

***Writing new identities: The portrayal of women by female  
authors of the Middle East***

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## **Transcription System**

The "Leitfaden zur Transkription des Neupersischen" [Stand 18. Mai 2011] from the Centrum für Nah- und Mittelost-Studien of the Philipps-Universität Marburg has been applied in the transcription of Persian terms, places and names. Quotes from Farsi have been translated into English by the author – unless otherwise indicated.

## Introduction

Until middle of twenty century and appearance of pioneering Iranian women writers in 1930s, Persian literature was an absolute male-dominated discourse that represented abstract stereotypic portrayals of women eclipsed by male protagonists. These historical clichéd depictions of female characters "lacked dimension beyond a male-intoxicating beauty; a limitless nurturing capacity; a naïve innocence; or conversely, a seemingly endless potential for destruction, harm, and repulsiveness" (Milani 1992: 184) The release of *Sūvašūn* by Sīmīn Dānišvar (1921–2012) in 1969 was the starting point of the earnest attendance of women writers in the area of modern story-writing. Dānišvar (1921–2012) who is considered as first Iranian woman who indeed wrote a modern novel, put an individual female protagonist at the heart of her story and tried to valorize the female psyche. With this introduction, a limited number of women started to write and publish stories that were deeply influenced by the literary tendencies of the male authors. But, since the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, the quality and quantity of women writers' work have dramatically changed Persian literary scene, and a great number of novels and short stories collection have been published by Iranian women that gave the primary role of the story to the female character/s. To understand why and how Iranian women have been motivated to write story, we briefly look at the socio-political scene of Iran during last forty years.

During the years after 1979, Iranian women have undergone a complex experience and rapid changes concerning gender politics. Despite their pre-assumptions that their active presence in and assistance to the victory of the Revolution would grant them a better social and political life, they faced unforeseen circumstances shortly after the establishment of the Islamic State. To emphasize on the religious and ideological aspects of the Revolution and to manifest hatred towards secular world, the new state has a deep tendency to determine a perfect depiction of Islamic life-style for Iranians as the ideal symbols of committed Muslim citizens. Thus, a collective identity based on perception of clerics of *Shi'i* laws was defined and advertised in public media to draw attention of the society. Women were at the target of this trend, since their most primary responsibility/role was tied up with portray of devoted mother at the heart of the family. Consequently, the coercive Veil Act was forced and public spheres were separated by gender. "Women's sexuality had to be limited to their husbands, their bodies to the home, and their roles to a trustee of the family." (Mahdi 2003: 56) But it was not the end of story as the clashes between clerics and women



continued and women used every chance to oppose such degrading laws concerning their social status. Despite the tireless efforts made by the Islamic government to return women to domestic sphere, Iranian women strongly disobeyed to perform just the traditional roles of devoted mothers and generous wives. Thus, in the second decade after the Revolution, when Iran-Iraq war ended in 1988 and the period of Reconstruction (*Duri-yi Sāzandigī*) began, the earlier restrictions and harsh judicious gender policies have declined and Iranian women experienced a better condition concerning presence in public space, entering the labor market, schools and colleges. Subsequently in 1990s, when reformists won the Presidential and Parliamentary elections, the history of Iran witnessed a momentous event which strongly affected all aspects of the society. "Evidence of this can be found in the rationalizing and bureaucratizing of more and more features of daily life; modernization of religious sphere; development of private enterprise; the birth of urban culture; social activism among women; the stress on individual autonomy and, at the same time, on respect for legal and other regulation." (Adelkhah 2000: 1) Such new socio-political atmosphere resulted in the appearance of a great number of female writers who after some decades of suppression and restriction, had the chance of narrating their stories. The subsequent ups and downs of female experience in the years after the Islamic Revolution thus, located women's issue at the center of attention of women activists and writers. Therefore, self-discovering, realization of individuality and perception of social and personal identity became the most considerable themes in women's literature.<sup>1</sup> The increasingly appearance of Iranian women writers and the efforts made by them to create concrete female characters affirmed that the pervasive presentation of female characters as composing a homogeneous group identity was an artificial construct of the male perspective.

## Scope of the Research

During last forty years, the increasing exposure of Iranian women to modern thinking and Western literature has gradually led them away from cautious, direct, and sentimental writing to more complex texts that convey a desire to capture women's original experience. Consequently, we observe the emergence of a female voice in modern Persian literature that has been gradually processed in an individualized and even revolutionary light. Our main aim is to analyze this gradual process through studying female identity as reflected in the portrayal of the heroines in the selected novels. The literary form of novel has been chosen since the large amount of time and planning

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the flourishing growth of Iranian women's literature look at the first chapter of this research.

needed to produce a novel (in comparison with short stories and novella), have made it the most important fictional genre among Iranian women who have chosen their career as an author. In this regard, this study is the first of its kind in English language. The traditional researches are generally centered on a single author or a variety of genres. For instance, "Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers" (Milani, 1992), "Iranian Women's Literature: From Pre-Revolutionary Social Discourse to PostRevolutionary Feminism" (Tallatof, 1997), and "Words, not Swords: Iranian Women Writers and the Freedom of Movement" (Milani, 2011) are some of the few analytic studies about Iranian women writers that are centralized on the literary outputs of Iranian women in various genres and mostly from a political perspective.

In this research, seven novels which were written by different generations of women writers after the Islamic Revolution have been studied with focus on the portrayals of the female protagonists within them. The selected novels are listed below:

- *Tūbā va Ma'nāy-i Šab* (Tuba and the Meaning of night-1989) by Šahrnūš Pārsīpūr
- *Ingār Guftih Būdī Liylī* (As You Had Said Leyli-2000) by Sipīdih Šāmlū
- *Čirāq-hā rā Man Ĥāmūš Mīkunam* (I Turn off the Lights-2001) by Zuyā Pīrzād
- *Parndi-yi Man* (My Bird-2002) by Farībā Vafī
- *Az Šiytān Āmūht va Sūzānd* (She Learned from Satan and Burned-2007) by Farḥundih Āqā'ī
- *Nigarān Nabāš* (Don't Worry-2008) by Mahsā Muḥibalī
- *Iḥtimālān Gum Šudi'am* (Probably I'm Lost-2008) by Sārā Sālār

The choice of texts has been primarily guided by the themes that have been tackled in the study: centrality of a female character in the story; representation of female identity; reflection of the interests and concerns of Iranian women, from feminist issues to social and political problems to cultural and moral dilemmas; illustration of different styles and modes of writing, with diversity of techniques and creative approaches. This body of writings offers experiences, memories, criticisms, and commentaries about life from various authentic female points of view. The novels have been written and published during thirty years after the Revolution of 1979, and all have been received noticeable public reception and been appraised by literary critiques and festivals. *Tūbā va Ma'nāy-i Šab* (Pārsīpūr, 1989) is among the most famous novels written after the Revolution

of 1979 that centers around a woman's life. Pārsīpūr is one of the influential Iranian writers who pioneered speaking about women's issue, their oppression and the limitations placed on them in a patriarchal society. The unprecedented theme of the story alongside author's creative usage of magic realism have brought her a lot of fame amongst the book readers in Iran. *Ingār Guftih Būdī Liylī* (Šāmlū, 2000) is the first and the most acclaimed novel by Sipīdih Šāmlū that won the best First Novel Prize from the Gulšīrī Foundation, and has been reprinted fifteen times after its first publication in 2000. The narrative recounts the life-story and identity formation of a female protagonist before and after Iran-Iraq war, and the author has tried to redefine the long-term neglected aspects of the identity of women in the context of a male-dominated society. *Čirāq-hā rā Man Hāmūš Mīkunam* (Pīrzād, 2001) is Pīrzād's first novel that shortly after the publication received great admiration of the literary critiques and warm approval of the public reader. This novel inspired and intensified a significant literary trend which was identified as *kitchen stories* or *apartment literature* by Iranian critiques; the main theme of which was centralization of a woman/mother in the story who mostly spends her time inside the house, particularly in the kitchen, and despite her commitment to the housekeeping tasks she has a deep feeling of frustration because of being marginalized and unimportant to others. The novel has been reprinted more than sixty times after its first publication and translated into foreign languages including English, German and French. *Parandi-yi Man* (Vafī, 2002) was the first novel of Farībā Vafī that won the Award of the Best Novel from *Gulšīrī* Foundation and *Yaldā* Literary Festival. Thematically, it also belongs to *kitchen stories* or *apartment literature*, which for some years had shadowed on Iranian women's literature and resulted in creation of some of the most successful works of fiction by women writers. *Parandi-yi Man* (Vafī, 2002) has been translated into English, Italian, German and Kurdish Sorani, and now it is on its 14<sup>th</sup> reprint. *Az Šiytān Āmūht va Sūzānd* (Āqā'ī, 2005) has brought the author a remarkable success among both critics and public audience and stabilized Āqā'ī's status as a prominent author in Iran's contemporary literature. As one of post-revolutionary author who is deeply concerned with social problems, in this story Āqā'ī picks up her protagonist from an oppressed minority in the metropolitan of Tihṛān; a Christian woman who got expelled from home because of her religion and must live in public places across the city. This social novel won the award of the 7<sup>th</sup> round of the Book of the Year by authors and press critics. *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muḥibālī, 2008), the magnum opus of Mahsā Muḥibālī, was published by Čišmih Publication and caught the attention of various literary societies. Focusing on the life of a stranger

female character, the author depicts a young girl whose personality is a combination of opposite feelings, indeterminate thoughts and unconventional behaviors that reflects new perspective in representation of female identity. The characterization of the protagonist of this novel has profoundly challenged the familiar literary discourse of female identity as previously being oppressed and innocent. *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muhibalī, 2008) won the title of Best Novel of the Year in Association of Critics and Writers of the Press Prize in 2008 and was awarded the Biennial Award for the Best Novel from Gulšīrī Foundation. The Novel was also nominated as the Best Novel of the Year by Rūzī Rūzigārī Prize and Mihrigān-i Adab Festival. And the last novel of this research, *Iḥtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) was the first novel of the author that alongside *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muhibalī, 2008), awarded Biennial Award for the Best Novel from Gulšīrī Foundation in 2010, and shortly after the first publishing it was reprinted four times. The story is centered around a woman and her unsettled inner world, and the author succeed to delicately represent some parts of the mental complexities of modern Iranian women. Despite the success of the last two novels among the critiques and readers, the ministry of Culture and Guidance prevented the reprint of both because of their controversial themes and the books were proclaimed to be banned.

Prominence and public acceptability of these novels proclaimed the social enthusiasm for new voices and perspectives in literature. Through portraying a female protagonist with her unique personalities and complexities, the selected authors have tried to make their heroine vivid, alive and believable; the most refreshing aspects of the texts therefore, is to discover one's own identity as a woman and creation of a new feminine outlook toward the world which have been neglected for a long time in Persian literature.

## **Research Questions and Methodology**

The main themes of the research are to analyze portrayals of women as reflected in the selected narrations, and to study the gradual reconstructive procedure that has been followed up by the women writers to mature the portrayals into detailed and differentiated individuals with moral, intellectual and emotional complexities. We have used the methodology of close reading, and tried to investigate all the efforts made by the authors to characterize the female protagonists in the narrations. To this aim, the following set of questions have been answered in each novel.

### **1) How can we describe the protagonist of the story?**

Descriptive inquiry of the female protagonist according to the direct and indirect observations provided about her by the author through the story. We will consider the characteristics of the protagonist including her physical appearance, educational background, marital status, job status, words/language, mannerisms, behaviors and thoughts.

**2) What is the role of protagonist in the story?**

Review of the Heroine's role in relation to social world. Literary criticism has its famous set of contrasts, for example, man vs. nature, nature vs. society that set up points of inquiry. In this case, our fundamental contrasts would be woman vs. man, woman vs. society. We will look at the role of the character in the plot and analyzing if her role is minor/major, dynamic/static or round/flat in the overall story.

**3) What does the protagonist want?**

Realization of the protagonist's main concern/s. The main concern/s of the protagonist can be derived from protagonist's basic desire for something, the absence/lack of something in her life or her main struggle with something.

**4) What does the protagonist do about her concern/s? And how powerful is she to achieve her goal?**

we will observe the character's actions, reactions, movements in the story.

**5) How does the protagonist change or grow throughout the plot of the story?**

We will read the text closely to realize if during the story the protagonist changes whether positively or negatively.

**6) Has the portrayal of women changed/modified during writings of different generations of writers?**

Look at our findings from the aforesaid questions to understand the similarities and differences between the protagonists of the selected novels. Investigating if through the process of portraying female protagonists, the authors have opened new windows toward women's issue.

## **Design of the Work**

The first part of this study has been allocated to the historical movement of Iranian women in modern Iran with a particular attention to the appearance and growth of female writers during last hundred years. Since in the few books written about Iranian women writers, primarily their pre-revolutionary literary outputs have been focused, in this chapter I tried to concentrate more on the

recent years, particularly forty-years after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. In the following, we have the analytical chapters of the selected stories; every chapter starts with a summary of the plot, then we learn about the author, her literary career and the importance of the selected novel among her works. After that is the narratology of the story which monitors the story components and try to discover the relationship between content and form of the novel; for this, in every novel literary technique/s, space, time and language of the narration as the basic narrative elements have been studied separately and in relation to the main theme/s of the story. Then comes the analysis of the heroine's portrait, and the last section is the conclusion about the message behind the novel in relationship with its unique protagonist. In the last chapter of the thesis, we have tried to trace the process of change and transformation that has been occurred in different aspects of characterization of female protagonists. For this, individual dimensions of the characters reflected in their desires, concerns and lifestyles, alongside their social identities in relationship with others, and of course change of the authors' tendencies to choose different narrative elements corresponding to the content of the story have been discussed carefully.

**1.**

**Historical Movement of Women and Iranian Modernity;  
When Iranian Women Narrated Their Own Stories**

Most of the researches about Iranian women's movement have analyzed women's participation in the modern history of Iran from a sociopolitical perspective. (Sanasarian, 1982; Paidar, 1995; Price, 2000; Vanzan, 2002; Rostam-Kolayi, 2003; Sedghi, 2007; Povey, 2012) In English language, the number of researches on Iranian women's literature as a significant avenue into their feminine mentality is noticeably rare.<sup>1</sup> Examination of the interpretations, judgments, observations, and ambitions of Iranian women through their artistic works, in our case their stories, provides a window into their female psyche which for long time has been kept closed and unknown. Thus, in this research, seven novels written by Iranian women after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, as a way to re-imagine lives and to forge among past, present, and future will be discussed. To this aim, first we take a look at the history of story-writing by Iranian women in the context of their socio-political movement during the last hundred years. Since in the few books written about Iranian women's literature, primarily their pre-revolutionary outputs have been focused, here I tried to concentrate more on the recent years, particularly thirty-year after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. In the following pages, the main concerns would be answering the upcoming questions; regardless of the artistic quality of writing, when did Iranian women story-writers start their career? And how has the socio historical context of Iran during time, affected their narrations in terms of subject, themes, and techniques?

## **Pioneering Iranian Women Before & After the Constitutional Revolution**

Iranian women's movement has a long history that goes back to mid nineteenth century and taboo-breaking activities of few avant-garde women like Tāhirih Qurrat ol-'Ayn (1814 or 1817 – 1852) and Bībī Ḥānūm Fātimih Astarābādī (1858/9–1921). Qurrat ol-'Ayn was one of the most significant female figures in the history of Iran; a poet who openly advertised and taught the Bābī's faith in the rigid atmosphere of the Iranian traditional Islamic society, and for the first time in the history appeared unveiled in the public. Fātimih Astarābādī was another female activist who wrote *Ma'ayib al-Rijāl* (The Vices of Men) in 1887, a pungent satire, which in fact was a response to an earlier pamphlet titled *Ta'dīb al-Niswān* (The Edification of Women) written by an anonymous

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<sup>1</sup>Look at Hashabeiky, Forogh. "Life, As I See It: A Typology of the Post-Revolutionary Persian Novel Written by Women". 2012; Milani, Farzaneh. Veils and words: the emerging voices of Iranian women writers. 1992; Vanzan, Anna. "From the Royal Harem to a Post-modern Islamic Society; Some Considerations on Women Prose Writers in Iran from Qajar time to 1990s". 2002; Talattof, Kamran. The politics of writing in Iran: a history of modern Persian literature. 1999; and Nafisi, Azar. "Images of Women in Classical Persian Literature and the Contemporary Iranian Novel". in M. Afkhami and Erika Friedl (eds.), In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-Revolutionary Iran. 1994.



author. Yet, the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911 in Iran, one of the most significant historical periods of change and transformation of the country from tradition into modernity, was the beginning point that gave progressive women the opportunity to appear in political realm and to discuss about their issues. This event opened a new season in the history of Iran whose main achievements were revolt against thousand years of Persian monarchies, demands of the rule of law, justice and equality in the society, and speaking about women's issues in public sphere. Basically, Iranian constitutionalism was a consequence of and a response to societal transformations during Qajar dynasty (1794-1925). The legal and judicial reforms that had been started in the second half of the nineteenth century in Iran were failed under the despotism and capriciousness of Qajar's monarchs and eventually the political scene of Iran observed a great public dissatisfaction and anger with the Qajar ruling family which led to the shape of a political movement. "Further resentment was fueled by the shah's granting of concessions to Russia and England in order to manage the country's national debt, which gave these European powers significant influence over Iran's economic and political sphere." (Jahanbegloo, 2013: 34) Increasing exposure to the West, decanted the material products of Western civilization into Iran alongside modern socio-political concepts like liberty, equality and social justice. Among diverse social aspects influenced by the European ideas and life style, was consciousness raising of Iranian women and consolidation of women's movement that its main concerns were rethinking about condition of women, and challenge of the stereotypic identity imposed on them by the patriarchal and Islamic society of Iran. During the Constitutional Revolution, the women's movements could be observed in organization of street riots, joining underground activities against foreign forces, and boycotting the import of foreign goods. (Kasravi 1978: 180–181) In the middle of the Constitutional movement, Iranian women with the support of male intellectuals began to discuss their concerns about women's oppression and discrimination. "It was in a spirit of change that Constitutionalists such as Mīrzā Āqā Ḥān Kirmānī wrote about women's right to education and the evils of polygamy and seclusion." (Mahdi 2004: 427) Tāj al-Saltānīh (1884 - probably 1936), daughter of Nāsir al-Dīn Šāh-i Qajar, was a memoirist who during the Constitutional Revolution strongly defended the political movement of women.<sup>1</sup> Her memories which were not published during her life are "a testament to her liberal political views: demanding natural rights, expressing

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<sup>1</sup> Her autobiography published in Iran in 1983 and translated to English by Anna Vanzan in 1996 under the title of "Crowning Anguish: Memoirs of a Persian Princess from the Harem to Modernity 1884-1914".

support for the constitutionalists and believing in freedom for men and women. They also provide a unique example of the impact of Western values on traditional Persian ones and the spiritual dichotomy which they caused." (Mahdavi, 1987: 188)

In August 1906, with the agreement of Mozaffar al-Dīn Šāh-i Qajar, Constitutionalists succeeded to establish a Majles (parliament) and on December 1906 Majles drafted and ratified the first Constitution of Iran. The Constitution granted the equality of all citizens in law, but surprisingly the concept of citizen did not include women. "Thus, while the political leaders were concerned with transforming men from subjects of the Shah [king] into citizens of Iran, a totally unprecedented and untraditional event, it was not deemed necessary for women to become citizens. Rather, women were viewed as subjects of their fathers and husbands, and their political participation was supposed to be in support of their male kin." (Price, 2000) Despite the ignorance of women's issues, the Constitutional Revolution had stimulated the development of women's organized struggle to change their conditions. In 1907 Tūbā Āzmūdih (1878-1936) established the first girl school for Muslim girls in Tehran but her opponents destroyed the school soon and threatened the students in the streets because of accusations of immorality and unchastity. Yet, despite the profound disagreement of the clerics and public objection of fanatical Muslims, schools for girls have been established in big cities like Tihṙān, Tabṙīz, Mašhad and so on. "By 1910, more than 50 private girls' schools, literacy and night classes existed in Tehran, most of them established by prominent women who had been supported by men." (Sedghi 2007: 53) From 1910 to 1932 women activists founded a few organizations and published considerable number of weekly or monthly magazines concerning specifically to the conditions of women's lives; Kaḥāl was the first Iranian woman who in 1910 published a magazine named *Dāniš* (Knowledge) in which she concentrated exclusively on women's issues. In 1913, Amīd Mozaya al-Saltanih edited and published *Šokūfih* (Blossom), and later, Sidīqih Dulatābādī (1884-1962) published *Zabān-i Zanān* (Women's Language) in Isfahan in 1918. After being forced to abandon her publication in 1920, Dulatābādī left Iran to continue her education in France. When in 1927 she returned to Iran, she appeared unveiled in public. *Jahan-i Zanan* [Women's World] were printed in 1920 by Faḥṙ Āfāq-i Pārsā. This magazine was published in Mashhad and was violently opposed by religious groups. In 1920 one of the most successful women's journals, *Ālam-i Nisvān* (Women's World) was published by the alumnae from the American Girl's School in Tehran. "It managed to publish bimonthly throughout a fourteen-year period, surviving longer than any other Iranian women's

journal of the 1920s and 1930s... *Ālam-i Nisvān* published somber stories of young women struggling with sexually transmitted disease passes on by infected husbands." (Rostam-Kolayi 2003: 158–159) In her memories of Iranian women's movements, Mihrangīz Dulatšāhī, the ambassador of Iran and minister of women affairs, stated that good stories were published in this journal under the name of Mrs. Dilšād, who was actually a male writer- most probably Ebrahim Khaje Nouri. Dulatšāhī emphasized it as another example of the cooperation of male intellectuals with women. (Dulatšāhī 2005: 17) The absence of Iranian women story-writers in the years of Constitutional movement has some reasons; foremost the existence of traditional and religious beliefs regarding insignificance of women's mindset hindered and postponed the appearance of female voice in Persian literature that for long time was a solely male-dominated zone. Most of Iranian women who even fortunately had enjoyed education, could not or even did not want to break their historical silence to join literary canon. "So important was a woman's silence, so cherished, that it became a key criterion of her beauty and desirability-the prerequisite of ideal woman." (Milani 1992: 49) This *silence* defined everything related to women. The concept by which, the society obviously strived to construct the identity of women through the corresponding stereotypes. The second reason was the lack of public education which even after its improvement in the following years did not recognize the importance and necessity of women's education. The situation had a direct impact of the number of story- writers and story-readers, and it took a very long time for Iranian women to emerged as authors and furthermore choose specifically a literary career. As we can observe later in the reign of Rizā Šāh (b.1878 – d.1944) who dramatically changed the educational system of the country, the first generation of women started to narrate their story. The third reason was that modern story-writing in that time was still a very new literary form to Iranian culture as it was just introduced to the society in the reign of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Šāh-i Qajar (1848-96). European literary forms, specifically novel and short stories were imported into Iran through the translation of Western literature in the late of nineteenth century, and the genesis of Iranian novel was directly connected to the constitutionalist thoughts and exposure to Western culture. During the years of Constitutional Revolution, the male story-writers, who mostly belonged to the elite families, were profoundly concerned with speaking about national identity and revival of racial values. As a result, the very first stories by male authors were surrounded by retelling or imagination of the lives of historical/ancient heroes. *Šams va Tuqrā* (1899) by Muḥammad Bāqir Mīrzā Ḥusravī is considered as the first historical novel in Persian literature.

Mūsā Nasrī was another story-writer who published two novels with historical theme; *ʿIšq va Saltanat* (Love and Monarchy) in 1919, and *Dāstān-i Bāstān* (The Ancient Story) in 1920. These historical novels foremost reflected the absence of national self-esteem among Iranians who had been mesmerized by civilized Western World. As a response to this situation, the authors tried to provide their readers with historical continuity and a sense of positive national identity. Given the socio-historical situation, the female pioneers who mostly belonged to elite families and bravely crossed the red line of silence paid a very high price because of their courage and endurance; Tāhirih Qurrat ol-ʿAyn for instance was the first woman in the history of Iran who was accused of corruption and executed secretly when she was just thirty-six years old. Tāj al-Saltanih whose lifestyle and critical ideas profoundly challenged male supremacy of her time, had a dramatic life in which she attempted suicide three times. As Milani precisely declares "Perhaps one can consider pioneering women writers as social and cultural mutants and take cognizance of the fact that not all mutants survive. But even if women survived, their struggle for identity as writers entailed a life of continuous rebellion against stereotypes of women's place in both society and literature." (Milani 1992: 62)

## **The Pahlavī Era (1925-1979)**

### **• Rizā Šāh & Issue of Women (1925-1941)**

In 1925, Rizā Šāh unseated Aḥmad Šāh Qajar, the last Shah of the Qajar dynasty (from 16 July 1909 to 15 December 1925), and established the Pahlavī dynasty. He organized a constitutional monarchy that lasted until overthrown in 1979 during the Islamic Revolution. Rizā Šāh was impressed with Western life-style and soon after his access to the power he began the process of Westernization of the society of Iran. During his sovereignty, "educational and judicial reforms improved that laid the basis of a modern state and reduced the influence of the religious classes. A wide range of legal affairs that had previously been the purview of Shīʿite religious courts were now either administered by secular courts or overseen by state bureaucracies, and, as a result, the status of women improved." (Afary, 2017) Consequently, some women could work in public places, the number of girls who attend schools dramatically increased and officially women entered the organizations of higher education. In contrast to the 1910, when there were 50 private schools for girls, in 1933 the number of girl's schools reached 870 but most of them had no governmental support. (Sedghi 2007: 71, Sansarian 1982: 62, Povey 2012: 20) During 1935-6 as

part of his Westernization process of Iran, the king insistently campaigned to unveil Iranian women in the public places and finally unveiling edict were proclaimed by him in 7<sup>th</sup> January 1936, thereafter known as *Rūz-i Āzādī-yi Zanān* (Women's Emancipation Day). Yet, these reforms had a very little effect on traditional restrictive beliefs of the society regarding women and their issues. Rizā Šāh's policy towards women, particularly their emancipation from traditional and religious restrictions was indeed his effort to allocate political supremacy to the state and thus reduction of the power of clergy and religious institutions. He "stripped much of clerical power from controlling women's labor and sexuality. By so doing, his Westernization schemes came full circle: women's emancipation meant state exploitation of gender as a measure to combat and contain religious forces and their *Bazaar* supporters." (Sedghi, 2007: 66-67) Thus improvement of women's life was not a real concern of the king but more like a political device by which he tried to overshadow the power of religion. In such atmosphere, every independent and non-conforming female organization or publication was banned under his despotism. Instead, some state-sponsored institutions running by educated women were established to navigate women's movement in conformity with state's will. (Mahdi 2004: 430, Sedghi 2007: 76-82)

- **1930 & Appearance of First Generation of Iranian Women Writers**

In the period of Rizā Šāh's monarchy, the development of educational system and the increasing opportunity of being educated for ordinary people led to the appearance of middle class in the realm of art and literature. The literature of this period of time can thematically be interpreted as a response or reflection of the authors towards the upheavals after the failure of Constitutional Movement, the appearance of Rizā Šāh and his emphasis on Westernization of Iran; from one side still we observe nationalism as the main theme of the stories which can be categorized as historical novels, examples of which is *Dalīrān-i Tangistānī* (Heroes of Tangestan) (1925) by Muḥammad Ḥussiyūn Ādamīyat, from the other side we watch focus on social issues in the context of narration that leads to creation of Iranian social novel. With progressive increasing of national consciousness, the modern writer did not devote his artistic work to satisfaction of the limited number of royal family any longer, but to the public readers who were interested to know about their ordinary life and reality. Assumed a different role than the privilege aristocratic literature, new writers began to reflect the most crucial social issues and criticize despotism, poverty and superstitions. As a consequence, social novel was developed subsequent to the years after the

Constitutional Revolution. The social novel, surrounded by retelling and description of political corruption, prostitution, and poverty, was the acceptance of the reality by the author while he is dramatically trying to emphasize this unpleasant reality. The most famous novels in this category are *Tih-rān-i Maḥūf* (The Dreadful Tehran) (1924) by Mušfiq Kāzimī, *Parīčīhr* (1929) and *Zībā* (1933) both written by Muḥammad Ḥijāzī. Most of the social novelists, due to their limited and superficial perception of society and history did not ponder the main reasons of the social problems and mostly described their own sentimental and moral understandings. (Mīrābidīnī, 1999: 55) In these fictional world "women were mostly presented as creatures deceived and deprived by the modern way of life and as prostitutes in the heart of the big cities." (Hashabeiky 2012: 140–141) In fact, to criticize the inhuman traditions of the era and propose the discontent with unpleasant aspects in the society, the authors highlighted the condition of women in the family and society as the most vulnerable victims of such rough reality. For the society which was in transition from tradition into modernity, women's condition was one of the best indicators of illustration of patriarchal conservativeness and social suppression. Yet the restricted perspective of the authors alongside their lack of knowledge about feminine world did not lead to creation of enduring female characters.

In 1930s, the first stories by Iranian women were written totally under the influence of the social literature of the time; for instance, Irānduḥt Tiymūrtāš (1916-1991) wrote a novel named *Duḥtar-i Tīribah̄t va Javān-i Bulhavas* (Unlucky Girl and Capricious Boy) in 1931 and claimed that her novel is documentary of a real event that happened in her neighborhood. The novel narrates story of a naïve sentimental fourteen-year old girl who lives in a traditional family. In her way to school she meets a handsome but glib young man, who deceives and brings her his home. After a while when she finally succeeds to escape from the house and comes back to her family, her parents do not accept her. So, she returns to the young man and destroys her life. (Mīrābidīnī 2007: 51) Zahrā Ḥānnlarī (1915-1990) was another female writer of the era who obtained a PhD degree in Persian language and literature in France and published two novellas; *Parvīn va Parvīz* (1933) and *Žālīh* (Dew) (1936); both were concerned with moral issues relating to women's chastity. In her stories, Ḥānnlarī uses a very simple language and her final goal is to illustrate the main reasons of Iranian woman's misfortune as being inexperienced and naïve, and the existence of mandatory marriages.

Despite their importance as the first novels written by Iranian women, these stories could not be considered as the beginning of the credible appearance of female voice in Persian literature, since they had serious superficiality in terms of characterization and realism, thus they have never been reprinted again. It should be considered that until 1921 story-writing, as a new Western imported narrative genre to Iranian culture had not been blossomed in the narrative tradition of the male authors as well. It was only in 1921 when Muḥammad Alī Jamālzādih (1892-1997), traditionally known as the founder of modern Persian fiction published his momentous collection of short stories, *Yikī Būd, Yikī Nabūd* (One upon a Time) "whose preface is considered the manifesto of modern Persian fiction." (Molavi, 2006) Later on in 1936, *Būf-i Kūr* (The Blind Owl), known as the first and most enduring work of prose and a major literary work of 20th century Iran, written by Sādiq Hidāyat (1903-1951), was printed out in Delhi, due to the political censorship in Iran. "The fact that women's prose in Iran did not develop until the 1940s necessarily raised the question of whether Persian women writers drew their inspiration from Western or 'universal' female-feminist literature or from the consolidated models of their male compatriots. If modern Persian prose was born with a tangible delay compared to the European one, we may conclude that Persian women's prose suffered from a double delay, as the product of acculturated authors who were, in addition, women." (Vanzan 2002: 90) Consequently, the first female writers were not successful to portray realistic female personage since they imitated their male contemporaries and assumed the same responsibility as the male authors did. Most of the fictional female characters in these narratives "were abstract, allegorical figures, deprived of characterizations that would do justice to the emotions or events of their bodies; denied the expression of unfeminine pleasure or pain; portrayed without emotional, intellectual, and moral complexity; and overshadowed by male heroes. They lacked dimension beyond a male-intoxicating beauty; a limitless nurturing capacity; a naïve innocence; or conversely, a seemingly endless potential for destruction, harm, and repulsiveness." (Milani 1992: 184) From the appearance of the first stories by women in 1930s, it took almost thirty years for Persian literature to observe the first modern female story-writer, Sīmīn Dānišvar, who literally focused on female psyche and focalized a female perspective in her masterpiece *Sūvašūn* (1969) (known in English as "A Persian Requiem").

- **Iranian Women writers in the Era of Muḥammad Rizā Šāh (1941-1979)**

In August 1941, Great Britain and the Soviet Union attacked and occupied Iran because of Rizā Šāh's sympathy to Nazi regime and his declaration of neutrality in Second World War.

Subsequently in September 1941 Rizā Šāh was forced by British-Soviet to abdicate in favor of his son Muḥammad Rizā Šāh Pahlavi, who ruled Iran from 1941 until 1979. At the beginning of the young Shah's reign, because of the occupation of the country by the allied forces, the power of the state declined. In the absence of an overpowering state new women's publication and organizations emerged. "Diverse women's organizations, independent of the state, but closely related to different political parties, were active, campaigning and raising issues that ranged from Iran's independence from foreign domination to socialism and in this context promoted specific feminist issues." (Povey 2012: 20) The following organizations were among the most influential: *Hizb-i Zanān-e Īrān* (The Women's Party of Iran), *Jam'īyyat-i Zanān* (Women's Society), and most importantly *Jam'īyyat-i Dimucrāt-i Zanān* (the Democratic Union of Women). (Sedghi 2007: 90–93) Gender issues, particularly the veil, became some of the most controversial topics among people. Again, in Tihrān and other cities some women appeared with *Čādur*, the traditional veil, which provides them with opportunity of declaration their own choice of clothing. From 1941 to 1952, the women's organizations presented the parliament three bills "demanding equal political and economic rights, especially enfranchisement." (Mahdi, 2004: 431) The latest petitions were sent to Dr. Muḥammad Mussadiq, the nationalist Prime Minister, requesting equal political and economic rights. In 1953, under the pressure of Mussadiq and his nationalist government, Muḥammad Rizā Šāh left Iran, but he returned back one week later since Mussadiq and his cabinet were overthrown with the *coup d'état* organized by the United Kingdom (under the name 'Operation Boot') and the United States (under the name TPAJAX Project). "The coup and the shah's return brought repression, modernization and women's suffrage. Political parties went underground, members of the religious and secular opposition were arrested, and some were sentenced to life imprisonment. Similar to his father, the shah seemed to be consolidating the state." (Sedghi 2007: 97) Like Reza shah's reign, again in this period the gender issues and feminism were directed from above. Ašraf Pahlavī, the sister of the king became responsible to unify the women's groups under the state-sponsored organizations which were fundamentally involved in charity projects, educational programs and health plans for Iranian women.

The *coup d'état* of 1953 in Iran was a turning point for the modern Persian literature and Iranian women's movement, since till end of 1950s the king harshly silenced intellectuals including writers and women activists. With the return of Muḥammad Rizā Šāh to power, the history and literature of Iran entered a very gloomy period which lasted for seven years. In these years Persian



literature experiences a critical crisis and writers are very confused and upset. During 1951-1960, eight women writers published stories; for instance, Dānišvar (1921-2012) published the first collection of short stories written by an Iranian woman, named *Ātaš-i Hāmūš* (The Quenched Fire) in 1948 and continued her writing by two other collections *Šahrī Čun Bihišt* (A city like Paradis) (1959) and *Bi Kī Salām Kunam?* (Whom Shall I Say Hello?) (1962). Nevertheless, after publication of her most acclaimed novel *Sūvašūn* in 1969 she refused to republish her earliest work because she was embarrassed by the juvenile quality of their writing. Malakih Baqā'ī Kirmānī wrote several books on Iranian women's living conditions and a novel named *Būsi-yi Talḥ* (Bitter Kiss) (1957), which had a nervous and tense atmosphere. (Mīrābidīnī 2007: 55) Another writer was Bihīnduht Dārā'ī, who had PhD in Persian language and literature and wrote the novel *Hirmān* (Deprivation) in 1965 that was an epistolary novel; a long letter, written by a lonely divorced mother to her daughter, who has become matured now and could understand the fillings of her mother. Despite focusing on Women's life, these stories lacked the maturity and depth of modern fictions; mostly they reflect one-dimensional personages that do not have internal conflict or mental complexity. Given the socio-cultural situation, still these female writers have not had the opportunity of choosing lifestyles of their own or of being freely educated, whereas improvement of their narrative needed lots of knowledge and experience. During this period, women were either so busy doing house chores that they didn't find time to develop their sublime talents, or, they still hadn't realized the notion of story writing. Even the ones who wrote stories in this era used nicknames such as Īrānduht or Maḥsīmā. In such an atmosphere, women were not encouraged to join literary canon, because for female artists no facilities were available. (Sirāj, 2015: 74)

In 1960s and 1970s Iran witnessed impressive socio-economic changes, under the name of Westernization and Modernization of the country which were directed into society from the state. Subsequently, both unveiled and veiled women joined the increasing labor market and eventually they gained some power and limited independence.<sup>1</sup> Yet, despite a drive to abandon household for work in the labor market still the most admirable role for Iranian women was being a good mother. In 1967, a Family Protection Law was passed that set tougher conditions for polygamy, raised the age of marriage for girls to 18, put divorce under the authority of family courts, and created more

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<sup>1</sup> The percentage of working women increased from 9.2 percent of total population in 1956, to 12 percent in 1966, and 13 percent in 1976. Another important achievement by Iranian women in this era was the dramatic increase of the literacy rate which from nearly 8 percent of the female population in 1956, grows to 17.4 percent in 1966, to 26.3 percent in 1971. However most of the urban literate women experienced stereotyping and were concentrated in health, teaching and secretarial jobs. (Sedghi 2007: 112-121)

safeguards against male vagary in divorce. (Paidar 1995: 118–147) Despite their importance, these laws could not impressively alter the condition of Iranian women since they were as symbols of Westernization of the country and were minuscule in their scope<sup>1</sup>; the beneficiaries of juridical policies of the state were foremost upper and middle-class women, although the consequences of those policies resulted in limited progresses in the lives of poor women, providing low-paying jobs. Nevertheless, women's growing access to education and the relatively progress of their financial situation of in 1960s and 1970s, resulted in the increasing number of female writers who had chosen literature as a medium to express their thoughts and ideas. 25 female story-writers in 1960s, and 28 women in 1970s published fictional works. In this period, Gulī Taraqqī (born 1936), Mahšīd Amīr Šāhī (born 1937), Šahrnūš Pārsīpūr (born 1946), Mīhan Bahrāmī (1947-2017), Qazzālīh Alīzādīh (1948-1996), Munīrū Ravānīpūr (born 1952) are among the most important women writers who not only chose their carrier as story-writer but also ascertained to be influential in modern Persian literature. The female authors who started their literary career between the *coup d'état* of 1953 and the Revolution of 1979 have been categorized by Jamāl Mīrsādiqī as the second generation of Iranian women writers (Mīrsādiqī, 2007) and Mīrābidīnī categorized them under the name of the Authors Who Paved the Way. (Mīrābidīnī, 2005) The efforts have been made by these writers deserved a great attention since in the time when they bravely wrote and published fictions still the society could not easily tolerate this kind of actions made by women who were supposed to be at home and serve their family.

Thematically the stories written by women in this time are mostly under the influence of critical realism of male literature that was a response to Muḥammad Rizā Šāh's efforts to depict a promising picture of the country. The king's devotion to the West from one side, and widespread poverty, social inequality and political oppression in the society from the other side have given rise to a serious social discontent among ordinary people and middle-class with the national and international policies of the country. Consequently, intellectuals started to question the monarchy and the ideals that were being relayed to them. The Westernization of the society was the main target of the questions. Given the sociopolitical atmosphere, the male writers also supposed a

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<sup>1</sup> As the ruler of the country, Muḥammad Rizā Šāh had never believed in the equality of women and men and in an interview with Oriana Fallaci, he obviously stated that: "In a man's life, women count only if they're beautiful and graceful and know how to stay feminine and... This Women's Lib business, for instance. What do these feminists want? What do you want? Equality, you say? Indeed! I don't want to seem rude, but... You may be equal in the eyes of the law, but not, I beg your pardon for saying so, in ability... You've never produced a Michelangelo or a Bach. You've never even produced a great cook." (Muḥammad Rizā Šāh, 1973)

strong responsibility toward society, which mostly revealed itself in joining a political group and writing *Committed Literature*. Like their male contemporaries, most of the women writers also emphasized sociopolitical matters and criticized the social inequality and injustice. "To be sure, authors chose themes related to women but in the context of male-dominated social concerns. Women's literary works before the Revolution did not have a distinct identity but were subsumed with the dominant paradigm of Committed Literature and leftist ideology." (Talattof 1999: 93–94) Yet, for the first time in the history of Persian literature female characters occupied the center stage of the plot. For instance, Dānišvar in her most acclaimed novel *Sūvašūn* (1969) narrates the story of the Iranian national resistance against allied forces during Second World War, through the perspective of a young woman named Zarī who is married to a political landowner. Šahrnūš Pārsīpūr started her writing in 1974 by publishing of the novel *Sag va Zimistān-i Buland* (The Dog and the Long Winter, 1974) which narrates the life of a committed young man in the political events of Iran in 1950s. In her next collection of short stories, *Āvīzihā-yi Bulūr* (The Crystal Pendants, 1977), stories "are all pervaded by the sense of their protagonists' loneliness. Pārsīpūr identifies some of the evils which afflict human beings (both women and men) such as a lack of communicability and a loss of identity, in the harsh life of the big city." (Vanzan 2002: 94–95) Exploring these hidden emotions of depressed people who cannot find a valuable meaning for their live can be observed in the earlier stories by Gulī Taraqqī too. Taraqqī started her writing career with a collection of short stories entitled *Man Ham Che Guevara Hastam* (I Am Che Guevara Too) in 1969 and later published the novel *Ĥāb-i Zimistānī* (Winter Sleep) in 1973. Influenced by the committed literary tendency and being upset of the unpleasant socio-political situation, her first stories are about secluded people who always dream about emancipation of their solitude but they are incapable of decision-making.

In this time, alongside committed literature another tendency in women's writing appeared concerning women's issues that could be found for instance in the writings of Mahšīd Amīr Šāhī (born 1937) and Mīhan Bahrāmī (1947-2017). Amīr Šāhī published five collections of short stories during the years 1966-1970 and her stories are mostly narrated through the eye of a small girl, a teenage or a woman. One of the most significant features of her writing is her stylish simple language which in that time considered being very impressive and has been acclaimed by many critics. (Nazīfpūr, 1971; Daryābandarī, n.d.) Amīr Šāhī tells story of the ordinary moments in life of Iranian women which in the meantime could be very complicated and eventually demonstrates

that her concerns about the situation of women. "All the characters in Mahšīd's stories are rightful in their actual position and we accept that whatever they have done or said was the only possible thing." (Nazīfpūr, 1971:44) Bahrāmī (1947-2017) was another author who started her literary career by publishing stories in periodicals and her first collection *Zanbaq-i Nāčīn* (The Unpickable Lily) in 1962. Her favorite themes are memories of childhood and lives of the traditional and wealthy families in old Tehran. In her following collections *Hiyvān* (The Animal, 1985) and *Haft Šāhi-yi Surḥ* (Seven Red Branches, 2000) she highlights the situation of Iranian women who suffer hierarchical traditional society. By creating female protagonist who suffers lack of independence, and is in the conflict between her own will from one side and the expectations of society and family on the other side, the women writers have also tried to give a sense of mourning to these stories. Although their writings reflect their own experience and personal emotions, ironically they point out the intolerable sociopolitical aspects of the society concerning women's dignity. (Mīrābidīnī 1999: 409)

The increasing appearance of women writers in 1960s and 1970s was among the factors which obviously demonstrate that women have left home affairs and seriously want to take part in the public life. Not only in the literary era but also in other social movements including mass demonstration against the Pahlavī's regime, women indicated that they could not wait for their male partners to change their destiny. "The final twenty years of Pahlavi rule persuasively illustrate the potent power of women as a political force in Iran. Despite twists and turns in Iran's tumultuous history, women's political participation has been pervasive. Yet the rise to power of Islamic activist women has paralleled the erosion of power of conformist and many nonconformist women." (Sedghi 2007: 195) Thus, in the organized demonstrations against Muḥammad Rizā Šāh, Iranian women came to the streets, beside their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons. Regardless of their political beliefs and religious tendencies they impressively combine to overthrow the Pahlavi's dictatorship.

## **Islamic Republic of Iran and the Women Writers**

The Revolution of 1979 was an unforgettable event in the history of women's movement in Iran. The unprecedented presence of women in the demonstrations against Muḥammad Rizā Šāh which led to the overthrow of the Pahlavī's monarchy created the context for the inevitable growing appearance of women in a variety of public spaces, in our case literary canon. During the years

after the victory of Revolution in 1979, gender politics in Iran have been gone through a complex experience and rapid changes. At the beginning, the Revolution brought a unique degree of solidarity among religious groups, political organization and genders. Men and women had common goal; to terminate the Pahlavī monarchy and its Western supports. "Like other revolutions, "the Spring of Freedom" (*Bahār-i Āzādī*) led to the collapse of the brief coalition of class, gender, and religion, not long after the downfall of the old regime. Women's rights came under attack as new developments set the stage for forced reveiling. First, increasingly visible, veiled women appeared publicly in large numbers... Second, pressure on unveiled women mounted as streetwalkers, armed guards, or individual male revolutionaries began to harass and physically abuse them in public." (Sedghi 2007: 204) Though, before the victory of the Revolution Āyatullāh Ḥumaynī had avouched that no religious laws would be imposed on the society, soon after the victory "established clerics prompted a forceful process of Islamization in different pockets of society. In April 1979, a referendum decided that Iran was to become an Islamic Republic which meant that specific interpretations of Islamic law replaced several civil laws regarding the status and appearance of women. The Family Protection law was quashed immediately, and women became barred from being judges, the Hejab law was reinstated and became part of the everyday realities of women's lives." (Paidar 1995: 232) Despite protests and demonstrations made by women who believed in their right to choose, the ideal Muslim woman in her long black chador became the symbol of anti-imperialism and anti-western sentiments which at the beginning of the Revolution completely seized control of the revolutionists. Although this political opportunism by clerics could be obviously understood as the harsh example of totalitarian trend of the new religious leadership, none of the political parties opposed or even questioned the decree. Of the main influential trends of the new state was also to determine the best way of living for Iranians, specifically Iranian woman as the ideal symbol to illustrate hatred for Western life-style. To this a collective identity based on perception of clerics of Shi'i laws was defined and advertised in public media to draw attention of the society. Women were at the target of this trend, since their most primary responsibility/role was tied up with portray of devoted mother at the heart of a family. Therefore, "women's sexuality had to be limited to their husbands, their bodies to the home, and their roles to a trustee of the family. This timeless and androcentric notion of family is very important to the Islamic ideology not only for its reproductive, social placement, and maintenance functions, but also for its role in localizing female identity through socialization of

girls." (Mahdi 2003: 56) As a consequence, most of the public places were separated by gender; at the beginning places like beaches and swimming pools and later on schools and for a while universities too. It was in such oppressive atmosphere that the Iran-Iraq war (22 September 1980 - August 1988) began and put the country in a great turmoil. The Islamic state extremely exploited the chaotic situation of Iran during eight years of war to suppress any oppositional voice and to centralize its power. Subsequently, male and female activists and organizations that opposed Islamization of the country have been face with harsh discipline; prohibition, detention, imprisonment or in the worst cases execution

Concerning art and literature, the Islamists "shared with the Marxists a hatred of individual freedoms and freedom of expression in literature of art by linking them to the imperialistic ambitions of the Western world, denouncing the women's struggle as bourgeois and the urge for freedom of imagination as manifestations of decadent Western culture." (Nafisi, 2003) The new state used all its power to strengthen the dominance of Islamic mindset in cultural sphere; thus, determinant cultural institutions like *Šurāy-i 'Inqilāb-i Farhangī* (Council for Cultural Revolution of the Islamic Republic) were established to regulate artistic currents of the country and to ban publication of the topics in literature and art that could be identified as anti-Islamic. "The council bylaws provided the guideline for rewarding cultural and artistic activities. Section 6 of item 8 enumerates the criteria for award-winning works: Producing or compiling an outstanding work on Islamic culture and art; translating an outstanding work on Islamic culture or art; establishing an institution for promoting Islamic culture and art; cooperating effectively with art and cultural institutions for the realization of the government's cultural policy; introducing Iranian Islamic art and culture on an international level." (Talattof 1999: 113) In such one-dimensional determinative atmosphere, a limited number of women who mostly began their career before the Revolution were eager to continue their writing. Like the previous decade, in 1980s, 28 women authors published fictional works while the number of male author was 140. Hence, there were five male authors for every one female writer in 1981-1990. (Mīrābidīnī 2005: 64–65) The most famous female authors who wrote stories in these years are Šahrnūš Pārsīpūr, Munīrū Ravānīpūr, Mansūrih Šarīfzādeh, Farīdih Rāzī and Banafših Hījāzī. Women's literature in this decade enjoyed thematic diversity. Still we observe stories that are written under the influence of critical realism of the previous decade; *Ahl-i Qarq* (The Drowned, 1989) by Munīrū Ravānīpūr, for instance is one of the remarkable novels of this time that tells the mythic story of a poor village in south of Iran which

after the appearance of a British oil company becomes the scene of confrontation between tradition and modernity. From the other side, despite the suppressive and backward approach of the Islamic regime regarding women, we notice appearance of a female voice in the context of narration which exclusively concentrates on women's issue. For example, in 1989 and 1990, Pārsīpūr's published her most acclaimed novels, *Tūbā va Ma'nāy-i Šab* (Tūbā and the Meaning of Night) *Zanān Bidūn-i Mardān* (Women without Men) which are considered as the first feminist novels in Persian literature. Šarīfzādeh's wrote a collection of short stories named *Mulūd-i Šišum* (The Sixth Child, 1984) that focuses on women's issues. Ravānīpūr published the short stories collection of *Kanizu* in 1988 with focus on the mournful lives of women in south of Iran. Her second novel, *Dil-i Fūlād* (Heart of Steel, 1990), deals with "the trials and tribulations of a modern woman writer in Tehran and employ experimental methods in style and technique." (Mozaffari 2013: 156)

The emergence of a female literary voice in the inflamed time after the Revolution of 1979, was an unavoidable consequence of awareness raising of Iranian women of modern ideas about the significance of women's individuality and mentality. The female authors have discovered that women's situation would not change unless their issues brought up publicly. About the reason of choosing literary career, Pārsīpūr states: "I write because I have started thinking, it was not on my own. Suddenly they removed my animal skin of a cow from my shoulders, so I am writing since it seems that I am becoming a human being; I want to know who I am?" (Pārsīpūr 1988: 9) The women-centered narrations in that time, have been received a noticeable public reception that indicated the public enthusiasm for new voices and perspectives in literature, and the urgent need of women, both as writers and readers, to share perceptions and feelings of their own through on the most historical media of art; fiction.

By the end of war with Iraq in 1988 and later the death of Āyatullāh Ḥumīynī in the following year, the earlier restrictions and harsh judicious gender policies have declined. With the presidential of Hāšimī Rafsanjānī (1989-1997) and the beginning of the period called *Sāzandigī* (Reconstruction) that led to the initiation of limited economic and political liberalization, Iranian women experienced a better social condition; "The number of women graduating from universities and higher education institutions increased almost two-fold between 1987-1988 and 1992-1993. The number of women staff members at universities almost doubled during this same period. Among the 30,262 academics serving in the field of education in 1992-1993, about 18 per cent

were women." (Iravani 2011: 2966) Two decades after the Revolution and especially since 1997, when reformists won the Presidential and Parliamentary elections, the history of Iran witnessed a momentous event which strongly affected all aspects of the society. "What began with the candidacy of Mūḥammad Ḥātāmī for presidency in 1997 evolved into a sweeping popular movement with high hopes for democratization, civil society and rule of law. Almost in tandem, the women's movement made its presence felt in the 1990s, engaging in vocal criticism in the post-1997 period." (Zeydabadi-Nejad 2011: 2) By supporting candidacy and presidency of Ḥātāmī, women demonstrate their desire to equality and rule of law, since Ḥātāmī was the first president who clearly admired those concepts as the fundamental features of a civil society. "There has been, for a start, the creation of a real public space, if not a civil society. evidence of this can be found in the rationalizing and bureaucratizing of more and more features of daily life; the craze for sport among all categories of people; modernization of religious sphere; development of private enterprise; the birth of urban culture; social activism among women; the stress on individual autonomy and, at the same time, on respect for legal and other regulation." (Adelkhah 2000: 1)

In 1990s, the number of Iranian women who published stories reached 370, thirteen times as many as the last decade. Meanwhile, 590 male authors published stories and eventually the distance between the number of male and female writers dramatically dropped. (Mīrābidīnī 2005: 66) This noticeable progress can also be observed in the quality of writing by women authors. Two decades after the Revolution Persian prose-writing by Iranian women has gained more maturity. This was a direct result of the publication of literary journals, the considerable increase of translation of foreign literatures including modern and postmodern literary works, and the growth of the fiction-writing workshops. The development of women's literature during last decades have been characterized by most of the scholars as an astonishing achievement (Milani: 1992, Mīrābidīnī: 1999, Talattof: 1999, Mīrsādiqī: 2007)

During 1990s and 2000s, we can trace the pre-revolutionary trends of women's literature in their post-revolutionary fictions as well. Still some women authors are concerned with socio-political problems, and their fictions could be categorized under the name of social literature; Dānišvar (1921-2012), for instance, continued her literary career with the novel *Jazīri-yi Sargardānī* (Wandering Island, 1993), which "can be interpreted as an allegory of the pre-Revolutionary Iranian society and the conflicting political discourses within it, which finally resulted in the



victory of the Islamic discourse in the 1979 Revolution." (Hashabeiky 2012: 143) *Hāni-yi Īdrīsīhā* (Edrisi's House) written by Qazzālīh Alīzādīh (1948-1996) is another social novel that appeared in 1996, the same year as the author hanged herself in a village in North of Iran. The novel is set in Īšqābād in 1910s, and is the tale of a house confiscated by revolutionary authorities, and handed over to new residents, who are caught in a metaphorical clash between a decadent revolutionary state and a defiant emerging culture. Of the significant differences of the recent social novels in comparison to previous ones written by women was the remarkable importance of the female characters in the storyline that reflected women's effective role in the socio-political currents of the country. Another propensity by the women writers which was very welcomed by the public reader was writing of popular romantic suspense books, in which moral message behind the story was essential. Fahīmīh Raḥīmī (1952-2013) and Nasrīn Sāminī (born 1962) have been the most prolific and popular authors of this genre. Raḥīmī published more than twenty novels, some of which are: *Utubūs* (The Bus, 1993); *Iblīs-i Kūčak* (The Little Devil, 1995); and *Pāyīz rā farāmūš Kun* (Forget the Autumn, 1995). In these years we also observe presence of female authors who admire values and achievements of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, and their fictional works have been focused on the gallantry of Iranian soldiers and endurance of Iranian women in the time of Iran-Iraq war. *Rūstāy-i Sūḥti* (The Burned Village) (1993) by Šīrīn Banīsadr and *Tāzīyānī'ī bar Bālhā-yi Šikastih* (A Lash on the Broken Wings) (1994) by Farībā Rahnamā are successful novels of this genre. (Qāsimzādīh, 2013; 110) Despite the existence of these literary trends, the feminist novel with a female protagonist at the center stage has occupied the largest part of the women's literature after the Revolution of 1979. As pointed out by most of the critics, the overriding themes of the women's literature in the last thirty years, are gender issues and search for individual identity. (Milani 1992, Nafisi 1994, Talattof 1999, Mīrābidīnī 1999, Ansari 2002, Vanzan 2002, Molavi 2006) In an interview with BBC Persian Goli Taraqqī stated that: "Iranian women felt upset of the restricted sphere, and literature was the best opportunity for them to unveil themselves. They grasped book, paper and pen." (Taraqqī, 2007)

Mitrā 'Īlyātī (born 1950), Farḥundīh Hājīzādīh (born 1952), Zuyā Pīrzād (born 1952), Farzānīh Karampūr (born 1955), Nāhīd Tabātabā'ī (born 1958), Šīvā Arastū'ī (born 1961), Farībā Vafī (born 1963), Sārā Sālār (born 1966), Sīpīdīh Šāmlū (born 1968), Nātāšā Amīrī (born 1970) and Mahsā Moḥib Alī (born 1973) are among the most famous writers who began their literary career in 1990s and 2000s and were profoundly concerned with women's mentality. The literature

produced by the new generation of writers gives them the opportunity to reconstitute the female subject through women's forms of remembrance and through the stories women write or rewrite about themselves and their foremothers. The increasing leaning among female authors toward self-expression "directly undermined women's freedom brought about changes in the themes, and characters, and language used by women writers. Ironically, the Islamization of the country caused the emergence of unprecedented literary works by women." (Talattof 1999: 139–140) The restrictive gender policies of the Islamic state thus, located women's issue at the center of attention of women activists and writers, and consequently self-discovering, realization of individuality and perception of social and personal identity became the most considerable themes in women's literature. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that despite the improvement of the cultural and political compass of Iran during last three decades and the promising growth of women's literature, still female authors are faced with severe censorship and burdensome constraints in the process of publication. The centrality of religion and Islamic values in the cultural policies of the country and the subsequent authoritarian rules regarding literary products, eliminate the possibility of talking about taboo-breaking issues like sexuality or female body. Therefore, in women's literature, we rarely observe such issues being talked about or even mentioned. In addition, depiction of desperate or chaotic portrait of the modern society of Iran could cause the story to be banned; *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muhibālī, 2008) and *Ihtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) are among the successful novels in post-revolutionary women's literature in which the authors portray horrifying depictions of the Iranian society, and both were proclaimed to be banned for some years. Yet, these grueling difficulties could not discourage female authors. "Having experienced social discrimination, female writers are driven to write about their own time and place, their own surroundings, their own conditions. This gives their works an urgent feminist voice. Regardless of their different styles, talents, backgrounds, and mind-sets, and no matter whether they live in Iran or not, their works reflect a search for an individualistic identity. It is in the process of discovering "self" and "other" that this feminist voice emerges, and articulates a self-definition." (Molavi 2006)

By placing women characters on center stage, the women writers rescue their protagonists from the quagmire of objectification, impotence, and lifelessness. Furthermore, through the process of individuation, the female protagonists have been rescued from the clutches of group mentality, which the myth of homogeneity produced by male supremacy imposes on them. Assigned to play primary roles, the female protagonists challenge the stereotypes and thus, the writer bears

responsibility for the possible flaws in her character. Mostly this results from the conduct of a female protagonist as the first-person narrator, who merges with the author, her speech, and her bold, critical stance. Not only revealing the myths of homogeneity and fixed "secondary role," women writers also brought up their validity. By presenting a New Woman that is the thinking, mature woman who constantly strives to enrich her interior world and mostly has a balance, flexible view of men although often she does not condone their behavior and their unhealthy view of women.

2.

*Tūbā va Ma'nāy-i Šab* (Touba and the Meaning of Night)

Šahrnūš Pārsīpūr

Albourz Publication

Tihṛān

1989

## About the Plot

*Tūbā va Ma'nāy-i Šab* (Pārsīpūr, 1989) centers largely around a female character named Tūbā, and her experiences of the rapid changes Iran underwent in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Tūbā pursues the dream of unification with god and spiritual world, under the influence of her father who is a scholar of classical literature and theology. She is named after the tree of divine light and wisdom in Persian legend and lore and pursues the dream of reaching her legendary namesake throughout her life. She loses her father at the age of twelve, and to save her mother from a compelling marriage, she offers to be the bride instead. Suspected about her strange proposal to marry an old man, her husband decides to ignore her through giving her a very minor role in the new house. The marriage is short-lived and after the divorce, Tūbā marries a prince from Qajar royal family (the ruling dynasty of Iran from 1794 to 1925) with whom she receives four children. Differently than her expectations, she experiences a very difficult condition in the eventually deposed royal family of the prince. During second World War (1939-1945), the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran by Soviet, British and other Commonwealth armed forces has ripple effects on the lives of Iranian and of Tūbā's as well; because of the chaotic situation of the capital, her husband leaves the family several times for hiding himself somewhere safe and finally resides in the north-west part of Iran for handling political predicaments in some villages. As an alone mother, she is entirely in charge of the household; from nurturing her children to managing financial problems. Although the new lifestyle rarely gives her the chance of devoting her time to the divine world she always strives to keep her dream alive. Ten years later the prince marries a fourteen-year-old girl. Paralyzed by her bitter marital life and her fruitless attempts to become part of the divine world, Tūbā takes refuge in weaving carpets and gradually becomes an upset and sullen woman. Her depression integrates to the burden of the secret of burying a young innocent girl named Sitārah in the garden of her house. Her dissatisfaction of her misfortune and her deep confusion in understanding the events of her life lead her to fence herself within the walled space of her house in the remaining years of her long life. Gradually her family and others who once had been supported by her abandon her. Exhausted and muddled by unintelligible events of her destiny, she exhibits insane behaviors. The novel finishes when at the end of the story a mysterious woman named Liylā joins Tūbā and asks her to accompany her into the deep layers of the ground. Unifying with Liylā, through observation of symbolic pictures, Tūbā understand the truth of her life.

## About the Author

Šahrnūš Pārsīpūr is one of the most well-known Iranian writers who has chosen story-writing as her main profession. She was born in Tehran in 1946 and from an early age, she showed an interest in literature. Her lettered parents encouraged her interest by keeping her in school until graduation, after which she entered the University of Tehran to study sociology. During her studies, Pārsīpūr became captivated by the topic of Chinese philosophy and I Ching. Her first collection of short stories, *Āvīzihāy-i Bulūr* (Crystalline Pendants) was published in 1974. Her first novel, *Sag va Zimistān-i Buland* (The Dog and the Long Winter) was written while she was working for the National Iranian TV, as the producer of *Zanān-i Rūstā'ī* (Rural Women), a weekly socially program. *Sag va Zimistān-i Buland* is a first-person narrative in which a young Iranian girl returns from the death to tell the tragic story of her life. Parsipur resigned from working in National TV to protest the unjust execution of two poets, that caused her to be imprisoned for fifty-nine days. Later, she moved to France to continue her studies of Chinese, Indian and Iranian mythology at the Sorbonne. Her deep interest in Chinese philosophy can be observed through her translation of several books about Chinese civilization like Chinese Astrology (1975), Laotse and the Taoist Master (1987), and History of China (1995). In 1977 She wrote her second novel, *Mājirāhāy-i Sādih va Kūčak-i Rūh-i Diraht* (Plain and Small Adventures of the Spirit of the Tree); an erotic novel that she claims to be written when she was in high spirits, under the influence of supernaturalism. (Pārsīpūr, 2006)

In 1979, she could not complete her education in France due to the financial problems, thus had to return to Iran. In the fervent days after the Revolution 1979 because of a misunderstanding, she ended up in the Islamic Republic of Iran's political prison, for four years and seven months. The circumstances of her arrest are unclear, as she was never formally charged with a crime. However, she maintains that her incarceration, in conjunction with that of her mother and brother, was due to her brother's involvement in political documenting. In an interview, she recounts her prison experience as follow: "During my second term in prison, many executions took place. Large groups of people were executed. Maybe six, seven thousand people were killed, which in addition to the executions that took place in 1988, the number exceeded to ten thousand deaths. These were exceedingly frightful years. The atmosphere of prison was terrorizing" (Pārsīpūr, 2006) Her novel *Tūbā va Ma'nāy-i Šab* (Pārsīpūr, 1989) which has brought her a lot of fame amongst the book

readers in Iran, was written mostly in this prison (Talattof, 2004; 45) and she published it, as soon as she was released from the jail. In 1990, she published a short novella consisting of connected stories, called *Zanān Bidūn-i Mardān* (*Women without Men*). Both novels show a concern with women's oppression and the limitations placed on women in a patriarchal society; the themes that aroused a good deal of controversy in the Islamic Republic. Her openly referring to the issue of virginity in *Zanān Bidūn-i Mardān* caused her being imprisoned again on two different occasions. Finally, after over a decade of political pressure from the Iranian government and its Revolutionary Guard, in 1994, she left Iran and immigrated to the United States. After nine months of traveling in the US, she went to England. There, she had a mental breakdown and returned to Iran for medical care. The following year, she went to Germany to launch the German translation of *Tūbā* and then returned to the US. Then, she wrote *Ĥātirāt-i Zindān* (*Prison Memoire*), a 450 pages book of her memoir of four different times that she was in different prisons. Residing in the USA as a political refugee, she has enthusiastically tried to continue her literary career with the following books; *Šīvā*, a science fiction novel; *Bar Bāl-i Bād Nišastan* (*On the Wings of Wind*), a novel; and a collection of shorts stories *Ādāb-i Sarf-i Čāy Dar Ĥuzūr-i Gurg* (*The Proper Etiquette of Drinking Tea in the Presence of Wolf*). Kamran Talattof has translated two of her most famous novels, *Tūbā va Ma'nāy-i Šab* (Pārsīpūr, 1989) and *Zanān Bidūn-i Mardān* into English language and translations of some of her short stories appear in *Stories by Iranian Women since the Revolution* (1991) and *Stories from Iran: A Chicago Anthology* (1991). Her prison memoir, *Ĥātirāt-i Zindān* has been also translated into English by Sara Khalili in 2013. Pārsīpūr received Brown University's International Writers Project Fellowship and has given lectures at UCLA. She currently lives in California, and her bipolar disorder continues to hinder the work she wishes to do in America. Despite her tremendous popularity, her books are now banned in her country of origin.

## Literature Review

*Tūbā va Ma'nāy-i Šab* (Pārsīpūr, 1989) is among the most famous novels written after the Islamic Revolution of Iran. In this novel, Pārsīpūr has pioneered new horizons in the characterization of the female protagonist, and mirrored women's issues from a first-hand female perspective. Several articles have been published in Iran, concentrating on the different aspects of the novel. Pārsīpūr's stories have been debated too among the Iranian literary critiques who originally write in English,

however the main credit has been given by them to her most famous work, *Zanān Bidūn-i Mardān* (Pārsīpūr, 1990), as one of the best examples of taboo breaker stories in Iran with five interesting female characters.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, the novelty of the story of Tūbā in terms of theme, characterization, and setting causes diverse thematic approaches towards analysis of this book. Reflection of women's condition in the male-dominated society of Iran has been pointed out by some scholars as the main theme of the narration; Hasan Mīrābidīnī for instance states that "the result of Pārsīpūr's work is a kind reawakening and understanding of the sense of women's bewilderment in the modern history; showing isolation of women and their exile to the state of illusion and melancholia." (Mīrābidīnī, 1999; 1118)<sup>2</sup> In her article "The Quest for "Real" Women in the Iranian Novel", Azar Nafisi begins with the story of Tūbā and then traces the changing images of women in the fictions created by Iranian male and female authors in the last one hundred years. There, she concentrates on the earlier portrayals of female characters in Persian literature and then briefly states that in Tūbā's story "Pārsīpūr begins with concrete images of a woman's life and then trail off into vague musings." (Nafisi, 2003; 994) In his essays about Pārsīpūr's fictions, Talattof discusses how the author radically confronted literary conventions at the time, challenging the existent tenets of the state by exposing the harsh realities of the social conditions of Iranian women.<sup>3</sup> He says that Pārsīpūr's stories "has broken taboos about women's sexuality and contributed to the rise of feminist discourse in Iran; it continues to inform succeeding generations of female writers. The literacy movement to which they belong has produced new forms and creative approaches to social problems and has addressed forbidden topics." (Talattof, 2004; 44)

Reflection of significant socio-historical events in the life of Tūbā is another topic that has been studied by the critiques. Hura Yavari, in the afterword of Tūbā's English translation, has focused

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1 Fatemeh Keshavarz who wrote about Pārsīpūr's works published after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Mainly focused on *Zanān Bidūn-i Mardān*. She dedicated a chapter of her book "Jasmine and Stars: Reading More Than Lolita in Tehran" (Keshavarz, 2007) to Pārsīpūr's character and literary works; "Women without Men; Fireworks of the Imagination". The same story has been chosen by Farzaneh Milani to show Parsipur's influences on the further generations of Iranian female writers, in terms of characterization and feminine tune. See the chapter of "Women on the Road; Shahrnush Parsipur and the Conference of Female Birds" in the book "Words, Not Swords: Iranian Women Writers and the Freedom of Movement" (Milani, 2011). Pp 188-200. Based on the story of Women Without Men, in 2009, Shirin Neshat directed a feature movie with the same name. The movie won the Silver Lion for best director at the 66th Venice Film Festival.

2 See the chapter of *Dāstān Nivīsān-i Zan* (Female story-writers) in Mīrābidīnī's *Šad Sāl dastān niwīsī-i Īrān* (One Hundred Years of Story-writing in Iran). 1999. Pp 1109-1157. See also Jūdakī, AbdulḤussayn; Ilyāsī, Zaynab. Deconstructing Phallogocentrism in Shahrnush Parsipur's Tūbā and the Meaning of Night: A Psycho-Feminist Study. GEMA Online. Journal of Language Studies. Vol. 15(2), June 2015.

3 The chapter of "Feminist Discourse in Postrevolutionary Women's Literature" in Talattof's "The Politics of Writing" (2000); and "Breaking Taboos in Iranian Women's Literature: The Work of Shahrnush Parsipur," (Talattof, 2004); and "Iranian Women's Literature: From Pre-Revolutionary Social Discourse to Post-Revolutionary Feminism. (Talattof, 1997)



mainly on the intertwinning of the modern history of Iran and the story, and carefully traced the representation of the main political currents of the country at the time, in the episodic life of the protagonist.<sup>1</sup> Mašī'at Alā'ī has studied Pārsīpūr's usage of diverse philosophic ideas and Eastern mysticism in favor of portraying legendary characters<sup>2</sup>. In his conclusion about the novel he states that the eclectic occultism, represented by Pārsīpūr in this novel, has been inspired by Persian Sufism, Taoism, conjectures of Para psychology (extra-sensory perception psychology), the mythologies of the indigenous peoples of North America, and Hindu beliefs, specially the differentiation between the visible and invisible worlds. (Alā'ī, 1990; 65)

As one of the pioneering Iranian writers who has used the technique of magic realism<sup>3</sup>, a few scholars have focused on the author's intelligent usage of the technique in favor of showing the strange situation of the real life of Iranian women. Salmān Sākit for instance says that however *Tūbā va Ma'nāy-i Šāb* is not a perfect story which has written with the technique of magic realism, it is definitely better and more modified in comparison with lots of the stories of Iranian literature which have written with the same technique. (Sākit, 2010; 524) There are also some studies that have shown the influences of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* on Tūbā's narration; in their article "A Comparative Review of the Influence the Novel "One Hundred Years of Solidarity" on the Novel "Tūbā and the Meaning of Night"", Sābir and Šāyḡānfar have shown the common themes of the both novels to reveal the discursive and intertextual relationship among these two stories. (Sābir, 2015) Safawī believes that because of severe literary censorship after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, female story-writers used techniques such as magical realism "as an assertion and affirmation of their literary independence, and as a tool to discover, explore and expose the emotional, ideological, and social layers of human existence." (Safawī, 2006; 97) However, Saba Sulaiman argued that "Parsipur was already writing magical realist fiction as a

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1 Yavari has extensively written about this novel in Farsi and English; please see "Naqd va Barrasī'-yi Kitāb; Ta'amulī dar Tūbā va Ma'nāy-I Šāb.1990; "Naqd-I Adabī; Ravāyat-I Degargūnī-hāyi Rūhī va Ātifi". 2006; "Touba and the Meaning of Night"; Afterword" 2006; TUBĀ VA MA'NĀ-YE ŠĀB; in Encyclopedia Iranica. 2012

<sup>2</sup> See Alā'ī, Mašī'at. Naqd-I Kitāb; Ustūrah-ye Zan; Taḥlīl-i Rumān-i Tūbā va Ma'nāy-I Šāb (Book Review; Woman's Myth; Philosophical analysis of the Novel Touba and the Meaning of Night). 1990. Kilk. Vol. 1. Pp. 63-71

<sup>3</sup> During 1970s, the skillful translators introduced Iranian readers the literary works of Jorge Luis Borges, Carlos Fuentes Macías, Alejo Carpentier y Valmont, Juan Rulfo and Mario Vargas Llosa. Translation of Latin American novels familiarized Iranian authors with the magic realist story-telling. After the global acclamation of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez and the publish of its Farsi translation in 1978, Iranian Authors become more interested in this writing-style. "Qulām Ḥussain Sā'idī and Rizā Barāhīnī are among the pioneering writers who used magic realism in the context of Iranian culture. The following authors, inspired by Marquez's novels and the experiences of these two writers, enriched the genre in Persian prose literature. Using their own history and culture and relying on the traditions and etiquette of their own country, these authors could adopt new horizons and experience unique realms in story-telling." (Sākit, 2010)

young adult ... and this was not a style she adopted simply as a result of the Revolution." (Sulaiman, 2012; 6)

The main concern of Pārsīpūr to write this novel was reflection of women's condition in the context of the modern history of Iran. Yet her hope to create a multilayered story that covers different aspects of sociology, history and politics of the society of Iran causes a kind of disintegration and disarray in the narration which subsequently affect the content analyses focused on this story; despite all the valuable studies that have been done about the different aspects of the novel, the female protagonist of the novel has never been the main axis of any research. Tūbā of this story is a unique, brave, individual and indefatigable woman whose very natural human weaknesses cause her portrayal to reflect a real and understandable human being. *Tūbā's* character is among the primary memorable examples of female characterization in Iran's literature whose interesting innermost world flicks the presumptions of the male-dominated society about women's mind. At the same time, her character represents an energetic and enthusiastic individual who is captive of profound principal contradictions, like every thinker human being. In my research about the portrayals of female protagonists of Iranian women's literature, Tūbā's character is one of the most significant personages that must be separately and precisely studied. Thus, in the following pages, after a brief look at the literary aspects of the novel, Tūbā's character and the process of change and transformation of her personage will be examined.

## About the Narration

*Tūbā va Ma'nāy-i Šab* (Pārsīpūr, 1989) was published ten years after the Islamic Revolution of Iran. The story proposed an unprecedented theme in Persian literature; seeking truth and perfection by a woman whose life is influenced by the socio-political changes and transformations of the country. The novel has 511 pages and divided into four chapters. Using an omniscient narrator, Pārsīpūr has tried to provide the reader with an all-around image of life of a female mystic in the modern history of Iran. Thus, the narrative time of the story is both linear and circular. As a woman who was born in the late of nineteenth century, her story linearly begins "with the socio-political upheavals that culminate in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911, [and] ends with the Islamic Revolution of 1979\_ both events with far-reaching affects on the country's social, political, and literary landscapes. Iran's Constitutional Revolution converted the country from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional one, and reflected among other things, its growing engagement with

the West and modernity. The Islamic Revolution, encompassing a broad spectrum of ideas and objectives and reflecting diverse intellectual trends, social background, and political demands, put an end to the millennia-long monarchy and also represented a rejection of Western influences and interests that had come to dominant Iran." (Yavari, 2006; 384) Pārsīpūr has intelligently tried to exhibit Iran's modern history through the lives of the characters who represent ordinary people of the society; at the very beginning of the story, the presence of the Englishman in Tūbā's house reflects the arrival of the Western ideas into the society of Iran; the bewilderment of Tūbā's father after his meeting with the Englishman shows the profound concerns of the traditional Iranians in confrontation with the modern world; Tūbā's loyalty to Mr. Ḥīyābānī, a political leader of the Constitutional Revolution of Iran, and her subsequent disappointment with him mirror the thirst of Iranian for the Constitutional movement and their discouragement of the honesty of its leaders; the transformation of Tūbā's ideas about both Iranian and non-Iranian political figures shows lack of stability in the political thoughts among people of Iran. From this perspective, Tūbā's narration can be considered as a story-sample of People's History<sup>1</sup> that takes its subjects from ordinary people and concentrates on their experiences and viewpoints; the historical outlook of the narration recounts the recent history of Iran from the viewpoints of common people rather than political leaders. Thus, we observe the simultaneous relationship between the characters, representing real Iranian people, and the historical currents; while the lives of the individuals are affected by the socio-political events, these very individuals are shaping the history.

On the contrary to the linear narration of the history, Tūbā's life as a mystic is a voyage in the infinite mythological time to achieve to the origins of the facts. In this voyage, the underground level of the historical journey, the characters are illusory and supernatural. (Mīr'ābidīnī, 1999; 1120) To narrate the innermost occult adventure of the protagonist, Pārsīpūr uses the technique of magic realism. She merges the history and the supernaturalism within the context of mystical and mythological ideas, and seeks peace and truth in returning to the nature's origins.<sup>2</sup> (Sākit, 2010;

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1 The phrase People's History or also called History from Below is a type of historical narrative in which the historians "turning their attention to the lives and struggles of ordinary people, they focused on social relations at the grass roots, popular forms of protest, everyday activities such as work and leisure, as well as attitudes, beliefs, practices, and behavior. This became known in the 1960s as history from below." (Port, 2015) for more information please see "History from Below, the History of Everyday Life, and Microhistory" Port, Andrew. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Second Edition). Elsevier. Oxford. 2015. Pp. 108-113. [www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9780080970868621566](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9780080970868621566). And also "History from Below" Bhattacharya, Sabyasachi. *Social Scientist*, vol. 11, no. 4, 1983, pp. 3–20. [www.jstor.org/stable/3517020](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3517020).

2 The theme of returning to the nature's origins has been widely used by Pārsīpūr in her stories. In this novel and in Zanān Bidūn-i Mardān the portrayals of women are inspired by the ancient myth of mother-earth that personifies the earth in the form of a woman regarding their common

۵۱۹) In the inner world of the protagonist, we encounter a non-linear narrative time that is more like a conjunction of different eras; when Šāhzādi Gīl, a mysterious character of the novel, recounts the history of Iran he intermingles the mythological, mystical and social history of Iran to the contemporary time of Tūbā 's life, the Qajar era, thus represents her the time as an obscure and vague matter. (Alā'ī, 1990; 66) Pārsīpūr's has tried to use narrative-time simultaneously as linear and circular since, from one side, she wanted to propose a female linear recount of the most significant political currents in the geography of modern Iran, and from the other side, through applying a non-historical narrative-time she wanted to generalize the bitter life-experience of Tūbā, as the very exemplar of femininity, to the women of all times. Alongside the usage of non-linear narrative time as a feature of magic realism, the author has applied other indexes of the technique too; binarism of real historical events and paranormal experiences of the heroine; hyperbole for the sake of emphasis of events or statuses to intensify the dramatic influences of the novel; ironic perspective of the author towards the society through which traditional thoughts and superstitious beliefs of the people are targeted. (Sākit, 2010)

The narrative space has a distinctive importance in *Tūbā va Ma'nāy-i Šab* (Pārsīpūr, 1989) as most of the story's events take place within Tūbā's house. Her house "on the one hand, resembles the four-walled space that was once equated with sedentary Earth. On the other hand, like the country it represents, it undergoes a turbulent history, traversed continually by different people and their stories, by ideas and developments that originate beyond its all-enclosing walls. The politics and ideologies are mysteriously empowered to penetrate the thick walls of Tūbā 's house, and she fears that the walls and the lives they protect will crack at any moment." (Yāvarī, 2006; 398) Her house is the first-hand witness of all the events happened in her life; within its walls she has grown up and matured; in the time of misery and poverty she returns to this house; beneath its only tree "she has buried two corpses, the slain body of a young girl, Sitārah, raped by a soldier and murdered by her uncle; and the bullet-stricken body of Maryam, a political activist during the 1979 revolution. Filled with magically guarded secrets, the house resembles a graveyard, an image not far removed from the cruel realities of killing and moral amnesia that have swept Iran in recent decades." (Yāvarī, 2014) The intertwining of Tūbā 's life with her house has turned the dignity of this place into an aware venerable presence that must be respected and protected from any probable masonry

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ability of life-giving and nurturing. The author obviously tends to echo the idea that the earth resonates more closely to the female form than the male.

that would definitely destroy its essence. The house, far from a mere inanimate soil, coalesces with Tūbā 's life, experience, and feelings. Thus, the final step of her long mystical voyage is accomplished in her journey into the profound layers of this soil where the hidden truth of existence and femininity gradually reveals itself to her.

The multifaceted employment of narrative time and narrative space in Tūbā's story indicates the effort of the author to tell a comprehensive story that covers all historical, philosophical, political and social aspects of the lives of Iranians in the modern time. Pārsīpūr has tried to generalize the temporal and spatial dimensions of her story into the mythical time and immense geography of Iran, but the complex nature of generalization in the context of fiction and lack of enough writing-experience by the author prevent her to perfectly achieve her goal. Consequently, some parts of the novel have become disjointed since multiplicity of the issues in the author's mind hampers the creation of a coherent and precise narrative. The main theme of the story of Tūbā is condition of women in the modern Iran, and Pārsīpūr has correctly realized that to challenge women's issues in the society requires multi-dimensional social pathology. But Tūbā's story could not perfectly succeed to reflect women's condition and the most significant topics of the society of Iran at the same time. Nevertheless, the main achievement of Pārsīpūr is portraying a unique female character who has a remarkable attractive, stubborn and complicated personality. In the following pages, we look at this personage and her life-experience that has been prolonged in the one hundred years of Iran's modern history.

### **About the Protagonist**

*Tūbā va Ma'nāy-i Šāb* (Pārsīpūr, 1989) is story of growth, maturation and transformation of a small girl named Tūbā, within the context of a patriarchal discourse of a traditional community; from the beginning of the story we observe how the assumptions, foresight and prudence of a male-dominated society influence Tūbā 's life and change it forever. Being daughter of Hājī Adīb, a scholar of Islamic theology, Tūbā 's father is the first man who deliberately determines for her paragons of virtue and chastity, as he is worried if Tūbā soon or late shows any sort of shamelessness in her behavior. Hājī Adīb has recently received some new information concerning sphericity of the earth; the critical moment of exploration of this fact results in his new conclusion about women's mind which was previously connected to his perception of the earth as a mysterious lady.

"در حقیقت بانو نه خواب بود، نه خواب و بیدار، بلکه همیشه بیدار، دیوانه‌وار به دور خود می‌چرخید. در این چرخش بود که فصل‌ها می‌آمدند، سیل‌ها سرازیر می‌شدند و خشکسالی از راه می‌رسد... بله زمین گرد است، زنان می‌اندیشند و به زودی بی‌حیا خواهند شد. همین‌طور است، به محض اینکه کشف کنند صاحب فکرند خاشاک به هوا بلند می‌کنند. حق با خواجه شیراز بود، این عجوزه عروس هزار داماد بود... حاجی احساس حقارت و خشم داشت. از همه مهم‌تر وحشت." (پارسی‌پور، ۱۳۶۸، ص. ۱۷-۱۳)

"In fact, the lady was never sleep, nor even half asleep. Rather, she was always awake and spinning frantically. It was just this turning that causes the seasons to follow one another, floods to occure, and droughts to descend...Haji Adib pressed his lips together in anger. He decided, "Yes, the earth is round. Women think. As soon they shall have no shame." A small cloud covered the sun, a gust picked some dust and twigs off the ground. "That is the way it is. As soon as they discover they are able to think, they shall raise dust... Haji felt angry and humiliated. Most of all, he felt afraid."<sup>1</sup> (Ibid, p. 10-14)

Preoccupied with his prior beliefs that the earth is symbolically a lovely lady who is awake in spring and summer and sleeps in autumn and winter, the new geographic fact disquieted him. In Adīb's mind, the transformation of the identity of the earth; from a decent half-conscious woman into a dynamic presence warns the rise of a new generation of powerful women who hand in hand with the new scientific facts flick the foundations of traditional and religious society in which thinking, knowledge and rationale was considered as men's personal properties and heritage, and women had no access to any of them. (Jūdakī, 2015; 169) Tūbā's father is the representative of a male-dominated establishment that for long time has determined the boundaries of femininity according to its own knowledge and need. His fear of the existence of the ability of wisdom in women reflects the very primary confrontation of oppressive men with the women who, relying on their intellect, would set foot in social scenes that previously were entirely occupied by men. Adīb's reaction however is very smart; he decides to precede others and personally provide her daughter with valuable food for thought; a combination of traditional/religious sciences and some new geographical information. To prevent probable moral decadence, he familiarizes Tūbā with portray of Virgin Mary, picked up as the representative of holy women. (Pārsīpūr's, 1989, p. 18)

<sup>1</sup> All English quotations from the novel are from Parsipur, Shahmush. "Touba and the Meaning of Night". Trans. by Hava Houshmand and Kamran Talattoff. New York: Feminist Press, 2006. Print.

Inspired by the story of Saint Mary, 12-year-old Tūbā wishes to conceive a baby miraculously by the command of God. Stimulated by this strong desire and the subsequent ambition comes with, every aspect of Tūbā's life gets influenced. Despite the attempt of her father to control her daughter, his lessons give rise to a unique individuality in the character of Tūbā. Although, she follows the same prevalent life-pattern of ordinary stay-at-home women, she always tries to link her life to the divine world, and the events of her life becomes important according to their strength of linkage to her desire. Her belief in spiritual matters strengthens when she experiences some sort of revelation which considerably influences her thoughts and assures her of being selected by the supernatural powers. (Ibid, p. 44-45) But, her lessons of obtaining a direct experience of god and embracing the divine presence are few and fragmented. With the death of her father, her only teacher whom Tūbā believed to know the pathway of the divine world, she has been left alone with a just limited knowledge about the lives of the hallows. Lack of a teacher who lightens for her the unknown way toward supernatural world intensifies the ambiguity of the pure truth that she wishes to perceive. The traditional society does not give her possibility of searching for a teacher who accepts to accompany a young girl in her mystic voyage. Add to this, as a girl who has been grown up in this society, she cannot imagine to independently choose her lifestyle as a devotee of God. Therefore, she must follow her mystic voyage based on her own innermost intuition, and paralleled to the supposed stereotypic lifestyle imposing by the society on her.

"از مرگ پدر تا چهارده سالگی را به دو کار مشغول بود، فالیچه ای برای جهازش می بافت و اگر وقتی باقی می ماند به پشت می خوابید و منتظر می شد تا فرشته خداوند بر او ظاهر شود و نطفه الهی را در دلش بنشانند." (همان، ص. ۱۹)

"From the time of her father's death until she turned fourteen, she busied herself with two things: She wove a carpet for her dowry. And, whenever she had the time, she lay on her back stretched her arms open so the angel of god could appear to her and plant the divine seed in her." (Ibid, p. 16)

Tūbā's amazement at spiritual world and at extraordinary lives of the saints gives a new meaning to her life; contrary to the women around, visible beauty become devalued in her mind. She never pays attention to her attractive appearance, the thing that is always noticed by others. This is the very basic difference of her character with other women; an important difference that causes her to get exhausted very soon of any kind of communication with ordinary women. (Ibid, p. 52) Instead, her thirst for spiritual matters results in her tendency to learning and reading books, what

in that time frame considerably individualize her from other women. Reading books gives her some sort of knowledge by which sometimes she can answer religious questions; the matter which signifies the character in the mind of others.

"شب، بعد از خاموشی سر و صدای روز پرگرفتاری، طوبی به سراغ روزنامه رفت. کنار چراغ لامپا زانو زد و با ادب شروع به خواندن کرد. موج حوادث خارج از خانه به صورت مبهمی از طریق روزنامه به طوبی منتقل شد. زن بعد از خواندن روزنامه را تا کرد و با ادب روی تاقچه گذاشت." (همان، ص ۶۹)

"That night, after the long, noisy, and busy day, Toubā began reading the newspaper. She sat next to the oil lamp and opened it almost reverently. A wave of events from the outside world rushed in. after she was finished reading, she folded the newspaper respectfully and placed it on the alcove shelf." (Ibid. p. 57)

Her polite manner during reading affirms her deep respect towards newspaper as a source of information and medium of knowledge. In Tūbā 's Mind, socio political news, the complex and influential events that alter life of the individuals, are elevated to the position of important issues that normal people like her cannot comprehend them. Nevertheless, she is eager to know; the mere possession of knowledge, even without accurate understanding of it, disconnects her from the ordinary life matters, and opens the gate of the superior world for her. From this perspective, the holy world and the political world become similar for her as both decode an unknown world which might be understood through feelings and intuition rather than logic and reasoning. This similarity causes her to intertwine these two worlds together and chooses a highly-reputed politician figure, Mr. Ḥīyābānī, as the messenger of the holy world. Although her faith in Mr. Ḥīyābānī has no specific reasons, she always interweaves his shadowy existence into her own spiritual experiences, believing that he knows the profound truth behind the existence.

"زن یقین داشت که مرد خودش است، فرستاده و رسول است. اینک او را به نیروی غیب فرامی خواند." (همان، ص ۵۴)

"She was certain that Mr. Khiabani was a messenger of the prophets. He was now invoking her by his divine power." (Ibid, p. 45)

Her loyalty to Mr. Ḥīyābānī, the active representative in the parliament, always encourages her to get information about the main political trends of the country. Yet her knowledge of political



debates is always received through the intermediate male sources around her, thus, her understanding of the politic is always adjusted to the assumptions of men.

"به حرف‌های مردان گوش می‌داد. او هم احساس کرد دارد به هیتلر علاقمند می‌شود. هیتلر می‌توانست پدر بلشویک‌ها را در بیاورد. دمار از روزگاره انگلیسیان در آورد. آن وقت ایران به زمان قدرت پادشاهان قدیم برمی‌گشت." (همان، ص. ۲۲۷)

"She was listening to the men talk. She also felt that she was beginning to like Hitler, because she thought he could give the Bolsheviks a truly rough time. He would also make it difficult for the English. Iran then would regain the power of its old kingdom." (Ibid. p. 183)

Underlining her sophisticated perception of politics, the author intelligently succeeds to show how the limited social interaction and lack of direct contact with the outside world undermine women's mentality. At the same time, Tūbā 's adoption of men's ideas illustrates the paralyzing penetration of men's thoughts into women's judgements. Aside from the effects of political discourse of men on women's lives, woman's mind has always been the target of politics to be changed and transformed in favor of its policy. (Jūdakī, 2015; 171) Despite having a naive understanding of the outside world, the character never stops thinking about it; as a unique ambitious female personage of her time, she does not believe in the supposed gender binarism of her society in which thinking about sociopolitical events are men's job.

"آنچه بود در ذهن او بود. ذهنی که فعالانه در امورات دنیا مشارکت می‌کرد و بالا و پایین مسائل را بررسی می‌کرد و بسیار کم به مرحله‌ای می‌رسید که از طریق زبان به بیان آید و اما اگر فرصتی پیش می‌آمد که اظهار نظری بکند چنان به لکنت زبان دچار می‌شد که در شنوندگان مرد حالتی از دلسوزی و عطوفتی که بزرگان نسبت به بچه‌ها پیدا می‌کنند پیدا می‌شد. ازین قرار ترجیح می‌داد حرف نزنند و ساکت بماند." (همان، ص. ۱۶۹)

"It was all inside her own mind. Her mind participated in world affairs and questioned the ins and outs of all problems, but rarely were her thoughts verbalized. And if ever she did have to talk, then she began to stutter to the point that the men felt the same sympathy and concern for her as an elder feels for children. She therefore preferred to keep silent." (Pārsīpūr, 1989, p. 138)

Tūbā 's faith in her personal capability to unify with the superior world gives her a certain and independent personality. (KāzimīNavā'ī, 2014; 141) Thus, as the only literate child of the house, in the absence of her father and the clumsiness of her mother she becomes the leader of others. She apparently assumes ordinary life as a contemptible superficial matter. For her, the mundane

life and the human relationships within it are not that much important or remarkable to be considered with special care and attention. In her youth, she, optimistic and assured of her few mystic experiences, tries to proceed her mundane life based on her own intuition; in some significant moments, she, paying no attention to the probable consequences, makes some strange decisions that result in further unpleasant circumstances. For instance, to help her bumbling mother, fourteen-year-old Tūbā proposes her mother's middle-age suitor to marry Tūbā instead of her mother. Though the suitor mentions their age difference, she frankly replies that she doesn't mind. (Pārsīpūr, 1989, p. 22)

"به همین سادگی طی مراسم بی رنگ و جلایی به همسری حاج محمود در آمده بود تا چهار سال یخزده و منجمد را بگذراند. نخستین مشکل کشف موهای طلایی رنگ او در شب زفاف بود. دختر چهارده ساله، زبان درازی داشته باشد، خود از شوهر خواستگاری بکند، زیبا هم باشد و از همه بدتر گیسوانش طلایی باشد، امری که اگر کشف می‌شد، دهها عاشق دلخسته برایش فراهم می‌آورد. حاجی تا لحظه زفاف صدها بار به خود گفته بود عیبناک است، عیبناک است. و اما دختر هیچگونه نقصی نداشت." (همان، ص. ۲۲)

"And so Touba endured a very quiet and colorless wedding, marrying Haji Mahmud only to spend four cold, lifeless years with him. The first problem arose in bed on the wedding night with the discovery of Touba's golden hair. An outspoken fourteen-year-old girl who personally proposed marriage to a man\_for her also to be beautiful and, above all, have golden hair was just too much! If these matters were discovered, she would have thousands of devoted lovers. A hundred times before the wedding night Haji Mahmud had said to himself, "She probably has a defect." The he discovered that the girl had no defects whatsoever." (Ibid, p. 18)

Though her proposal may seem to be derived from her naivety and immaturity, through the story in some occasions we observe her immediate instinctive decision-making in respond to the difficult situations of her life. These decisions however, mostly escalate the hardship of her life because within the context of a male-dominated society, her subjectivity is always suspected and questioned; her husband, the second man of her life cannot trust Tūbā or accept her as the lady of his house. He keeps her absolutely subordinated, gives her no significant role and always blames her for being reason of the long drought that has started from the beginning of their marriage. (Ibid, p. 23) Emphasizing the humiliating experience of Tūbā in her first marriage, Pārsīpūr shows how the patriarchal discourse gives the character a strong feeling of uncertainty about her supernatural

experiences, and from an energetic enthusiastic young girl turns her into a totally upset and sullen woman.

"دختر در خانه شوهر هیچگونه مسئولیتی نداشت... تنها کاری که می‌کرد راه رفتن در طول اتاق بود و دزدانه به آسمان نگاه کردن و حسرت باران را خوردن. رویای کودکی و حامل نطفه الهی بودن اینک به حقارت سرکوفته‌ای مبدل می‌شد. او حتی آنقدر لایق نبود که خداوند حداقل یک بار برای او بباراند." (همان، ص. ۲۳)

"Touba had no responsibilities at her husband's home... Her only activity was to walk back and forth across the room and take quick, secret glances at the sky, longing for the rain. The childhood dream of bearing the divine seed was now wasting into humiliation and depression. She was not even worth enough that God would make rain at least once." (Ibid, p. 19)

For centuries, the supposed and fixed discourse of the idea of women/inside, men/outside has prevented women from having active association with the outdoors; thus, in this novel Tūbā is not allowed to take an independent and active part outside the house. (KāzimīNavā'ī, 2014; 148) Therefore, as soon as she leaves the house for the first-time and sets foot on the streets, her childhood desire rebels again; she resumes strong feeling of connection to the holy world through watching a dead little boy whose picture merges into the holy child Tūbā could conceive from the heaven. The character interprets the event as a sign of credibility of her spiritual desire and consequently decides to fast and die like the innocent boy. Her perseverance convinces her husband of her extraordinary abilities and endurance, but the consequence is surprising; her husband simply divorces her as this rebellious woman who stops eating and does not fear to be beaten or even killed is not tolerable anymore. (Pārsīpūr, 1989, p. 39) The unilateral decision-making of Tūbā 's husband about their marriage once again exemplifies the prevalent behaviors of the men who are granted the power over women in traditional communities.

Despite Tūbā 's satisfaction with the divorce, she assumes it as a mistake derived from her vacuous self-assertion in her pathway to god. Her failure in the first marriage gives rise to a profound confusion in her character; she cannot precisely decide whether she must precede her destiny and influence it as a determinant character, or she must embrace her predestined life like a faithful mystic. Being hopeless from her previous active role, in her next marriage she passively becomes wife of a Qajari prince, believing if this wedlock was not destined by God, she would be informed through the agency of Mr. Hīyābānī. (Ibid, p. 76) Yet, marrying a philander and nearly insolvent

prince captures her in the most familiar gendered lifestyle within the context of cruel patriarchy; living with an unfaithful man and being fully engaged in endless matters of house chores. (Ibid, p. 97) Her real life in an absolute masculine atmosphere contrasts her desire of unification with the non-gendered superior world in which both men and women are welcomed. From the other side, though like an ardent devotee she sincerely tries to keep her childhood dream alive, she can never thoroughly ignore her basic instincts of the mundane life.

"هنوز سی سال نداشت. البته اگر زن به بیست سال می‌رسید دیگر باید برایش گریه می‌کردند. اما یکپارچه گرما و نیرو بود. زنانگی‌اش در جوار شاهزاده بارور می‌نمود اما نه آنقدر که به طبع لازم داشت. شاهزاده اغلب نبود. چند سالی را در روسیه گذرانیده بود و بیشتر اوقات در ولایات به سر می‌برد. با این حال وقتی که بود زن راضی بود." (همان، ص. ۱۶۹)

"She herself was hardly more than thirty. Of course, once a woman reached twenty, most assumed that the good part of her life was over. But he was still full of warmth and energy. Her femininity bloomed around the prince, but not always to its full potential. The prince was often absent. He had spent a few years in Russia, and other long periods in the provinces. Nevertheless, when he was there, Toubā was content." (Ibid, p. 137)

Contrary to her spiritual thirst, Tūbā 's dissatisfaction of her sexual experience and her strong emotional needs for her adulterous husband reflect her profound desire to enjoy her marital life; a female desire which is condemned to be silenced within the context of every male-dominated society. In this regards, Pārsīpūr is among the most impressive taboo breaker writers who bravely propounds such human needs of her female characters in the Islamized atmosphere of Iran after the Revolution of 1979; though Tūbā 's sexual need has been mentioned from the perspective of an absolute private matter, Pārsīpūr broaches this topic as a part of Tūbā 's reality that is combination of contradictory aspects of humanity. The conflict between her opposing desires however, always gives her discontent and sorrow. As a believer in spirituality who at the same time has such undeniable erotic desires, she is very ashamed and cannot forgive herself because of not implementing her decision to devote her life to God.

As a woman who always misses her unachieved heavenly dream, the engagement in the never-ending household chores is of the most intolerable issues in Tūbā's life. By whatever means she tries to manipulate the recurring patterns of her life; for instance, avoiding to weave carpets with same design. (Ibid. p. 97) Yet her intrinsic dissatisfaction with conformity to earthy life always

influences her feelings and thoughts. Her responsibility toward nurturing her children, and discipline them is a heavy burden that intensifies her discontent with her life. Her perpetual desire of experiencing motherhood like Saint Mary has never been objectified through the mothering of her own children. Apparently the simply natural life of her children can never meet the expectations of her desired sacred seed; so, she never doubts if her children could be the same blessed gift that she has been waiting to receive from God. Their existence in Tūbā's life is only another burden, hindering her from what she wishes to do. (Ibid. p. 136) Her portrayal thus, represents identity of a degraded and deprived woman whose life has become an undesirable play devoid of attraction and delight. Despite all her efforts to refuse this narrow clichéd life, she cannot find any escapeway from the clutch of this destroying reality; she is doomed to failure and acceptance. The bitterness of her failure however, channels into her relationship with her children; throughout the story we rarely observe Tūbā talking to her children or thinking about them. Her children are portrayed as seemingly orphans who grow up under the supervision of Tūbā, a strict principal whose mind is always concerned with probable guilts.

"زن روز به روز گوشت تلختر می شد. حالا دیگر مطمئن بود گناهی کرده است که بابت آن تقاص پس می دهد، اما چه گناهی؟... وقتی بچه ها را با الماس خاتون و یاقوت برای نماز باران ردیف می کرد نیم ساعتی از گناه برایشان حرف می زد. وای به حال آن بدبختی که در بچگی غفلت می کرد و گناه می کرد و دیگر از معصومیت کنده می شد و خداوند غضب خود را بر سر همه می بارانید." (همان، ص. ۱۱۶)

"Touba became more and more sour each day. She was now certain that she had committed a sin that she had to answer for, but she had no idea what it was... Whenever she lined up the children and Almas Khatoun for rain prayers, she would also lecture them on the subject of sin for a good half hour. Heaven help the one who commits a sin in childhood. Such a one will be cut off from innocence and God's wrath will prevail upon everyone." (Ibid, p. 95)

As a woman who loathes the limitation of her stereotypic lifestyle, the protagonist always tries to use her opportunities to free herself of this inferior life. In this regard, her character mirrors the identity of a tireless woman who despite all the obstacles in her way of mystical commitment, never stops. Consequently, her failure in unifying with the divine truth through the agency of Mr. Ḥīyābānī, convinces her to find another divine person. This time she attains few stages in her search for God like a Sufi; to enter the way, she meets the spiritual teacher of the time -Gidā Alīšāh- as the connection to the teacher is considered necessary for the growth of the pupil. She does

some specific devotional acts such as the repetition of divine names of God (Zikr) and regularly attendance in ritualized ceremonies. Nevertheless, gradually she discovers that women are not welcomed in Sufism as much as men. (Ibid, p. 212-213) The confrontation with the same patriarchal discourse of the real life in the context of mysticism marks a watershed in Tūbā 's life through which the subjectivity and certainty of her youth turns into objectivity and skepticism in her old age. Given her deep dissatisfaction with her life, the character is not motivated anymore to quickly respond to her inspirations. Her modalities changed after her assurance of being failed in achievement to her demands in life; in the last parts of the novel, the repeat of interrogative sentences and ambiguous sentences indicates perplexity, uncertainty, fear and insecurity of her character. (KāzimīNavā'ī, 2014; 148) Far from her pre-assumption, her complicated life experience disappointed her to know the secret behind the fragmented truth. She rarely leaves her house to find the answer outside; instead she is attached to her house, believing that the soul of Sitārah, an innocent girl who had been murdered by her uncle and buried in the yard of Tūbā 's house, has guaranteed the god's blessings to Tūbā and the house. Her relationship with Sitārah is that much satisfying that she cannot imagine her life without her. (Pārsīpūr, 1989, p. 258)

"باور کرده بود که در جریان انتقال سلسله قاجار به سلسله پهلوی ناموس دختر، خانه‌اش را و بچه‌هایش را حفظ کرده بود. نمی‌توانست به بچه‌هایش بگوید که خانه را ترک نکنند چون به هر حال می‌رفتند اما می‌دانست که خودش نباید خانه را ترک کند و می‌دانست راز دختر را به هیچکس نباید بگوید... این ستاره می‌خواست خودش حامی طوبی در دینا و آخرت باشد." (همان، ص. ۲۸۵)

"Touba had come to believe that during the transfer from the Qajar dynasty to the Pahlavi regime, the girl's honor had protected her house and her children. She could not tell her children not to leave the house, but she knew that she herself must not leave, and that she must not ever tell the girl's secret to anyone... It was Setareh herself who wanted to be Touba's protector, here in this world and in the next." (Ibid, p. 232-233)

"The line between past and present, dream and reality grows progressively blurred as Tūbā approaches her final days. Every bit of her capacity for disillusionment is exhausted, to such an extent that she no longer distinguishes hours from years." (Yāvarī, 2006; 401) Supposing to have a great responsibility towards the corpse of the dead girl, she gradually alienates her family and the people once had been relied on her. The fluctuating relationship with Sitārah's ghost contents and persuades her for having a direct connection with the invisible world, thus, the girl and the

grave house become the most valuable things in Tūbā's mind. Her sullen behavior towards the relatives and the inability to convince them to comply with her wish or command, soon or late resulted in being completely abandoned and isolated by them. Although being alone in her house was the most demanded desired she always had, the feeling of utter loneliness causes her performing seemingly lunatic behaviors; giving pomegranates to pedestrians, talking to strangers about the corpses in the yard, playing Tar in the streets and the like. Her destiny at the end, as a combination of utter loneliness and bewilderment echoes the undermining and subversive aspect of the imposed life-experience of women who must consent to the fates determined for them by the society; otherwise their attempts to achieve something extraordinary would cause them to be abandoned and neglected. Tūbā 's insanity is however her freedom; apart from her previous concern of being judged by others, she completely follows her intuition and feelings. She stops reacting against her unpleasant life-experience, and realizes the whole game of extreme binaries imposed by patriarchal society and simply chooses to slip out of it. This is the beauty of her rebellion: the rebel's freedom; an absolute liberty that provides her with the possibility of perceiving the pure truth behind the existence. In the last scene of the story, Tūbā, hand in hand with Liylā<sup>1</sup> penetrates the earth. Their journey towards the truth is not directed into the sky, the supposed place for the holy world, but into the earth which from the beginning of the story had been intertwined to femininity.

"پیرزن را با خود به عمق کشید... به عمق می رفتند، به عمق تاریکی، به تاریکتر از تاریکی، و سنگینی و خمودی و سکوت. و سکوت ترین سکوت. و سنگین ترین سنگینی. به عمق فلز، به عمق آتش، به عمق آب می رفتند. ذرات وجود طوبی در هم می پیچید، سر و پایش یکی شده بود، چنان درهم بود که ذره ای و از درد نعره می کشید." (همان، ص. ۴۰۶)

"She pulled the old woman to the depth with her. They traveled down to the roots of the pomegranate tree... The two sank even deeper into the depth of darkness, into a darkness darker than itself, which was heavy and stagnant and silent. There was in that place a silence to end all silence, a heaviness to end all heaviness. They descended to the depth of metal, to the depth of fire. Particles of Touba's being were turning around themselves, her head and feet were all one. She

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<sup>1</sup> Liylā is a mysterious woman whom Tūbā met for the first time after marriage with the prince. Her attractive appearance and behavior notably distinguish her from usual women. Her Husband Shahzadeh Gil, another unusual person who never ages, explains for Tūbā how Leyla was born from his mind and came to the existence.

had become as one singular particle, and she screamed from the pain." (Pārsīpūr, 1989, p. 331-332)

In their journey into the earth, Tūbā and Liylā go through the uneven confusing pathway to the history of women; an ambiguous muddled story of a timeless and placeless portrayal of the historical and symbolical woman. Like Dante's journey the author burrows into the limbo and inferno of the condition of ancient woman, and presents a panoramic picture of her; the Bedouin woman hunter, the Hindu woman, the Iranian woman and in brief the woman of all time; a portrayal based on legends, myths and rituals of different tribes regarding women's issue that includes all the philosophic- mystic beliefs of the author. (Alā'ī, 1990; 68) In her merger with the earth, Tūbā observes how women have been historically sacrificed for masculine ambitions; the unpleasant life-experience of all women emanates from their degraded gender in a world that has been designed and managed by male authority. Nevertheless, Tūbā 's reincarnation in every particle of the globe at the end reaffirm the legitimacy of the beginning idea of her father about women's awareness; despite the tragic life-experience women have undergone throughout history, Tūbā, as the representative of female nature, ultimately unified with the dynamic awake presence of the earth and no one can prevent her spread throughout the earth; her new presence in every corner of the earth promises the rise of feminine consciousness that can no longer be ignored or denied by the patriarchal discourse.

## Conclusion

The Protagonist of *Tūbā va Ma'nāy-i Šab* (Pārsīpūr, 1989) mirrors the profound contradictions of women's life in the suspended Iran between tradition and modernity; the contradiction between transcendent wills of a perfectionist woman and her inferior life-experience as a victim of male supremacy; the contradiction between the stable spiritual world that Tūbā wishes to unify with and the uncertain real world around her; the contradiction of her extraordinary individuality that cannot tolerate gendered demarcation and the stereotypic feminine identity imposing to her by the society. The intertwining of her life with the society however, does not give her the opportunity to liberate herself from this situation. Thus, the only solution is endurance; the way that the protagonist undertakes throughout her long life, and at the end succeeds to embrace her dream of perception of the hidden truth of all ages. In the encounter of the character with these conflicting spheres, Pārsīpūr tries to keep balance between the two parts; as much as the reader becomes acquainted



with the idealist spiritual world of Tūbā, s/he gets familiar with the social reality of her life consisting of family relationships, status of women in the society, women's reaction to the political and economic issues. Tūbā's story therefore, is the recount of the intertwining of the realism and idealism; a complex situation that is based on the very endless conflict between the extremes, and through the technique of magic realism, Pārsīpūr could rather succeeds to portray this bipolar structure.

Tūbā is among the most primary female characters in Iranian literature who indeed, have been in the center of the narration. The examples previous than her belong to the female personages of the commitment literature of the time before the Islamic Revolution of 1979, whose thinking and dreams were absolutely under the influence of the patriotic men of the stories.<sup>1</sup> Though, the seed of interest in the divine world has been planted in Tūbā's heart by her father, her seriousness to follow her dream and the preference of this desire over all other aspects of her life, give her a unique individuality that has been unprecedented till the time of publication of this novel. Therefore, Tūbā's story has been addressed to a conservative society that must consent to the fact that when women possess knowledge and familiarize with the something more than ordinary house chores, undoubtedly, they would not accede anymore to return to their previous insignificant and inferior status as marginalized housewife. Nevertheless, in confronting women's hardness, the suppressive power of the patriarchal society turns life of such idealist women into an agonizing limbo. Thus, only death and release from corporality can provide these women with a true chance of freedom. Tūbā's death therefore, is her ultimate liberation from the cage of her body which leads to her spiritual flight towards a timeless and placeless eternity, where her questions will be answered and her desire will be fulfilled.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about Committed Literature in the history of Iran look at the first chapter of this research and its section that is titled "Iranian Women writers in the Era of Muḥammad Rizā Šāh (1941-1979).

**3.**

***Ingār Guftih Būdī Liylī* (As You Had Said Leyli)**

**Sipīdih Šāmlū**

**Markaz Publication**

**Tihrān**

**2000**

## About the Plot

*Ingār Guftih Būdī Liylī* (Šāmlū, 2000) is the life-story of a young widow named Šarārih who has lost her husband thirteen years ago. Šarārih and her husband, Alī had married shortly before the Islamic Revolution (1979) and conceived a son named Sīyāvaš. Seven years after the marriage Alī gets killed in an air raid in Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). His shocking death has terribly influenced his family; his mother has become insane. His sister, Mastānah has married a close friend of his, named Maḥmūd, whom she later realizes that is a dangerous leader of a counterfeit mystic group. In the meanwhile, Šarārih has faced a new harsh reality with variety of difficulties; contrary to the past, now she should earn money and raise her son lonely, however, still she lives with the memories of her late husband. Yet, after some years of hard work, Šarārih succeeded to become a professional art photographer, and to build up a close relationship with her son. With the progress of the time, she decides to stop thinking about her dead husband, hoping to begin a new life with an old acquaintance. But everything changes when Mastānah, unkempt and bewildered, takes refuge in Šarārih's house. Her remarks about the fraudulent mystic sect of Maḥmūd, and his tricky business irritates the young son of Šarārih. He decides to disclose the continuous lying of Maḥmūd about his supernatural power. He participates in one of his ritualized ceremonies and records it with a concealed camera. After some days, Suspiciously Mastānah commits suicide. Then Maḥmūd visits Šarārih and asks her to persuade her son to return the record otherwise he would be in a real danger. Šarārih decides to talk to Sīyāvaš and then go to the police. But Sīyāvaš never comes back home from that night. The novel finish when after three years of searching for Sīyāvaš, Šarārih's eyes become very weak and again she starts to talk to Alī.

## About the Author

Sipīdih Šāmlū was born in 1969. She studied English language and literature in the university and started her literary career with publishing short stories in the magazines of *Adīnah* and *Huqūq-i Zanān*. She also wrote some articles about cinema and co-wrote the script of a successful movie named *Turtles Can Fly* (Ghobadi, 2004) with Bahman Ghobadi. Šāmlū was recognized as a notable writer after publishing her first acclaimed novel *Ingār Guftih Būdī Liylī* in 2000. The novel won the best First Novel Prize from the Gulšīrī Foundation in the same year, and it has been reprinted several times after its first publication in 2000. Šāmlū continued her literary career with a collection of fourteen short stories named *Dastkiš-i Qirmiz* (Red Glove, 2001) in the next year,

and in 2006 she printed out her second novel named *Surhīy-i Tu Az Man* (Your Redness from Me). In her second novel, she recounts the interior monologues of three women who all suffer from mental illness. There, she utilizes a feminist perspective and third person omniscient point of view in which the narrator knows the thoughts and feelings of all characters. *Surhīy-i Tu Az Man* (Your Redness from Me, 2006) has been praised in some book festivals.

Šāmlū often designates a woman in the central stage of her fictions, and women's issues are the main thematic aspects of her stories. As she personally stated, her stories are connected to her feminine world and to the interlocution with and sympathy for other women who experience different situation in the society than men. (Šāmlū, 2007; 21) Her female personages generally suffer from irritating experiences of the past that "perennially influenced their perspective towards their surroundings. In other word, they are "hostages" of the past. The disturbing memories from the previous events always run through their heads, and become their concerns by which they are incapacitated to have normal behavior and peaceful life without anxiety." (Pāyandah, 2013; 242) She is a taciturn writer who does not write a lot. Yet, her publications have always been debated among the earnest readers and literary critiques of Iran. Eleven years have passed since her last publication and updating her personal blog which was an important medium for her to communicate with her fans. In one of her last posts named *Mādiḥ-yi Munfağirih* (Explosive Material) she ironically, recounted the meaning of womanhood from the perspective of male-dominated society as follow;

Are you a woman? No matter. What is your job? No matter. How much do you know? No matter. How much you don't know? No matter... Don't forget that you should not be a doll for entertainment. Do you know what you should be? Do you know what the dignity of a woman is? Listen! Woman means mother. Why did you become grumpy? It's obvious that no man can do maternal duties. We always repeat it in our lectures... Of course, you are very responsible and very important; so much important that you shouldn't be misused... We don't want to have sexist perspective toward you at all. Just we don't know why we become excited when we see you... you are the explosive material that can ruin every family with a simple glimpse. Repeat this point thirty-two times a day and be more careful... Sorry but more than everything else you are

explosive material. Actually, you are just this, explosive material. Cover yourself!  
(Šāmlū, 07/06/2006)

Talking from the determinant patriarchal viewpoint and using a sarcastic language, in this passage she declares her idea that how men derogatorily define the identity of a woman as only being a mother; and how easily they humiliate women through downgrading them from a human being to a simple sexist object whose main function is seduction of men. As an aware female writer who has experienced such mortifying discourse, Šāmlū has tried to redefine the long-term neglected aspects of the identity of women; the thing that is always resonating in her stories, and among them in *Ingār Guftih Būdī Liylī* (Šāmlū, 2000) as one of the most successful stories written by a female writer after the Islamic Revolution. Though *Surḥīy-i Tu Az Man* (Šāmlū, 2006) is an interesting story about women's issue, for this research first novel of the author has been chosen because it recounts the life-story and identity formation of one female protagonist. Centrality of one heroine in the novel corresponds to other selected stories of this study and could better answer our main research question regarding change and transformation in portrayal of female protagonist.

## Literature Review

Despite having few number of publications, Šāmlū is among the well-known female writers whose stories have been debated among literary scholars, though the main credit has been given by them to her second novel, *Surḥīy-i Tu Az Man* (Šāmlū, 2006) which has a psychological theme.<sup>1</sup> Yet some studies have been focused on literary aspects and characterization of *Ingār Guftih Būdī Liylī* (Šāmlū, 2000). As one of winners of Gulšīrī Award in 2000, the novel was first debated by some critiques and story-writers in a panel discussion named *Liylī Işg-i Azalī, Abadī va darūnī-ye Tamām-i Ādamhā Ast* (Liylī Is the Eternal, Immortal and Internal Love of All Human Beings). (Bihfar, Mihrī; Alīpūr Gaskarī, Bihnāz; Sulaimānī, Bilqiys; Šāpūrī, Afsānah; Salāḡiqah, Parvīn; Tavāngar, Firištah; Gūdarzī, Muhammad Rizā; Mu'tamidī, Nāhīd; Banī Āmir, Hasan; Mu'taqidī, Muhammad; Piżmān, Abbās; and Ālīnasab, Faraḡnāz. 2002) The discussion latterly was reported in the magazine of *Kitāb-i Māh-i Adabīyāt va Falsafah*. In their remarks, the scholars talked

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<sup>1</sup> Look at Pāyandah, Hussayn. *Guşūdan-i Rumān: Rumān-i Īrān dar Partuvi Nazarīyah va Naqd-i Adabī* (Opening a Novel; Iranian Novel in the Light of Theory and Literary Critique). 2013. Tihrān. Murvārīd; And Islāmī, Maḡīd. *Kābūshā-yi Yik Šahr; Guftigū bā Sipīdah Šāmlū Darbārah-ye Surḥīy-i Tu Az Man* (The Nightmares of a City; An Interview with Sipīdah Šāmlū about Your Redness from Me) Haft Magazine. NO. 30. August. 2006. Pp. 18-23; AND Uskū'ī, Nargis. *Tagẓī' i-yi Huvī' at dar Rumān-i Surḥīy-i Tu Az Man* (Decomposition of Identity in Your Redness from Me). Pażūhiş-i Zabān va Adab-i Fārsī. NO 29. Sommer 2013. Pp. 119-144.

concisely about different aspects of the story; from structure and designs of the chapters to characterization and literary techniques of the narration. Alī Sirāḡ in his book about feminine discourse in the literature of Iranian writers, has concentrate on the novel from the perspective of Halliday's systematic functional grammar, and analyzed the narration in three levels of semantic, syntactic and pragmatic. He concludes that the novel relying on real facts of life, emphasizes on seeking individuality and its meaning. (Sirāḡ, 2015; 155) Amīn Alislām in a short review, has described the narration as a character-based novel in which the female personages do not evolve and the male characters, particularly Maḥmūd are unfamiliar and unbelievable. (Amīn Alislām, 2001; 28) Parastiš has analyzed the female protagonist of the novel, using the theory of Norman Fairclough about the language and power. He has mainly focused on the confrontation of female protagonist towards the traditional disciplines of the society and states that through the process of identity formation of the character, slowly we observe the signs of disturbing the old discipline and what has been formerly considered as normal. (Parastiš, 2010; 64) In her critical note on the story, Sādiqī briefly has evaluated different aspects of the story and believed that the story has conceptual disorder and has not been developed appropriately. (Sādiqī, 2001; 8)

The protagonist of *Ingār Guftih Būdī Liylī* (Šāmlū, 2000) is an important personage in the literature of Iranian women. Among the selected heroines of this research, she is the most defiant and ambitious character who changes the rules of her life and proves herself as a determined individual. To understand how much potential for improvement and flourishing a female writer imagines for women, the portrayal of Šarārih is the best exemplar that can answer this question. Thus, in the following pages we focus on her characterization, after a brief look at the setting of the novel.

## About the Narration

*Ingār Guftih Būdī Liylī* (Šāmlū, 2000) is a character-based novel that tells the life-story of two women during almost twenty years. The centrality of women in the novel and choosing them as the narrators provide a considerable opportunity for the author to propose women's issues from firsthand perspectives. The 182 pages' story has eight chapters that all are narrated with the technique of direct interior monologue for an absent audience. Using the interior monologue technique, the author has relied more on mental reflection than dialogue; thus, she tells not only what the character said at any given moment but also what she has left unsaid. In all but one chapter the narrator is Šarārih who recounts mostly her soliloquy to her dead husband. Her remarks consist

of her fragmented memories of getting to know Alī, their marriage, her loneliness after his death and finally her emotional conflicts to forget him and begin a new life. Another narrator of the novel is Mastānah who in the fourth chapter articulates the stream of thought and feeling flowing through her mind. The allocation of the seven chapters out of eight to the narration of Šarārih undoubtedly indicates the centrality of her character in the story. The character of Mastānah, an attractive restive girl who listens to her heart at the expense of her life could be an interesting topic for this research, but her monologue is mostly limited to her short marital life, and we cannot follow the change and transformation of her character during time. Thus, in accordance with the main research questions of this study the portrayal of Šarārih will be examined in the following pages. While the story is told in present time the narrative is based on memories. Every chapter is a longish passage of uninterrupted thought; the thoughts are presented in the first person, several thoughts run into each other as perception of different things crowd into the narrator's consciousness. The narration therefore, gives us an unparalleled intimate view into the character's life and mind.

Suspension has a very significant role in this story. A part of the suspension is formulated through the presence of anonymous or incognito characters who accompany or follow the protagonist like a shadow; the old acquaintance, Maḥmūd and Liylī. This strategy generates detective atmosphere in the story and enhances its attraction. (Fūlādīnasab, 2015; 85) The suspension stirs up the curiosity of the reader about the past and the future of the characters; to understand the present time, the reader should know about the past, while s/he also wonders what will happen in the future. Though the narrative-time encompasses almost 20 years of the recent history of Iran, it rarely broaches the socio-historical events of the country. This is one of the shortcomings of the story that perhaps could make the narration more enriched and memorable. (Salāḡiqah, 2002; 56) Lack of historical perspective in the narration keeps the story in the level of a romantic tragedy surrounded by a few personages who scarcely think about the world outside their homes. We rarely observe the characters outside the walled spaces; the horrific events of the story always take place inside a surrounded sphere; Alī dies in the balcony, Maḥmūd holds his secret ritualized ceremonies inside his apartment, Mastānah dies mysteriously at home. But at the same time, the focus on the indoors as the central narrative space of the novel sheds light on the concept of private zone of home that within the context of a closed society like Iran cannot be easily addressed. Contrary to our expectation, the author propounds private space not as a stress-free sanctuary, but a life-threatening trap in which no one is safe. From this perspective, the main social problems of the

country have penetrated the private spaces of individuals; bombardment is not only on the battlefields on the border of country but in the balcony of a house in the capital, far away from the front line; crime and murder are not happening only in the streets but in the hall of the house when people are simply drinking tea or watching TV. The portrayal of private space thus, mirrors dreadful condition of a chaotic society whose vulnerable inhabitants are the very wounded of the social predicaments.

The language of the story tends to be illustrative, and succeed to build up cinematic atmosphere and pictures. The author is not preoccupied with explanation or description, she rather uses brevity and simple writing instead of prolixity and wordiness. (Alīpūr Gaskarī, 2002; 56) Writing-style of the author, as a combination of simple words, short sentences, vivid descriptions, and accurate details forms an appropriate medium by which she artistically transmits the profound feelings and thoughts of a modest female protagonist whose tune arouses sympathy of the readers. But despite the effectiveness of the language in the narration, the author applies a similar language for the both narrators. In the fourth chapter that Mastānah narrates her interior monologue, her tune does not differ from Šarārih's; this is one of the weaknesses of the story that has been pointed out by scholars. The basic features of the language are always the same. Likely, all the characters talk to us with the language of Šarārih. Thus, this question is brought up that what is the function of change in point of views? (Amīn Alislām, 2001; 29) Inattention of the author toward this issue that maybe derived from her inexperience in story-writing, has weakened the polyphonic nature of the narration as the dominance of the main narrator's language throughout the story hampers the creation of a precise narrative world with diverse voices.

### **About the Protagonist**

*Ingār Guftih Būdī Liylī* (Šāmlū, 2000) is the story of personality transformation of a female character named Šarārih who despite having ambitious morale, is doomed to live with sorrow and loneliness. The novel begins with Šarārih's continuous nightmare of the death of her husband, and ends with her abortive attempt to find her son. In between we observe the arduous life-experience of the heroine who, despite confrontation with agonizing widowhood in her youth, relies on her intrinsic capabilities and succeeds to achieve an admirable independence. Thirteen years ago, Šarārih has lost her beloved husband, Alī in a bombardment of Tih-rān. Though long time has passed from his death, the narrator still cannot stop thinking about him. Alī is the center of gravity



of all her remarks; her memories of the past are largely about her emotional relationship with him, and after Alī's demise, her *sudade* for him resonates throughout her life like a never-ending mournful rhythm.

" بمبها از آسمان ریختند روی خانه همسایه. تو از ایوان پرت شدی. افتاده بودی زمین. زخمی نشده بودی. هیچ جای سرت خونی نبود. فقط مرده بودی. صدات می‌کردم "علی". توی بهشت زهرا بودم. مردها لباس سفید پوشیده بودند همه آمبولهای بزرگ دستشان بود. دنبالم می‌دویدند. می‌گفتند "مرفین". همسایه طبقه پایین یک تکه خاک برآمده نشانم داد. گفت "خدا بیمارز افتاده بود اونجا". (شاملو، ۱۳۷۹، ص ۱-۳)

"Bombs were dropped to the neighbor's house. You fell from the balcony. You fell on the ground. You weren't injured. There was no wound on your head. You were just dead. I was calling you. 'Alī!'. I was in the cemetery. Men were in white and all had big syringes. They were chasing me and saying "Morphine!". The neighbor showed me a lump on the ground. He said: 'The deceased fell over there.'"<sup>1</sup> (Šāmlū, 2000, p. 1-3)

The memory of Alī's death in the bombardment of Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) is a horrific hallucination that always scratches the soul of the heroine; despite the avoidance of the author to propose political and historical events in the story, the consecutive referral to this event mirrors the ugly portrayal of war and the inescapable damage remained by it in the lives of ordinary people. Šarārih is one of the thousand victims of war whose endless nightmare of death reflects the melancholia she has gone through years of widowhood. Her husband was a kind, thinker, supportive and mysterious man whom all the female characters in the novel love and think about. In portraying his character, there is an intentional exaggeration; in a way that gives his character a spiritual effect with symbolic and supernal dimension. (Alīpūr Gaskarī, 2002; 56) His personality resembles portrayal of an impervious noble personage, who had not changed throughout his life. Unlike him, Šarārih mirrors a character who has a great potential for change and transformation. This capability can be best observed through the opposing roles that she plays before and after death of her husband; while in the present time she is a self-reliant artist, in her memories of living with Alī, she presented the image of a stereotypic shy and dependent housewife whose most significant life-issue was thinking about her husband. She was an ordinary girl with no specific concern who surprisingly attracts the attention of Alī, a booklover and political activist against

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<sup>1</sup> Farsi quotations from the novel have been translated into English by the author of the research.

Pahlavī regime (the ruling dynasty 1925-1979 before the Islamic Revolution). Since this attention was so pleasant for her, she read difficult political books, though she never enjoyed the complexities of political issues. (Šāmlū, 2000, p. 18) However, the absolute monological nature of the story does not give us the chance to precisely know Alī's mind, the interior monologue of the female character continually elucidates for the reader her naivety and romantic desires. Her simplicity is also illuminated in her tone, style and syntax; using simple words and very short descriptive sentences, repetition and occasionally not following grammar rules are of the main features of the narrator's language. In accordance with her romantic desires, the mutual relation between the couple indicates absolute dependency of a compliant woman on a thoughtful man. The most important aspect of their relationship for Šarārih is the feeling of safety that Alī has given her, and she satisfyingly emphasizes it in the memories of her marital life.

"چادر من روی سرم لیز می‌خورد. اما تو بودی تا مواظب من و چادرم باشی. دستهام که رسید به ضریح، نمی‌دانم چرا اشک از چشمهام ریخت. سرم گیج می‌رفت. دلم می‌خواست آرام با این سرگیجه خلوت کنم. با تو و این سرگیجه. اما یادم بود باید برای همه دعا کنم. تند از خدا خواستم که همه سالم باشند، که هیچ‌کس مریض نشود، که ما خوشبخت شویم، که سال دیگر خانه بخریم و پسرمان را بگذاریم توی ماشین خودمان و بیایم زیارت. دعاهام که تمام شد، می‌خواستم خودم را بسپارم به آن سرگیجه و آن گریه بیخودی. تو دستهایم را از دور شانه‌های من گرفته بودی به ضریح. چه دعایی می‌کردی؟ چرا هیچوقت از تو نپرسیدم آن روز چه دعایی می‌کردی؟" (همان، ص. ۱۱)

"My chador was sliding off my head. But you were there to take care of me and my chador. When my hand achieved the shrine, I don't know why my tears came out. My head was spinning. I wanted to be alone with this vertigo. With you and this vertigo. But I knew that I must pray for everyone. Quickly I asked god to give health to everyone, to give us prosperity, and to help us to buy a house next year, to receive a son and to come here again for the pilgrim along our son with our own car. When my prayers were finished, I wanted to leave myself alone in vertigo and uncaused tear. You, behind me, had taken the shrine with your hands over my shoulders. What were you praying for? Why did I never ask you about your prayer on that day?" (Ibid, p. 11)

As a representative of clichéd housewives with no specific concern, the character defines prosperity as financial progress and conceiving a son, while she is always unable to guess Alī's mentality and his desire in life. Throughout the story the author repeatedly emphasizes the naivety of the heroine in comparison with the mysterious personality of her husband; she happily read

romantic novels and did ordinary life-matters of housekeeping, while Alī earnestly followed political debates and attended meetings of his favorite political party. (Ibid, p. 30) Despite profound emotion of the protagonist towards her husband, reading his mind was almost impossible for the character. She could never penetrate the social life of Alī or his innermost world. Her inability to discover him causes her the most agonizing issue in their relationship that has never been proposed between the couple; the identity of woman in Alī's life who is called by the narrator as Liylī.

"هر شب توی خواب ازت می پرسیدم "لیلی" کی یه؟"

می خندیدی. می رفتی ته سیاهی. همین بود. "لیلی". خیالم از "لیلی" راحت نبود. باید می ماندم. باید به خودم ثابت می کردم "لیلی" را می شناسم. می فهمم. حداقل خودم برای این اسم باید تعبیری پیدا می کردم. (همان، ص. ۱۶۴)

"I asked you every night in my dream: "who is Liylī?"

You laughed and went to the end of the darkness. That was the problem; Liylī. I couldn't get rid of it. I had to stay. I had to prove to myself that I know Liylī. I understand her. At least I must personally find an interpretation for that name." (Šāmlū, 2000, p. 164)

The narrator's uncertainty about the identity of Liylī whose legendary name<sup>1</sup> recalls the concept of pure love, is the most ambiguous complexity in her relationship with her husband. Although Alī never personally confirms whether Liylī really exists or if this name is merely for his desired ethereal woman, the narrator is suspected that Liylī exists, and like the legendary Liylī, she is the most deserved person for love. Alī's enigmatic and reticent personality had never given Šarārih the chance of knowing his Liylī whose identification was and still is the most important unresolved question of the heroine. However, till the middle of the story the reader is suspected about Liylī, we gradually understand that this name is not merely related to a specific person, but it embodies the subjective concept of belovedness that needs to be identified through unique interpretation of

<sup>1</sup> Liylī and Maḡnūn is an old Arabic legend that has been versified in Persian by Nizāmi Ganjavī (1141-1209). Here is a summary of plot; "Maḡnūn falls in love with Leyli at school but Leyli's father forbids any contact. Separated from Leyli, Majnun becomes obsessed with her, singing of his love for her in public. The obsession grows to the point that he sees and evaluates everything in terms of Leyli; hence his sobriquet "the possessed" (*Majnun*). When he realizes that he cannot obtain union even when other people intercede for him, he grows disillusioned with society and roams naked in the desert among the beasts. Contemplating the image of Leyli increases his love so that he cannot eat or sleep. His only activity is thinking of Leyli and composing love songs for her. Meanwhile, Leyli is betrothed against her will but she guards her virginity by resisting her husband's advances. She arranges secret meetings with Majnun, and when they meet, they have no physical contact, rather they recite poetry to each other from a distance. When Leyli's husband dies, removing the legal obstacles to a licit union, Majnun is so focused on the ideal picture of Leyli that he runs away to the desert. Leyli dies out of grief and is buried in her bridal dress. Hearing this news, Majnun rushes to her grave where he instantly dies. They are buried side by side and their graves become a site of pilgrimage. In the coda, someone dreams that they are united in Paradise, living as a king and queen. "It is the third of his five long narrative poems known collectively as the *Ḳamsa* (the Quintet)." (encyclopedia Iranica, LEYLI O MAJNUN)

the character. The significance of the concept of Liylī on the character's mind has been hinted by the author through the continuous allusion to this name throughout the monologues, and the vague name of the novel; *As You Had Said Liylī*. Resonance of this inner conflict of the protagonist in the story is an unforgettable strength of the narration that have artistically developed it to the level of successful psychoanalytic novels. The centrality of the absent character of Liylī in the narration; the centrality of love at its most perfect level, evokes the concept of love throughout the story. (Bihfar, 2002; 52) Everyone in the novel seeks for Liylī who deserves love, the extreme love, the extremity of love. And in the search for Liylī, every character experiences unique adventure of her/his own. The author does not say who achieves or who fails in the middle of the way. She does not say but just describe for us the searches.

The portrayal of Šarārih in her marital life perfectly adjusts the definition of womanhood in traditional cultures; She is quiet, surrender and patient. Living with a thinker mysterious man has taught her not to talk about her wills or wishes, and not to ask her life-share. In their marital life, apparently, the power is in the hands of Alī. However, his supportive character ostensibly differs from the male misogynist clichés, in the deep layers of the narration his behavior towards the protagonist represents the same stereotypic gendered approach of the men who underestimate women; he chooses the location of their house or the books that Šarārih should read; he does not share his mind with his wife; and believes that she is incapable of understanding and doing important issues.

"فکر می‌کردی من نمی‌توانم این کار را بکنم. لابد به نظرت خیلی کار مشکلی بود. اما همان بهتر که نفهمیدی می‌توانستم کنارت باشم، بیشتر از آنچه که بودم. تو و مستانه فکر می‌کردید من هیچی نمی‌فهمم." (همان، ص. ۴۸)

"You thought that I couldn't do that. Maybe it was a very difficult job in your mind. But you couldn't understand that I could support you more than what I did. You and Mastānah thought that I didn't understand anything." (Šāmlū, 2000, p. 48)

Other characters of the story like Mastānah or Sīyāvaš share the same feelings and behaviors towards Šarārih too, and assume her as a weak person. (Ibid, p. 153) Despite the awareness of the narrator about the beliefs of others regarding her weakness, she has been satisfied with her marital life. The demise of her husband thus, was a turning point that puts an end to her peaceful lifestyle. His loss turns the life-experience of the protagonist from an impotent housewife into a widow who

must learn self-standing if she wants to survive. The event was not only loss of someone for Šarārih, but beginning of a cold season in which the character must use all her power to continue. Her loneliness exposes her to an inhospitable exterior world and its greedy people that previously had not had any role in her limited walled world; experiencing sexual harassment and being underestimated by others are among the most haunting experiences that she had gone through shortly after the departure of Alī.

"چشم آنقدر به سیاهی عادت کرده بود که هر سیاهی‌یی را در سیاهی می‌دیدم. گوشم آنقدر تیز شده بود که وقتی مرد بالای سرم سکوت کرده بود، سکوتش را شنیدم. بعد از شنیدن آن سکوت بود که حس کردن تکه‌ای از آدم روی تنم راه می‌رود، یعنی حرکت می‌کند. آن تکه از آدم، که انگار دست بود، داغ بود و آرام." (همان، ص. ۱۱۸)

"My eyes got so much used to the darkness that I could see every dark point inside the darkness. My ears became so much sensitive that when the man quietened above my head, I heard his silence. After hearing that silence, I felt that a piece of a human body was walking, I mean moving throughout my body. That piece, probably a hand, was hot and quiet." (Ibid, p. 118)

Although thirteen years have passed from being sexually abused at the hospital still the character remembers its horrible details. This sexual harassment of her body, while she was floundering in a frightening nightmare, is the first episode of the new season in her life that opens her eyes into a harsh reality; the reality of a society whose brutal men do not refrain from lechery even with the injured bodies of women. In such terrifying realm, wailing and mourning are equivalent to demolishing passivity that soon or late would mangle every alone woman. And Šarārih is clever enough to quickly realize this point. Her reaction to the new situation reflects the defiant and resistant aspect of her personality; with the first stimulus by her mother, she finds a job and starts her work as the secretary in a small office. But she quits her job forthwith running into another sexual abuse from her boss who has rudely touched her body. (Ibid, p. 130) In the heroine's recount of her tough experiences in the society full of hungry men, the author deliberately abridges the narration. This intelligent strategy rescues the narration from drowning into a feminine querulous pathetic atmosphere that is widespread in Iranian women's literature. The avoidance of the character to complain about the vicious people, or to bold her domination and intelligence over such difficulties indicates her mental maturity in the present time.

"فکر نکن پریدن از انواع و اقسام دامها آسان بود. سخت‌تر از همه پریدن از دامهایی بود که دانه عشق در آن پاشیده بودند. فکر می‌کنی اگر این همه دیر باور نبودم، نمی‌افتادم." (همان، ص. ۱۳۰)

"Don't think that jumping over different types of traps was easy. The most difficult ones were jumping over the traps which had the lures of love. You think that I wouldn't fall down, if wasn't that much skeptical?" (Ibid, p. 130)

The social insecurity of the world outside home and the inexperience of the character to engage with this world incline her into a profession which requires minimum interaction with others; working as a photographer in a photography studio. Then the increasing financial problems derived from the eight years' war between Iran and Iraq compels her to work at nights too as the camera operator in wedding ceremonies. Therefore, in contrary to her previous life-experience that was absolutely limited to housekeeping, now she spends her time mostly out of home. Though the new condition is rooted in economic instability and lack of social support for alone parents, it gives the protagonist the chance of discovering her marvelous capabilities through devoting herself entirely to her job. Her unusual desire to press the shutter button in a moment that the photo subjects indicate their most real emotion without any ostentatiously contrived gestures, reveals her gift in photography. More profoundly, her desire reflects her attention to discern reality from unreality; contrary to her previous character in marital life who was just pursuing idealistic love in her romantic and isolated atmosphere, her current life in a rough society teaches her the significance and the value of realism. From this perspective, unrealistic gestures are not worthy to be captured as she intelligently understood that her only survival way is acceptance of the reality and logical confrontation with it. thus, her very realistic tendency causes her to prove herself as a remarkable artist who after launching some successful photo galleries, becomes a well-known photographer.

"زنهای پولدار شهر من را شناخته بودند. می‌آمدند و از من عکس هنری می‌خواستند. برنامه‌ام تمام مدت پر بود. برای مجله هم عکس می‌گرفتم. پول خوبی هم داشت. همان روزها بود که وسوسه ساختن فیلم افتاده بود به جانم." (همان، ص. ۱۷۴)

"Reach women of the city have known me. They came and asked me to take artistic photo. My schedule was totally full. I also took pictures for the magazine. It was well-paying. In the meanwhile, I became enticed to make a movie." (Ibid, p. 174)

Her faith in her flair alters her life and develops her into a flourishing artist. Unlike her previous portrayal as a stereotypic dependent woman, now the character represents a self-reliant individual whose engagement for directing a movie specifies her professional ambition in artistic sphere. However, the description of her movie is limited to have an algebraic structure and a symbolical final scene of the picture of a smiling woman in a huge cemetery, the reader can interpret that these elements are profoundly rooted in the most personal experience of the character whose nightmares and dreams are twisted to death. She is now the exemplar woman who has escaped from the dead-end of the femininity that has been determined by the culture, and she is now looking for freedom. (Parastiš, 2010; 65) As an individual who has solely found her pathway into independence and self-actualization, the identification of Liylī as the beloved of someone else becomes a meaningless question which is no longer important to the protagonist.

"چرا دست از سر من برنمی‌دارید؟ من از تو، از مستانه، از محمود، از آن دختر چشم سیاه، از مادرت، از پدرت، از همه شما خسته شده‌ام... علی، می‌خواهم آرام باشم. می‌خواهم یک پلوور آبی مردانه ببافم. اما نه مثل پلوورهای تو پر از پیچ. یک پلوور ساده، آبی و گرم تا آشنای قدیمی تنش کند. همین را می‌خواستم بهت بگویم. آمده بودم مشهد تا همین را بگویم. تا از تو خداحافظی کنم... فکر می‌کنی حاضرم اسم "لیلی" را به یک کابوس سیاه تبدیل کنم و خیال بافتن یک پلوور گرم مردانه را با این کابوس خراب کنم؟ نه علی، دیگر بس است. فکر می‌کنم حالا دیگر انقدر بزرگ شده باشم که رودزروی تو بایستم و بگویم، می‌خواهم از تو کنده شوم." (همان، ص. ۱۵۲-۱۵۸)

"Why don't you leave me alone? I'm tired of you, Mastānah, Maḥmūd, of that black eye girl, your mother, and your father. I'm tired of all of you... Alī! I want to be calm. I want to weave a blue male pullover, but not like yours full of twists. An easy casual pullover, blue and warm, that the old acquaintance wears it. I wanted to tell you that. I've come to Mashahd to tell you that, to say goodbye to you... Do you think that I'm ready to make a black nightmare out of the name of Liylī? And to ruin my dream of weaving a warm male pullover with this nightmare? No, Alī. That's enough. I think now I've grown up enough to face you and tell you that I want to abandon you." (Šāmlū, 2000, p. 152-158)

The challenging issue of Liylī in the character's mind reverses into a mere troublesome concept, unworthy of attention. On the contrary to all deep emotions that she had for Alī once, at the end of the story she blames him and his family for being reason of difficulties and unpleasant ambiguities she has tackled with in her life. The quiet obedient lover of the past, now wants to stop thinking

about her lost husband to start a new life in which a transparent emotional relationship with a real man is preferred over a complicated intense love for a dead beloved. So, the reality wins again; the attraction of Alī's character and his mysterious inner world dwindles against the sweet and simple reality of life with *the old acquaintance* who has sincerely expressed his love for the narrator. This is the most important aspect of maturation of the character through which she shows the climax of achieving an individual identity of her own that is no longer corresponds to the desires and expectations of Alī. But the attainment of this individual identity and the release from the memories which for thirteen years had hindered the narrator from enjoyment and peace coincides with the event of the disappearance of Sīyāvaš. The loss of Sīyāvaš puts Šarārih again in a miserable situation that reminds her chaotic situation after the death of Alī, however this time the gradual vision loss in both of her eyes will destroy her photography skill that once had rescued her life.

"دکتر بهم گفته نمره عینکم شده نه. می‌گفت نمی‌فهمد چرا چشمهام در عرض سه سال این طوری ضعیف شده. بدون عینک تقریباً جایی را نمی‌بینم. عینک کلفتم را می‌زنم و راه می‌افتم توی خیابانها دنبال سیاوش." (همان، ص. ۱۸۱)

"Doctor said that the number of my glass has raised nine. He said that he couldn't understand why my eyes have become so much weak during last three years. Without glasses, I almost can't see anything. I wear my thick glasses and go to the streets to find Sīyāvaš." (Ibid, p. 181)

After three years of searching for Sīyāvaš, the irreparable impotence of the character has been shown by the author through restarting her inner monologue towards Alī. Having a deep frustration of the possibility of any promising change in the life of the character/women, at the end the author shows how all efforts of the protagonist are doomed; as a photographer, she loses her eyesight so cannot continue her successful career anymore, and though she had previously decided to stop thinking about her late husband and his Liylī, again the question comes back to her mind and seems to stay there forever. Her life therefore, becomes a never-ending Sisyphus-like cycle in which she does not have any job but surrender and endurance. Seemingly she is captive in the clutch of an ominous inevitable destiny that once had taken her husband from her and now her son. Both Alī and Sīyāvaš were too young to die, and both were sacrificed because of social predicaments; one by Iran-Iraq War that the Iranian government always commemorates it as the Holly Defense, and the other by the surprising fact of the prevalence of fraudulent mystic groups and superstition



among people of an Islamic society. From a modestly critical perspective, thus, the author highlights these social traumas which are out of the hands of individuals but easily ruin their dreams and cause irreparable harms to them.

## Conclusion

*Ingār Guftih Būdī Liylī* (Šāmlū, 2000) is one of the most critical and radical stories about women's issues that has been written after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, though the simple language of the heroine and high frequent descriptions of her emotions in the story hamper the reader to quickly realize the poignant and sharp ideas of the author about feminine life-experience in Iranian society. The mental maturation and flourish of the narration's protagonist are direct consequences of the loss of her husband; the presence of Alī in Šarārih's life, despite all her pleasant supports, was her major obstacle to develop. His demise, thus, provides the character with a unique chance of loneliness and self-standing. Despite her agonizing anguish of his loss, only his death could remind Šarārih of her own existence as the powerful presence of Alī always overshadowed everything else and caused the protagonist to neglect her own being. From this perspective, Šāmlū's main incentive in the recount of the story of Šarārih is radical feminist ideas that condemn men as being the reasons of women's backwardness. Though the author tries to represent gray images of men in the narration, at the same time she shows how these very gray characters hinder women from social and mental improvement; they do not make problem for women; they are the very problems in the lives of women. This intense invasion by a female writer towards the dominant male-centered thinking is among the influential story-examples that shows the bravery of a woman in honest expression of her ideas about the reality of relationship between men and women.

In this story, Šāmlū portrays unavoidable bitterness of feminine experience in the context of male supremacy and social insecurity. Her protagonist, in spite of her efforts to achieve independence and individuality, is doomed to failure and misery. The author portrays a society that does not tolerate successful and independent women; a cruel society that is apparently waiting for brave and eminent women to prove them its indisputable power and watches the fracture of their bones under the pressure of this tough burden. Thus, *Ingār Guftih Būdī Liylī* (Šāmlū, 2000) is narration of eternal mourning of women, of their never-ending sorrows and stresses, and of chronic pain that flows like blood in their veins.

**4.**

***Āirāq-hā rā Man Ḥāmūš Mīkunam* (I Turn off the Lights)**

**Zuyā Pīrzād**

**Markaz Publication**

**Tihṛān**

**2001**

## About the plot

*Ĉirāq-hā rā Man Hāmūš Mīkunam* (Pīrzād, 2001) is a short cut of the life of an Armenian housewife, named Clarice Āyvāzyān during the 60s. The character lives with her family in the city of Ābādān that has rich oil fields. She has moved to Ābādān because of the occupation of her husband, Ārtūš, who is an engineer in the National Oil Company of Iran. The couple has received three children in this sultry city; a teenage boy named Ārmin and twin girls named Ārmīnih and Ārsīnih. Clarice has a monotonous life as her entire time is dedicated to daily chores, parenting, and communication with a small number of people like her widowed mother and her single sister. The novel begins when an aristocratic Armenian family, named Sīmunyāns moved in across the street. The new small family consists of a grandmother, her son and her grandchild. Sharing the same school, Clarice's children and Sīmunyān's grandchild, Emily become friends and two families start to meet each other. The short intense relationship between Clarice's family and Sīmunyān leads to some unpredictable events that influences life of the protagonist. Her communication with Emil Sīmunyān, the father of Emily, who like Clarice loves literature and gardening, causes her to feel close to him and deeply enjoys passing time with him. Her feelings gradually change towards this man; Emil's pleasant delicacy and supportive behaviors engender an infatuation in Clarice with him, which at the same time gives rise to her annoying mental conflict as a married woman. Meanwhile, in an occasional gathering in Clarice's house, Emil meets a recently divorced woman and quickly falls in love with her. Though Clarice suspects that they must have an affair, her intense feeling for Emil does not let her think reasonably. But soon in a private meeting Emil talks to Clarice about his love for the divorced woman, and asks her to convince his stern mother to agree with their marriage. Hearing the decision of Emil, Clarice feels shameful and disappointed because of her emotions toward him. Rethinking about her life and her recent complicated feelings prompts her to adopt new behaviors towards her own self and others; she boosts her self-confidence and declares her dissatisfaction with her boring duties in front of other, specially her husband. More importantly, she decides not to dedicate her entire time to doing house-chores or to satisfaction of others; instead she pays more attention to herself and her desires. Recovered from the emotional damages, Clarice understands that the Sīmunyāns have quietly moved out during the last days and left Ābādān.

## About the Author

Zuyā Pīrzād was born in Ābādān in 1952 and lived there until finishing the school, then she immigrated to Tehran, where she married and gave birth to her two sons. During 1991-98, she published three well-received collections of short stories; *Misl-i Hamih 'Aṣr-hā* (Like Every Evening) (Pīrzād, 1991), *Ṭa'm-i Gas-i Ḥurmālū* (The Acrid Taste of Persimmon) (Pīrzād, 1997) and *Yik Rūz Māndih bi 'Tyd-i Pāk* (One Day till Easter) (Pīrzād, 1998). Among them, *Ṭa'm-i Gas-i Ḥurmālū* (Pīrzād, 1997) with five short stories, won one of the Twenty-years of Fiction Awards in 1997 from the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance, and in 2009 it gained the Award of a French large circulation weekly-newspaper named *Courrier international*. In her collections of short stories, women are portrayed in a limited space of private family life and house, experiencing routines, disappointment and tedium. The most important visible issues and themes in their lives are worries, anxieties, frustration of marital life and difficulties of house-chore and job. Lives of her characters have become so much habitual that they fear any change. (Nīkūbaht, 2012; 139) In 2001, her collections of short stories have been published in one volume named *Si Kitāb* (Three Books) by the permanent publisher of her works, Markaz Publication. Pīrzād has also translated two books from English to Persian; *Āvāy-i Ġahīdan-i Ġūk* (The Sound of the Frog's leap) (Pīrzād, 1991) which is basically a selection of Japanese Haiku; and *Ālīs dar Sarzamīn-i 'Ağāyib* (Pīrzād, 1995), a translation of "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland". (1865, Lewis Carroll)

*Ĉirāq-hā rā Man Ḥāmūš Mīkunam* (Pīrzād, 2001) was Pīrzād's first novel that was published in 2001 and shortly after the publication received admiration of the literary critiques and warm approval of the public reader. The book earned the author immense popularity, and was selected as the best novel of the year by *Pikā* Institute, *Gulšīrī* Foundation, the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance, and in *Yaldā* Literary Festival. The novel has been reprinted more than sixty times after its first publication and translated into other languages including English, German, French, and so on. The German translation of the book has been done by Susanne Baghestani in 2006 with the title of "Die Lichter lösche ich", but the English translation by Franklin Dean Lewis has a different name than Farsi, titled "Things We Left Unsaid" (Pirzad, 2012). In 2004, Pīrzād published her second novel *'Ādat Mīkunīm* (We Get Used to It) three years after her first novel. This story narrates the life of a divorced woman who sometimes wants to respect herself, and to satisfy her

own desire instead of what her daughter and mother ask her to do. The character finally marries her ideal man.

Pīrzād has never accepted to be interviewed with Persian media. In one of her limited interviews with a British magazine named *Metro* she expresses her ideas about her writing style as follows: My writing has been compared to Raymond Carver. I think it's the honest dialogue that people originally found exciting. In Persian novels, people do not talk like real people. So when I started out, I offered a simple, real approach. It was a new way of writing. (Pīrzād, 2012) Regarding censorship in the publishing system in Iran she asserts that: It doesn't change the way I write. I write for myself and I don't even think about getting published. If I get permission, great. If not, I will wait. (Pīrzād, 2012) In the occasion of winning *Courrier international's* Award, she did an interview and talked about the condition of woman in a society like Iran: I write a lot about women because right now the issue of women is the main concern of my mind. If we think that women are dependent on men, it really hurts me. In Iran, Armenia, India and so many other countries which have non-western culture, when a girl is born she is the daughter of her father, then the wife of her husband and finally the mother of her son. Life and destiny of a woman is always intertwined to a man's. These are what the society expects from a woman; to do house-chores, to marry and then to conceive a baby. The situation was the same in France about fifty years ago. (Pīrzād, 2009)

The publication of *Čirāq-hā rā Man Hāmūš Mīkunam* (Pīrzād, 2001) inspired and intensified a significant literary trend which was identified as *kitchen stories* or *apartment literature* by Iranian critiques; the main theme of this literary trend was centralization of a woman/mother in the story who mostly spends her time inside the house, particularly in the kitchen, and despite her commitment to the housekeeping tasks she has a deep feeling of frustration because of being marginalized and unimportant to others. The best novels of this literary trend have been written during the two decades of 1990s and 2000s by the authors like Zuyā Pīrzād, Farībā Vafī and Nāhīd Tabātabāī. Among the characters who have been created in this special geography of women's literature, the protagonist of Pīrzād's novel has one of the most successful characterizations that causes the book to be a still bestseller novel sixteen years after its first publication. The impressive warm approval by the professional and public readers indicated the curiosity of the readers to enter and investigate the unknown feminine world of an ordinary woman that for long time quietly had

just watched the performance of the male heroes. Hence, in the following parts, we will study the portrayal of the protagonist of this influential character-based novel.

## Literature Review

*Čirāq-hā rā Man Ĥāmūš Mīkunam* (Pīrzād, 2001) has been subject of plenty of studies and researches after its first publication. In a panel discussion in 2001, late Prof. AlīMuḥammad Ḥaqšinās and other literary reviewers introduced the book as an outstanding novel in the modern Farsi literature and described its main features as simple language, precise account, narrative logic, proposing loneliness of woman and presentation of a successful and perfect design in novel-writing. (Ḥaqšinās & other, 2001; 54) In an article about the novel, Ānāhīd Oḡākyāns comes to the same conclusion that *Čirāq-hā rā Man Ĥāmūš Mīkunam* is an attractive novel which greatly succeeds to portray feminine mental labyrinth. (Oḡākyāns, 2003; 174) Āsīyih Gūdarzī in her article about the characters of the novel, divides its personages into static and dynamic characters and believes that Clarice's character is a static personage who does not change throughout the story. She states that Pīrzād does not write about unsaid issues, taboos or wishes of her characters. (Gūdarzī, 2009; 171) In a study named *Pirsunā az Dīdgāh-i Zuyā Pīrzād* (Personage from the Perspective of Zuyā Pīrzād) Turkamānī and ČamanīGulzār review the fictional characters of Pīrzād's, using the theory of archetypes by Carl Gustav Jung; they also believe that the protagonist of *Čirāq-hā rā Man Ĥāmūš Mīkunam* is like other female characters created by Pīrzād whose stories are without any excitement or event that could change their tedious lives. (Turkamānī and ČamanīGulzār, 2014; 148) Hasanzādih Dastgirdī from the other side, has analyzed Clarice's life according the Joseph Campbell's theory of the hero's journey<sup>1</sup> and concluded that the character of Clarice like mythologic heroes, takes an adventure into inner world and at the end, returns to her marital life with the elixir of knowledge and self-awareness. (Hasanzādih Dastgirdī, 2015; 75)

Pīrzād's literary works have been also subject of comparative studies; for instance, traditions of women's writing in the works of two generations of Iranian female writers have been studied through comparing the fictions written by Sīmīn Dānišvar (1921-2012) and Zuyā Pīrzād (born

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of *Hero's Journey* was introduced in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) by Joseph Campbell, who described the basic narrative pattern as follows: "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man." (Campbell, 1949)

1952). (Pākniyā and Ġānfadā, 2014) *Muqāyisi-yi Tatbīqī-yi Femīnīsm dar Ġirāq-hā rā Man Ĥāmūš Mīkunam va Gulhā-yi Dāvūdī Asar-i John Steinbeck* (Comparative Study of Feminism in "I Will Turn off the Lights" and "The Chrysanthemums" by John Steinbeck) was another essay that shows the thematic similarity of these two stories and the centrality of women's issue in both. (NağārHumāyūnfār, 2015) Mustafā DaštīAhanger in his article named *Guftimān-i Muštarak dar Ġāhār Rumān-i Fārsī* (Common Discourse in Four Farsi Novels) (2013) reviews the common themes between *Ġirāq-hā rā Man Ĥāmūš Mīkunam* (I Will Turn off the Lights) and three novels written by other Iranian women. He also considers Clarice's character as one-dimensional and static character and states that after having such experience that could convert her life, she returns to her first position and denies all her feelings. (DaštīAhanger, 2013; 90) Another part of the essays has been concentrated on the linguistic aspects of the novel; Akbarīzādih for instance, has written an article named *Ġilvihā-yi Ġand Zabānī dar Rumān-i Ġirāq-hā rā Man Ĥāmūš Mīkunam* (Aspects of Multilingualism in the novel "I Will Turn off the Lights") (2015) and studied the narrative through the concept of Mikhail Bakhtin's Dialogism. She states that in this novel, Pīrzād has used the social and cultural differences in the lingual layers of the novel and succeeded to propose feminine viewpoint in a heteroglossic lingual system with diverse languages. (Akbarīzādih, 2015; 43-44)

Despite the importance of the novel in the modern Persian literature and the existence of the English translation of the book, there is very limited number of studies about it. In her book "Iranian Culture; Representation and Identity", Nasrin Rahimieh has review the representation of Armenian identity, as a minority group in the Muslim society of Iran and concluded that "The novel explodes the concept of Armenians as different into a multitude of differences. The surface ordinariness of the lives depicted, as echoed in the title of the English translation, conceals what is left unsaid and unexplored about the leveling of differences of language, ethnicity, and religion into a category of the non-Persian Other." (Rahimieh, 2015; 130) The novel has been also focused by Sofia Ahlberg, in her article about the reflection of oil industry and its importance in some stories from different parts of the world. Ahlberg believes that "Clarice feels the rage festering in 1960s suburban Iran. Behind the veneer of a middle-class lifestyle as the wife of an oil worker, living in the city of Abadan, Clarice becomes attracted to her neighbor who is employed by the same oil company as her husband. While nothing comes of that particular longing, her desire for

emancipation remains unresolved nevertheless. Clarice's plight mirrors Iran's own struggle for autonomy from British oil companies." (Ahlberg, 2016)

The protagonist of *Ĉirāq-hā rā Man Hāmūš Mīkunam* (Pīrzād, 2001) is a precise and artistic reflection of the identity of stay-at-home mothers; her life-style, her dreams, her needs and her concerns represent those of the women who are tired of the constraints and pressures of their tedious lives. Analysis of her character alongside of other selected heroines in this research is a necessity to understand the process of change and transformation in feminine portrayals in the fictions written by Iranian female writers. In addition, as we observed in previous paragraphs, the studies about this personage can be divided into two opposite parts; some of the scholars consider Clarice's character as an absolute static personage while, the others introduce her as brave heroine who finally achieves profound inner transformation. But in my opinion, her character has both features at the same time because the author tries to keep her conservatively on a border between passivity and activity; between being static and dynamic, however at the end of the story she turns to an absolute static personality. This conservative approach which will be discussed after a brief look at the story-setting, was/is the main reason of the success of the book.

### **About the Narration**

This 293 pages' novel narrates a short cut of the life of an Armenian family that is focalized through the perspective of its thirty-eight-year-old stay-at-home mother, Clarice Āyvāzyān. The story resembles real life; it has a simple linear plot without substantial fluctuate or unpretentious language. The narration is divided into fifty parts whose shortest part is two pages and the longest part is not more than twelve pages. It seems that the novel is the description of fifty routine days of a family, and it brings the reader to the end as quick as possible because of using short parts and assertive sentences. (Sādiqī, 2003; 10) The story happens in 1960s, before the Islamic revolution; it begins in the middle of a school year and finishes shortly after the end of school year ceremony. To provide a concrete realistic sense of the past for the reader, the author constantly hints to the things which can better enhance the portrait of the past time from the perspective of a house-wife mother; the description of women's appearances and clothing in the public places without hijab, the photo of old cinema stars of 60s hanging in the rooms of Clarice's teenage son, and the favorite edibles and drinks of the old time. Nevertheless, because of the attachment of the character to the house and her apathy towards the society outside the circle of Armenians, throughout the story we



rarely hear about the significant socio-political currents of the country. Though the main concern of Clarice's husband is to follow political news, for which he always joins his friends at the weekends for political discussions, the couple never talks about these matters at home. The only important historical event that the narrator becomes aware of is the movement of Iranian women in 60s for equality and right to vote; the movement which becomes important to her through her friendship with Mrs. Nūrullāhī, who is Muslim and committed to fight for women's suffrage. The absence of historical events in the context of the story is an implied strategy used by the author to emphasize the isolation of Armenians, particularly Armenian women in the society of Iran. Belonging to the minority group of Christians in a Muslim country causes them to be detached from, and unaware of the society and its currents. They are inattentive and indifferent toward the society outside their community.

"به نقشه‌ی ایران نگاه کردم، روی دیوار بالای تختخواب. با نگاه دور دریاچه‌ای چرخیدم که سر جلو بردم تا اسمش را بخوانم و بدانم بختگان است. یاد قرار با خانم نوراللهی افتادم و فکر کردم چرا همه‌ی شهرهای ارمنستان را ندیده روی نقشه می‌شناسم و اسم دریاچه‌های ایران را بلد نیستم؟" (همان، ص. ۱۴۳)

"I looked at the map of Iran on the wall above his bed. My eyes circled around a lake and I leaned in closer to read its name. Bakhtegan. I remembered my appointment with Mrs. Nurollahi and wondered why it was that I knew the names of all the cities on the map of Armenia without ever having seen them, and yet did not know the names of the lakes of Iran?"<sup>1</sup> (Ibid., p. 156)

"Clarice's reflections on her own lack of interest in Iran as opposed to Armenia highlights how the term of inclusion and exclusion have been internalized [for Armenians]." (Rahimieh, 2015; 132) Nevertheless the protagonist's life with Ārtūš who keeps up with political currents of the country even more than those of small society of Armenians, gradually causes her to criticize the passive approach of the Armenians towards the society of Iran; although at the beginning of the story the narrator like other Armenians does not have any interest to follow such issues, at the end of the story she enthusiastically goes out of the thick cocoon surrounded the society of Armenians, and tries to join the campaign for Women's right to vote. (Pīrād, 2001; p. 316)

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<sup>1</sup> All English quotations of the novel are from Pirzad, Zoya. *Things We Left Unsaid*. Trans. Franklin Lewis. Oneworld Publication. London. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. 2013.

*Ĉirāq-hā rā Man Hāmūš Mīkunam* (Pīrzād, 2001) is the only story in this research that does not take place in Tīhrān, but in Ābādān; an important city with rich oil fields in the south part of Iran that had suffered serious damages during Iran–Iraq War (1980–88) including Saddam's deadly chemical weapons. Since from September 1980, Ābādān was besieged by Iraqi forces for 12 months, name of this city is always intertwined with military occupation and massacre in the collective unconsciousness of Iranians. But in this story, surprisingly we confront an exciting and lively picture of the city during 60s, the years of development of oil industry in Ābādān that has changed its appearances; from one side, we observe the city as the residence of Armenian engineers and educated staffs of the Oil Company, and from the other side as the house of the indigenous people of the region who mostly suffer poverty and illiteracy. Selecting the main characters from the rich educated Armenians and the minor characters mostly from the Muslim lower class, the reader discerns the considerable class difference among the people of the city. Nevertheless, Pīrzād succeeds to show the intertwined and peaceful life among Ābādānian inhabitants from different classes and with diverse religions. In creating Armenian ambience in the story, the author tries to use the very essential characteristics of an Armenian family, though she does not claim to portray a comprehensive picture of national and cultural specifications of Armenians. (Oġākyāns, 2003; 173) Relied on her own experience of living in Ābādān, Pīrzād has tried to show the reader the tangible role of the city of Ābādān in the lives of its residents through its climatic features; the ongoing report of the unpleasant tropical weather behind the doors, vis-à-vis the nice cool weather inside the houses by the always running air-conditioners illustrates the annoying sultry atmosphere of the place from which Clarice always flees; and the occasional appearance of lizards and frogs around the houses, an attached characteristic of tropical regions, provides an evocative picture of life in the city. The protagonist mostly has unpleasant feelings towards this city; the issue that intensifies her dissatisfaction with her life and causes her to rethink about her role as a committed woman who has accepted to accompany her husband and move to Ābādān because of his occupation.

"فکر کردم از وقتی به آبادان آمده‌ام، زندگیم جنگ دائمی بوده با انواع حشره و خزنده... حال تهوع مدام بوده از انواع بوها. بوی گاز پالایشگاه، بوی لجن جوی‌ها... و همراه همه‌ی اینها و بیشتر از همه‌ی اینها، گرما و شرجی. چرا به این شهر آمدم؟" (پیرزاد، ۱۳۸۱، ص. ۱۷۷)<sup>۱</sup>

"I thought how, ever since arriving in Abadan, life seemed like a constant struggle against a multiplicity of winged bugs and creepy crawlies... That, and all the smells that washed over me in Abadan, gave me a constant feeling of nausea; the smell of gas from the refinery, the rancid smell from the drainage channel... Of course, along with all that, perhaps the main culprit was the heat and humidity. Why had I come to this city?" (Pīrzād, 2001. p. 198)<sup>2</sup>

Despite the unpleasant feelings of the protagonist, the city is alive and animated. Thus, through giving an attractive presence to Ābādān, the author valorizes this city which for long time has been regarded as a victim of war and violence. This appealing picture of Ābādān from one hand, evokes the nostalgic emotions of the Iranian readers who remember the flourishing history of the city and from the other hand, it shows the young generation of the readers an unfamiliar but exciting image of a now poor and deprived city.

Of the main strengths of the narration is its simplistic language that has a great coordination with the atmosphere of ordinariness and repetition of a house-wife's life. Clarice recounts the very simple experiences of her feminine life and considers them to be worth reading and talking about; this gives an exquisite visage to the text. (Pākniyā, 2014; 56) Short descriptive sentences, and avoidance of prolixity and sentimentalism in recount of the events and memories lead to the formation of a realistic narration and evocative story that the reader cannot easily put down till the end. The high frequency of the words related to house, kitchen, and management of children's affairs in the story, is like a never-ending tedious melody that always reflects the boring role of Clarice as a stay-at-home mother. The continuous description of the repeated events in the life of the protagonist in addition to the intensification of the novel's realism, has a more important function that is creation of an uninterrupted rhythm in the events. In the life of Clarice there is no

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<sup>1</sup> All Farsi quotations of the novel are from Pīrzād, Zuyā (200۷): Čirāqhā rā Man Hāmūš Mikunam (I Turn off the Lights). Tīhrān. Našr-i Markaz. 1<sup>st</sup> Ed. 2001.

<sup>2</sup> All English quotations of the novel are from Pirzad, Zoya. Things We Left Unsaid. Trans. Franklin Lewis. Oneworld Publication. London. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. 2013.

excitement or change. (Pāyandah. 2013; 197) Yet Pīrzād could intelligently reduce the tedium of this continuous rhythm with the use of mild humor reflected in children's behaviors and adult's relationships. Here and there, even in the period of deep depression of the protagonist, small funny things are always noticed by her. In the first glance, what seems to be very considerable in the novel is its bright atmosphere that is full of hope. Alongside the happy, innocent and energetic characters of the twins, Ārmin's sense of humor, and Emily's archly mischief which make the story full of childish atmosphere, other characters also engage in the cheerfulness of the narrative world. (Oḡākyāns, 2003; 173) Although the main themes of the novel are the unpleasant complicated emotions of a neglected woman and her inner conflicts over her individuality, the use of this continual mild humor has changed the atmosphere of the story to an animated and exciting environment. Representation of Sorrow and happiness as two sides of a coin in the story resembles the very essential reality of man's life; one cannot exist without the other and nothing is permanent.

*Ārmin-hā rā Man Hāmūš Mīkunam* (Pīrzād, 2001) assures that Pīrzād is a professional story-teller. Her harmonic usage of story components affirms that how precisely she had known about the story's theme. Thus, she succeeded to create a literary work that rightly has become one of the best-selling books after the Islamic revolution. As one of the best example of character-based story in Persian literature, and of the most famous novels with concentration on feminine issues in the next part we will study the portrayal of Clarice Āyvāzyān as the main persona of this novel.

### About the Protagonist

"صدای ترمز اتوبوس مدرسه آمد. بعد قیژ در فلزی حیاط و صدای دویدن روی راهباریکه‌ی وسط چمن. لازم نبود به ساعت دیواری آشپزخانه نگاه کنم. چهار و ربع بعد از ظهر بود. در خانه که باز شد دست کشیدم به پیشبندم و داد زدم "روپوش درآوردن، دست و رو شستن. کیف پرت نمی‌کنیم وسط راهرو." جعبه‌ی دستمال‌کاغذی را سراندم وسط میز." (همان، ص. ۹)

"The sound of the school bus braking... the squeaking of the metal gate swinging open...the footsteps running up the narrow path across the front yard. I did not need to look at the kitchen clock. It was 4:15 p.m. As the front door opened, I wiped my hands on my apron and called out, 'School uniforms, off; hands and faces, washed! And we don't dump our satchels in the middle of the hallway.' I slid the tissue box to the middle of the table." (Pīrzād, 2001. p. 1)

*Āyāq-hā rā Man Hāmūš Mīkunam* (Pīrzād, 2001) begins with above-mentioned sentences, where from the very beginning the reader encounters an evocative portrayal of a stay-at home woman; a mother in an apron who is waiting in the kitchen to serve her children, and her surrounding's voices like the sounds of a speaking clock inform her of the repeating events of her life. The narrator, Clarice Āyvāzyān is a young mother who passes the time with the ongoing predictable rhythm of her absolute ordinary life; she wakes up early at the mornings, prepares breakfast for the family, sends her children to the school and her husband to work, and then does the rest of housework. On their return, she gives them the beforehand ready snacks, checks the home works of the children, eats dinner with them, and when everyone goes to sleep she turns off the lights and goes to bed. Since this repeated cycle happens every single day without any change, to follow her duties the character does not need to look at the clock anymore; like a robot, needless to be said, Clarice does her dictated duties. We always observe her cleaning, washing, vacuuming, cooking and disciplining her children. (Ibid., p; 34, 68, 111, 150] The author highlights the ordinariness and repetition in the character's life through numerous scenes of her housekeeping or her usage of the adverbs of frequency; "for the thousandth time, I gave Ārmin an earful." (Ibid., p. 11); "As usual, I gave in." (Ibid., p. 11); "Armen's door was locked, as usual." (Ibid., p. 95); "my rational side reminded me for the thousandth time." (Ibid., p. 100) "I wondered how many after-school snacks I had prepared up to that day." (Ibid., p. 189) Like a quiet servant, Clarice is always in the way between kitchen, living room and bed rooms, while mostly others forget her being. She mirrors a shy and patient woman who scarcely can say 'No' to others. No matter if her nagging mother, her demanding sister or even her easy-going friend Nina asks something from her, she cannot say 'No'. She is literally marginalized; no one notices her and no one is concerned about her.

"برای من بشقاب نبود. وقت میز چیدن برای مهمان‌ها همیشه یادم می‌رفت خودم را بشمرم. راه افتادم طرف آشپزخانه و گفتم "شما شروع کنید، من آمدم." کسی منتظر تعارفم نبود. همه مشغول خوردن بودند." (همان، ص. ۲۰۹)

"There was no plate for me. Whenever I set the table for a dinner party, I always forgot to count myself. I headed for the kitchen and called out, 'Go ahead and start; I'm coming.' Nobody had waited for this offer; they were all busy eating..." (Ibid., p. 235)

As a person who precisely watches her surrounding, the character suffers from having a boring cyclic life pattern in which her efforts are not enough noticed/appreciated by others and no one never asks her ideas. The inattention of others intensifies her feeling of unimportance among whom

she so much tries to gladden. Nevertheless because of her introversion and hence her taciturnity, she rarely expresses her discontent. Her ennui from this boring scene of domesticity can better understood through her few hours of freedom of housework on holiday mornings, for which she impatiently waits to sit back and enjoy her solitude. (Ibid., p. 65) Although because of knowing English language, she can translate texts from English to Armenian what she has previously done sometimes for local newspapers, now she does not show any interest to continue this activity. While other female characters of the story do not have any comment about her life-style, her husband is the only person in the story who clearly criticizes Clarice's state of being accustomed to this futile domesticity. Despite his negligence towards the calm and clean home that Clarice has created, his expectation of Clarice to make a change in her tiresome life has given him an interesting character. Unlike the narrator who outwardly has merged with the traditional role of a housewife, the character of her husband reflects modern ideas about roles of women; he scarcely notices Clarice's efforts to do the house chores, and is always inattentive to the well-done housework, Clarice's gardening or her unique style in decorating. On the contrary, he asks her to continue translation as he does not understand the reason of her preference to perform the traditional role of a fully engaged stay-at-home mom. (Ibid., p; 85, 115, 214) Thus, we gradually understand that the dissatisfaction of Clarice with her boring life-style is more a personal conflict which is basically related to her negligence towards her own abilities and interests. Seemingly, she reluctantly but passively accepts her current situation and does not have enough power to make a change in her life. In the meanwhile, she is emotionally a distant wife; Ārtūš's interests are confined to playing chess, following political news and communicating with opponents of the Pahlavi government, while Clarice is in love with literature and gardening. However, the couple has the same idea of choosing a modest way of life, having different interests causes a weak and cold relationship between them; The lack of congruence in their interests leads them not to understand the importance of these matters for each other, and not to have common words except their children's issues.

[کلاریس خطاب به آرتوش] "خب کتاب خواندن چه اشکالی دارد؟"

... "هیچ اشکالی ندارد. به شرطی که فایده‌ای داشته باشد، راه نشان بدهد، چیز یاد مردم بدهد، فقط محض تفریح و سرگرمی نباشد... شعر و قصه نشد نان و آب." (همان، ص. ۹۲)

[Clarice addresses to Ārtūš]" Well. What's wrong with reading books?"

...‘Nothing wrong with it at all. As long as it has a point, or offers a solution, or teaches people something, and isn’t simply an amusing pastime...poems and stories don’t pay the rent.’” (Ibid., p. 98)

Different interests between Clarice and Ārtūš reminds the distinction of the inner worlds of female and male characters that has been observed in the previous novel of this research, *As You Had Said Liylī* (Šāmlū, 2000); nevertheless, with showing Ārtūš discrediting Clarice’s hobby, Pīrzād intensifies the feeling of loneliness of the female protagonist, and indirectly underlines her urgent need to find someone with whom she can talk about her favorite topics. Thus, the reader can expect how friendship between Clarice and Emil Symonian, a gentleman who shares same hobbies with the narrator, can turn her colorless and dreary world into a provocative challenge.

رفت طرف قفسه‌ی کتاب‌ها. خم شد اسم‌ها را خواند. "تقریباً همه‌ی کارهای ساردو را داری، جز یکی دوتا." نمی‌دانم چطور شد که شروع کردم، ولی شروع کردم. درباره‌ی ساردو حرف زدم و این که از کدام کتابش خوشم می‌آید و از کدام خوشم نمی‌آید و چرا خوشم می‌آید و چرا نمی‌آید... گفتم و گفتم و گفتم. بچه‌ها که کیف مدرسه به دست توی درگاهی اتاق پیدایشان شد فکر کردم چطور صدای اتوبوس مدرسه را نشنیدم؟ امیل تمام مدت فقط نگاهم کرده بود. آرنج روی دسته راحتی، دست زیر چانه." (همان، ص. ۱۵۲)

“He went over to the bookcase and bent over to read the titles. ‘You have just about all the works of Sardo, except one or two.’ I don’t know how I got started, but I did. I talked about which of Sardo’s novels I liked and which I did not like, and why... I talked and talked and talked. When the children appeared in the doorway with their satchels dangling from their hands, I wondered how I had not heard the school bus drive up. Emil just watched me the entire time, his elbow on the arm of the easy chair, and his hand under his chin.” (Ibid, p. 167)

The opportunity of talking to Emil about the topics that others rarely think about, is like a fresh breeze that gives the protagonist pleasant break during the repeated rhythm of her never-ending housekeeping tasks. Talking with him causes Clarice to realize the deep long-term inattention she has had towards her own self. She suddenly remembers her inner self and enjoys expressing her very own self. Connection with him mesmerizes her; the shy and jaded Clarice becomes an enthusiastic orator who no longer hears the surrounding's noises. The pleasure of being observed and heard gives the protagonist a strong feeling of absurdity about her years of domesticity and caring for others. Emil is like the chevalier who discovers the allure and beauty of the sad and

exhausted woman of the tale and returns her the delight of life. He evokes the temptation of the narrator. His seductive presence in the narrator's life motivates her now to pay attention to her look. (Ibid, p.164) she feels unusual excitement for their private meetings, and shows a light sensitivity about the behaviors of other women with this man. But at the same time, as a married woman, Clarice accuses herself because of continuation of an immoral relationship.

"ور مهربان ذهنم پرسید "تو چی می‌خواهی؟" جواب دادم "می‌خواهم چند ساعت در روز تنها باشم، می‌خواهم با کسی از چیزهایی که دوست دارم حرف بزنم." ور ایرادگیر مچ گرفت. "تنها باشی یا با کسی حرف بزنی؟" (همان، ص. ۱۷۷)

"My compassionate streak complied, 'So, what do you want?' I answered, 'I want to be alone for a few hours a day. I want to talk to somebody about the things I like.' My critical streak leapt in. 'Which is it? To be alone, or to talk with somebody?'" (Ibid, p. 197)

However, the reader has previously observed the struggle between "*the compassionate and critical streaks*" of Clarice's mind, the friendship with Emil considerably intensifies this mental conflict in a way that the character is always under the interrogation of her mind. Her inner critic, representation of internalized ethics and conservatism, never leaves her alone to enjoy the taste of an unexpected love. Unawareness of others, especially Ārtūš's, about the emotional tension of Clarice strengthens the ironic aspect of this hidden challenge; while no one suspects the existence of such an affair in her mind, Clarice cannot push her feelings for Emil down. Despite showing a temperate and self-restrained personality, the protagonist confronts with a profound emotional crisis as soon as she familiarizes with a lovely and delicate man, and her new feelings evoke the exciting love affairs of teenagers. Underlining the captivating aspects of this friendship, the author proposes the sensitive and unprecedented theme of love affair from the perspective of a married woman whom no one in the story ever doubts to be seduced. This is the main strength of the plot that considerably enhances the excitement of the readers to follow the story.

[امیل خطاب به کلاریس] "کلاریس باید حرف بزنی. کی فرصت داری؟" زنجیر گردنش افتاده بود روی پیراهن. قلبم تند زد... امیل گفت "دوشنبه عصر؟" ... مثل برق از ذهنم گذشت که دوشنبه بچه‌ها دیر از مدرسه برمی‌کردند چون تمرین جشن آخر سال است و آرتوش از صبح می‌رود خرمشهر و شب برمی‌گردد... سر تکان دادم که "آره." (همان، ص. ۲۰۸)

[Emil addressed Clarice] 'Clarice. We should talk. When do you have a moment?' His neck chain was spilling out over his shirt. My heart was beating fast... Emil said 'Monday afternoon?'...the thought shot through my mind that on Monday the kids would be getting home from school late,



because of the rehearsal for the end-of-year ceremonies. And Ārtūš was going to Khorramshahr that morning, to return late that night... I nodded yes.” (Ibid., p. 234)

Although the protagonist continuously blames herself, she has a strange tendency to pursue the game of this hidden love. The importance of her being in this friendship where she has an active and determinant role, intensifies the attraction of this relationship. In contact with Emil, Clarice becomes the very self that she likes; she is no longer responsible or concerned for others. Showing the abrupt self-centeredness in the character who for long time has devoted her life to others, Pīrzād emphasizes the significance of individual identity for the women whose existences have been neglected under the shadow of superiority of family, maternity or commitment. Clarice's positive answer to meet Emil privately reflects the secret rebellion of a devoted mother who cannot stand her passivity or social expectations anymore. Therefore, we observe a transformation in her character; from a quiet, staid and committed woman, she turns into an adventurous person who consciously and enthusiastically continues an unknown game in her life. The author accordingly, puts her character in a dangerous situation that any way would lead to a worrying consequence; soon or late, the narrator must choose between her some-years boring family life or her some-months new love, and eventually sacrifice one for another. So, on the last meeting with Emil, it is not surprising to see the protagonist, bewildered, excited, happy and frightened. But against all expectations, Emil just confesses his love for another woman and asks Clarice, just like an elder sister, to persuade his mother to agree with their marriage. His unexpected expression of love for Violette, a charming recently divorced woman, is a slap in Clarice's face that pulls her out of the dream into the irritating reality. Different than her presumptions, in Emil's mind Clarice has had the same role of the caring and supportive woman whose being is needed; apparently, she is always a minor supportive actress whose importance is only dependent on her supportive role. Suddenly her passionate love for Emil turns into a stupid one-sided love whose remembrance causes the narrator to loathe herself. Failure in her love is the last step for the narrator to fully understand her loneliness and being marginalized. She is now an absolute loser whose shattered portrayal mirrors the unbearable weight of her life-experience as always being a medium for satisfaction of others.

"ظرف‌های نشسته‌ی صبحانه توی ظرفشویی تلنبار بود... از خانه بیرون رفتم... آبادان را هیچ‌وقت خاکی رنگ ندیده بودم. شهر انگار خسته بود و بی‌حوصله... تا یک ساعت دیگر بچه‌ها از مدرسه می‌آمدند و کره نداشتم و پنیر کم داشتم و بچه‌ها

بی‌عصرانه می‌ماندند... از صبح به جای رسیدن به خانه و زندگی توی راحتی سبز و ول خورد بودم و فکر کرده بودم به زن قصه و حماقتش و مرد قصه و حماقتش و ----" (همان، ص. ۲۵۱)

"The unwashed dishes from breakfast were piled up in the sink... I picked up my purse and left the house... I passed by the benches and leafless trees and deflowered oleander bushes... I had never seen Ābādān the color of dust; the city looked tired and listless. Like myself... the children would be home in another hour. We had no butter and not much cheese, and the children would be left snack-less... Instead of tending to the duties of the house that morning, I had squirmed around in the leather chair, resenting the heroine of the story and her stupidity, and the hero's stupidity, and..." (Ibid., p.285)

Contrary to the primary scenes of the story in which Clarice was like an observant matron, her despondent picture now resembles the depressive view of the city that because of the locust plague has become like a desert; both have been abruptly invaded and ruined. Her first reaction to this serious failure is to go to her cocoon of solitude and regret her naivety and stupidity, then she divulges her profound anger towards her husband who is the main person that for years oppressively has neglected her efforts. (Ibid., p. 293) Considering the plot, her expression of anger towards her husband is the main climax of her character's transformation and surprisingly, her identity crisis of having a minor role in life heals with a little attention from her family; Ārtūš surprises her with her favorite flowerbox and children try to leave her alone for a while; so, they all remind her of her importance in their lives and encourage her to be the same lovely caring wife-mother as before. In the remain parts of the novel, though the reader observes the character promising to take an active part in women's movement for equality, she continues her previous lifestyle without any noticeable change. In the last two final parts the unprecedented satisfaction of the character is understood through her euphoria, wearing a comfortable floral dress and slightly gained weight. The happiness of the character in the final scene due to the moderate changes in the behaviors of her family and of her own, to some extent weakens the end of the narration; though till the part of the locust plague and awareness of Emil's decision, Pīrzād artistically furthers the story with an interesting and appropriate narrative rhythm, after that the story slides down into a seemingly artificial happy end one. However, leading to this happy end is just a personal choice of the author, it gives the reader the impression of final scenes of fairy tales, like that one of Froggy Girl that was told by Clarice to her daughters. (Ibid., p. 304)

"از خواب که بیدار شدم آفتاب افتاده بود توی آینه‌ی میز آرایش. یادم آمد آرتوش وقت رفتن دم گوشم گفته بود "بخواب. بچه‌ها که مدرسه ندارند." ... از حیاط صدای جیک‌جیک گنجشک‌ها می‌آمد. بلند گفتم "امروز دیرتر از شما بیدار شدم." و با خودم خندیدم." (همان، ص. ۲۸۱)

"When I woke up, the sun's rays were reflecting off the mirror on the vanity table. I remembered Ārtūš whispering in my ear as he left for work, 'Sleep. The kids have no school today.' The sparrows in the yard were chirping. 'Today I got up later than you,' I told them out loud, and laughed to myself." (Ibid., p. 320)

Suddenly, the inner struggle of the character over her minor role and neglected individuality turns into a just anxiety of disgrace among her family. Thus, her awareness of the ignorance of others about her hidden love simply eliminates the most significant conflict of her life about her identity. Clarice's happiness of her emotional crisis to be kept secret, and of the preservation of her dignity among people around her, more than being a prudent contentment, mirrors a real gratification whose acceptance is difficult for the reader. Her certainty of the maintenance of her former status that previously was unpleasant and boring, now surprisingly gives her hope for the future. With such happy ending, doubt arises in our mind about the coherence of Clarice's characterization, since the reason of her happiness of continuing the same lifestyle that formerly saddened her is not clear for us. Nevertheless, the satisfaction of the character at the end can be understood as the reflection of fundamental priority of family bonds in the mind of a woman who for years, has made lots of efforts to build them up. In this regard, she represents mothers who despite being marginalized in social life, are not willing to disturb the secure yet tedious atmosphere of their homes. Though for a short while Clarice pays all her attention towards herself and her delightful love, once she confronts the fear of losing her family life, she forgets her existential questions, and her main concern becomes return to the safe former situation. Therefore, her happiness at the end of the story arouses these question in our minds that did the protagonist really suffer her dull life or she just experienced a casual discontentment of her lifestyle? Despite her complaint of being profoundly disregarded, we can say that her role of being a committed stay-at-home mother is more her own choice depended upon her own desire. She has always been in the safe and calm ambience of a small happy family and has a profound fear of disturbing the tranquility of her marital life by her self-centeredness. Thus, the short and intensive presence of Emil in her life just seduces her for a short while and then everything, only with small change, returns to its prior status;

once her husband and her children notice her sadness, her dissatisfaction of her inferior role fades and her belief about the value of the old relationships and of the safety of the sanctum of family strengthens.

## Conclusion

*Čirāqhā rā Man Hāmūš Mīkunam* (Pīrzād, 2001) was a significant story in Iranian women's literature that artistically opened the audiences' eye towards an absolute domestic set design. In this story, the author portrayed a traditional housewife whose life has been totally allocated to parenting and housekeeping, thus, her individuality has been sacrificed for the contentment of the family. Nevertheless, despite being frustrated of her tedious life cycle, at the bottom of her heart the character respects her womanhood in the context of domesticity. For her, life simply can be better with broidery of a beautiful flower in the margin of a curtain or finding the tastiest cold drink for the hot weather of Ābādān. Her narrative was one of the first stories that deepened knowledge of the readers about the mentality of stay-at-home mothers and valorized the feminine sense of traditional women. In this narration, Pīrzād depicts women whose lives define with the details of house and its furniture; relying on their personality, they give their homes character. Their home design, their favorite soap, their beverage recipes, all in all reflect their own way of being. They are born to pay attention towards something outside their innermost psyche, because giving priority to others is the main aspect of their personalities. They have not learned to concentrate on what they personally want or need. So, the author shows how situations which spotlight their own being quickly baffle them and give rise to their inner conflicts over the righteousness of their behavior. Their serenity is thus, to follow their own familiar lifestyle and forget obscure horizons of individuation or self-actualization. Just a little amount of attention from others towards them can heal their pain of being marginalized, and motivate them to carry on their daily responsibility.

**5.**

***Parandi-yi Man* (My Bird)**

**Farībā Vafī**

**Markaz Publication**

**Tihrān**

**2002**

## About the Plot

*Parandi-yi Man* (Vafī, 2002) is the story of an unnamed 35-year-old woman who has recently moved to a new apartment that her husband had just bought. The narrator is mother of two and owning a house deeply pleases her. But her husband, Amīr, is not in any way satisfied with the new situation despite all the efforts he made to buy this apartment. He dreams to immigrate to Canada. But the narrator, on the contrary does not want to leave the country. A lot of times the disagreement between the narrator and her husband on immigration, leads to tension and argument. Amīr's insisting on immigrating, causes a deep discomfort in the narrator and she gradually loses trust and interest in her marriage and her husband. On the other hand, she constantly remembers her memories from childhood and before her marriage, and the reader slowly finds out that she has had not so much pleasant experience in her father's house either. She has gone through bitter moments and incidents that still bothers her despite long years that have passed; lack of attention from her parents, sexual abuse by a relative and her fear to inform anyone about that and finally her father's Alzheimer in his last years of life which made others to keep him in the basement of the house are all painful memories that come to life and arise annoying emotions in the character. Nevertheless, the narrator succeeds to make peace with her past and forgive the negligence of herself and others around her. In the meanwhile, Amīr selfishly impose his decision to her, sells the house and spends the money to go to Baku to later reach to Canada. The difficulty of dealing with all life's hardships, financially and mentally, on her own with two children at first wore her down to illness and frustration. But at last, it gives her a strength to accept her destiny without a fight, and to try to create a happy atmosphere for her kids. At the end, after months of absence, Amīr returns home repentant of his hopeless journey. The narrator's avoiding from being alone with her husband and her serious trial to keep the distance with him shows that her broken trust and damaged love would never heal.

## About the Author

Farībā Vafī was born to a middle-class family in Tabriz in northwestern Iran on January 21, 1963. She launched *Dar 'Umq-i Sahni* (In the Heart of the Stage, 1996), her first collection of short stories, in the fall of 1996. That was followed, three years later, by *Hattā Vaqtī Miḥandīdīm* (Even When We Were Laughing, 1999), a collection of 22 short stories. Her first novel, *Parandi-yi Man* (Vafī, 2002), came out in 2002 and won the award for top novel from the *Gulshīrī* Foundation and

*Yaldā* Literary Award in the same year. It also picked up accolades from *Mihrigān-i Adab* Award and *Īsfahān* Literary Award. The novel has been translated into English, Italian, German and Kurdish Sorani. In 2003 her second novel *Tarlān* (2003) hit the bookstore shelves and secured an accolade from *Īsfahān* Literary Award. Two years later in 2005, *Ru`yā-yi Tabbat* (The Tibet Dream) was launched, for which she won the top prize of the *Gulšīrī* Foundation and an accolade from *Mihrigān Adab*. In 2008 she published *Razī dar Kūčihā* (A Mystery in Alleys) which was translated into French and Norwegian. In the early 2009, *Dar Rāh-i Vīlā* (On the Way to the Villa, 2009), her collection of short stories was launched, and a year later she released back-to-back novels *Hami-yi Ufuq* (All the Horizon, 2010) and *Māh Kāmil Mīšavad* (The Moon is Getting Full, 2010). Her literary career has thus far seen the release of four collections of stories and five novels as well as publication of short stories in various literary journals. Some of her short stories have been translated into Russian, Japanese, Swedish, Turkish, etc. She has won several awards and accolades from different literary events. Recently, the author won the German LiBeratur Literary Award for her novel *Tarlān* that has been translated into German by Jutta Himmelreich in 2015.

Portraying prevailing and annoying patriarchy in the society, identity crisis among women and the complex connections and relationships between human beings are some of the main themes in the works of Vafī. The protagonist in her works is usually a woman, in Iran's modern society, who must deal with serious issues. Women in Vafī's work often fall in the category of cliché traditional housewives who sacrifice their lives for the family. Passive females who just object to the status quo in their minds and go through an ongoing revision of their relationship with their husbands, children and relatives but that displeasure they find is never expressed in the objective world. (Tiymūrī, 2012, p. 212)

Vafī seldom consents to talk to the media. Nevertheless, her published conversations outnumber any other female writer before her. One of the reasons behind media and readers' interest in her, is the conspicuous success she gained during all these years though she, unlike most Iranian female writers, is not from Tehran, has no academic background and belongs to a middle class traditional family. It appeals to the reader to find out what portion of her stories, having women and female affairs as main characters and themes, come from her personal experience; a question she answers this way: I have written my own experiences most of the times. Sometimes, they have passed through many filters inside me and some other times through a few. At times I have played with

them so much that they cannot be recognized at all on the paper. I have also written from others' experiences. In fact, I am not able to write others' unless I make them my own. On the other hand, I think, the ability to understand and grasp others' experiences and changing them into a creative experience of one's own is indeed related to the dexterity and skillfulness of a writer. (Vafī, 2007) On the fact that her stories are formed around individuals and their reactions to issues in life, she says: People have always been interesting to me. Events and incidents do not excite me as much as people do. Their behavior in different circumstances and in facing their surrounding realities have always drawn my attention. I have never been bored by their movements. I can sit still in a corner and enjoy perusing their moods. (Vafī, 2007)

Among her stories, the short novel *Parandi-yi Man* (Vafī, 2002) has been admired the most. Its frequent reprinting/republishing is as well an indication of its popularity and status between younger generations of readers. Through choosing a female narrator from the low-income strata of the society, and depicting her complicated life-experience in different roles (as wife/mother/daughter), in this novel Vafī presents significant aspects of femininity and marital life of lower class women in Iran's society. All these have been the reasons for us to select this story with its nameless narrator as one of the selected narratives of this research.

## Literature Review

*Parandi-yi Man* (Vafī, 2002) is one of the successful novels written after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 that has been praised both in Literary festivals and by public reader. The characterization of the story with focus on a nameless female personage has been subject of some structuralist and linguistic studies. In an essay named *Sāhtār-i Ravāyat-i Zanānah dar Rumān-i Parandi-yi Man* (Structure of Feminine Narration in the Novel "My Bird"), Tiymūr Mālmīr and Čunūr Zāhidī have used the theory of structuralist narratology to study deep structure and narrative style of the novel. They have been concluded that the story wants to show the current situation of women; a situation that cannot be discussed frankly. (Mālmīr & Zāhidī, 2004, p. ۹۷) In a conference paper named *Bāznumā'i-yi Huvīyat-i Zan az Dīdgāh-i Ravāyat-i Zanānah dar Ruman-i Parandi-yi Man* (Reflection of Female Identity from the Perspective of Feminine Narration in the Novel "My Bird") Baqā'ī and her colleagues have tried to study the issue of Women's identity from the narrator's point of view. They State that identity is Vafī's main concern reflected in her novels... and in "My Bird" she talks about the women who have not achieved a clear definition about self or others, and



mostly they think about their lives with pessimism. (Baqā'ī, 2016) Mihrī Talḥābī is another scholar who has analyzed the novel from the perspective of critical stylistics and concluded that the author proposes linguistic issues to illustrate impasses of women's lives in various dimensions, and suggests some solutions for escaping from the domination of patriarchal order. (Taḥābī, 2014, p. 115)

In addition to the works that have been exclusively focused on this story, most of the other studies belong to comparative analysis between Vafī's novel and works of other female authors. Zahrā Azīmī and Ismā'īl Sādiqī have traced common feminine issues in *Čirāq-hā rā Man Ḥāmūš Mīkunam* (Pīrzād, 2001) and *Parandi-yi Man*. (Azīmī and Sādiqī, 2014) In an interesting article, Mas'ūdīnīyā and Furūqī picked up five successful novels published between 1997-2005 including *Parandi-yi Man* (Vafī, 2002) and analyzed them with consideration of the political discourse in Iran after the Islamic Revolution. In a general conclusion about Iranian women's story-writing after the Revolution of 1979 they state that having a comprehensive knowledge about women's issues and problems, female novel-writers critically look at the current situation and want it to be changed. (Mas'ūdīnīyā and Furūqī, 2012, p. 123) In an article named *Jinsīyat dar Āsār-i Rumānnivīsān-i Zan-i Īrānī* (Sexuality in the Works of Iranian Female Novel-writers) Vaḥīd Valīzādīh has focused on some novels written by Iranian women including Vafī's *Parandi-yi Man*. In the selected stories, he divides the female characters as the representation of femininity, into two distinct categories of "traditional portray of woman" and "modern portray of woman". He believes the narrator of *Parandi-yi Man* (Vafī, 2002) is a sample of "traditional portrayal of woman". (Alīzādīh, 2008, p. 211) In another comparative study, Afsānīh Ḥasanzādīh Dastjirdī has analyzed structural and content-related components in *Parandi-yi Man and Māhī-hā dar Šab Mīḥāband* (Fishes Sleep at Night. 2004) by Sūdābīh Ašrafī. (Ḥasanzādīh Dastjirdī, 2014) And finally Munīrī in another comparative article, has studied the social identity of the protagonists of Vafī's stories and those of the Italian author Natalia Ginzburg (1916–1991). (Munīrī, 2015)

The main theme of *Parandi-yi Man* (Vafī, 2002) as reflection of ordinariness and hardships in the life of a housewife has been previously proposed by other female story-writers like Zuya Pīrzād. Nevertheless, Vafī has used a unique setting different than former narratives and created a female character who not only suffers from her minor role in life but from poverty and loneliness that have deeply intensified her impotence. She consequently, has depicted the most painful aspects in

the lives of forgotten women from low-income strata. Through recounting story of a heroine whose outlook towards her fate is entirely full of misery and seclusion, Vafī shows how a woman who could easily fall down into the abyss of hopelessness and futility, patiently continues her life and to achieve a better condition, bravely encounters her agonizing memories and challenging identical questions of middle-ages. Therefore, after a concise review of the story's setting and language, we will study the characterization of this female personage.

## About the Narration

*Parandi-yi Man* (Vafī, 2002) has been written in 140 pages and 53 short chapters in which an anonymous woman recounts the story of her marital life and her memories of the past. Her remarks are told in the form of interior monologues to an unknown audience. Her story has a simple plot, but because of the author's renunciation of chronology in favor of free association, the arrangement of the chapters to some extent puzzles the reader over understanding the end of the story correctly; the novel begins with description of the new house that narrator and her family has moved in, and in the final chapter the narrator recounts a day in which someone is visiting the house to buy it. The real ending of the story however, happens in chapter 46 where the narrator's husband after selling the house and an unsuccessful attempt to immigrate to Canada, comes back to Iran. Besides the nonlinear pattern of the present events, the narrator also constantly remembers fragmented memories from the past. Both story lines thus, are told in nonlinear way that causes a labyrinthine un-linear narrative. About selecting this form of narration, the author explains: first I wrote parts that each had a beginning and end of their own and could be read separately. I wanted to write stories that are separate while related. Later, I had to change the story to how you see it now. (Vafī, 2011) So, selection of the narrative form has been more a result of an experimental writing approach that has not been depended on plot as being traditionally based upon a problem and solution. Instead of having one overarching plot, the narrative has smaller narrative arcs interwoven through the daily life of a character. Each chapter is dedicated to an aspect of the heroine's life and emotions; buying a new house, remembrance of her feelings as a child in an unhappy family, the meaning of fortune, mother-daughter relationship, and so on. The shortness of the chapters resembles the clichéd nature of life. In long chapters, we need long descriptions and multiple sequences, but in such short chapters, obviously just one part of life is exposed and of course the author intends to say that this very one part of life indicates the whole of it. The rest

of life is also repetition of this part. (Mālmīr, Zāhidī, 2014, p. 58) This narrative structure can be considered as the literary form of slice of life<sup>1</sup> that focuses on the ordinary details of real life and presents different sequences of events in a protagonist's life, and often lacks plot development or conflict. From the beginning of the story to the end, there isn't much change in terms of the character's circumstances, but we observe emotional changes in the protagonist towards people around her; this is the nature of slice of life story which is centered on an ordinary person and shed light on those small, ordinary, yet often powerful moments of his/her daily life.

No specific historical-geographical event is mentioned in the story. Nevertheless, it can be inferred that it occurs in present time and in a metropolitan city like Tehran. The anonymity of the protagonist, the obscurity of the place and the indeterminacy of the narrative time throw generality over the life-experience of the character as a sample of housewives who spend most of their times at the walled space of homes. Throughout the story, the narrator describes various places to the reader with a meticulous precision; they vary from kitchen, back yard, and rooms in the new house, new neighborhood to the dark corners of her father's house basement. For years, she has always been condemned to find a rental house and leave it at the end of the year for a new one. The place matters to her; it has a significant role in her life. Her deep disagreement with her husband is on location too; either staying in it or leaving it. Narrator's husband is certain that happiness can only be found beyond the borders of the country while the narrator inherently doubts the existence of an ideal perfect world because she believes that one can find happiness only inside. (Vafī, 2002, p. 62) The narrator begins her narrative with description of an ugly neighborhood, and ironically it ends with her sightseeing across the city and walking in an unfamiliar but beautiful street; the author intentionally sets this sequence at the end of the narration to shows the emotional development of the heroine through finding a delightful vista. Her narration thus, is based on apartment-house plot that has been defined and characterized by Sharon Marcus as follow: "the apartment-house plot bridges the gap between novels identified with space of the home (the salon novel, the domestic novel) and with urban sites (the urban bildungsroman, the novel of the street

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<sup>1</sup> Historically Slice-of-life is another term for naturalism that has been introduced by Emile Zola in his essay "Le Roman expérimental" (1880; "The Experimental Novel") (Ratner, 1997, p. 170) "A few directors, actors and playwrights began calling for an even more extreme form of realism, an accurate documentary of everyday life, including its seamy side. French novelist, Emile Zola (1840-1902) named this new "photographic" realism naturalism, and his phrase "slice of life" is an often-quoted description of it. naturalistic plays exposed the squalid living conditions of the urban poor and explored such scandalous topics as poverty and prostitution." (Downs, 2013, p. 372) "As a historical movement, naturalism per se was short-lived; but it contributed to art an enrichment of realism, new areas of subject matter, and a largeness and formlessness that was indeed closer to life than to art. Its multiplicity of impressions conveyed the sense of a world in constant flux, inevitably junglelike, because it teemed with interdependent lives." (Encyclopædia Britannica)

and of the crowd)... although highly episodic, apartment-house plot nonetheless followed a strict narrative sequence... the apartment-house plot thus combines the salon novel's emphasis on domestic interiors and microscopic social networks with the urban novel's emphasis on chance encounters, the interplay between isolation and community... as a result, the apartment house attached the city to the home as sturdily in literature as it did in architectural and urban discourse." (Marcus, 1999, p. II)

*Parandi-yi Man* (Vafi, 2002) is recounted from the point of view of a sensitive narrator who desires a company with whom she can fearlessly speak about her childhood memories and today's emotions. Using the technique of inner monologues in the narration "depicts the solitude of the protagonist and the fact that she has no audience; her inside conversations intensify her loneliness. (Hasanzādeh, 2014, p. 58) The punctilious scrupulous view of the narrator towards her whereabouts, her vivid descriptions of her environment while avoiding loquaciousness and repetition forms a catching language for the story that is completely appropriate with the mindset of the main character and is, without doubt, among the strengths of the novel. Through using this unique language for the protagonist, the author indirectly reflects some other significant aspects of the character; "Minimalist, dazzling in its candor and courage, attentive to the smallest details, textured, empathetic, simple and revelatory, elegant and profound." (Milani, 2009, p. 140) These lingual features form an influential language that despite the ambiguous complexities in the sequence of the novel's parts eases and pleases its reading. By using this language in the fifty-three short parts which never extend more than ten pages, the author gives the novel a sense of poetic fragments whose affective tune encourages the reader to continue the interior monologue of the protagonist to the end. Relying on such interesting setting, Vafi proposes novel aspects of the mentality of the quiet housewives who seemingly surrender to their destinies; these aspects give us the possibility of better knowing the mental world of these women whose identities and individualities have been forgotten in the ravage of numerous financial problems. In the following part, we observe the characterization of one of these forgotten women and study the process of her change and transformation throughout the story.

### **About the Protagonist**

*Parandi-yi Man* (Vafi, 2002) is a first-hand recount of poverty, responsibility and adversity in the life of a nameless woman. The protagonist of the story has been selected from the poor women of

the society whose primary concern, corresponding to their simple modest lifestyles and never-ending fear of debts, is reaching a stable permanent condition. The narrator is a 35-year-old woman who is finally relieved from the chain of nine times moving to different rental houses. She and her husband now own a small apartment that is situated in a busy and ugly neighborhood. Sweet taste of this ownership greatly satisfies the narrator. The depth of her content from having a house is highlighted by starting the narrative with explaining her feelings about the new place and extending it to the next two chapters, both taking shape around depicting a precise image of the new house and the new neighborhood.

"مردی که بعدها مدیر ساختمان می‌شود از همه می‌خواهد برای آشنا شدن با هم بگویند مالک هستند یا مستأجر؟ نوبت به من می‌رسد می‌گویم مالک. و تعجب می‌کنم از طعم شیرین آن. می‌آیم بالا و کلمه را مثل شکلاتی که یک‌دفعه کاکائویش دهان را پر کند مزه مزه می‌کنم. مالک. خدایا من مالکم. مالک. این کلمه گنده‌ام کرده است. دیگر مفلوک نیستم. دیگر دربر نیستم." (وفی، ۱۳۸۱، ص. ۱۳)<sup>۱</sup>

"To help us get acquainted, the man who is going to be the building manager asks us to say if we are owners or renters. When it is my turn, I say, "Owner." And I am surprised how sweet it tastes. I go upstairs and relish the taste like a piece of chocolate that fills your mouth with a burst of caramel. Owner! Oh Lord! I am an owner. An owner! This word has made me feel important. I am not miserable any more. I am not without a home any longer." (Vafi, 2009, p.7)<sup>2</sup>

Her innocent satisfaction and sweet feeling of freedom because of possessing "a shabby, fifty-square-meter house in a crowded neighborhood" (Ibid, p. 4) reflect her low expectations from life, giving her situation and emotions a tragic sense. But even such little amount of felicity for the narrator is targeted by the consequences of unequal gender roles in the family. Despite all her happiness, her husband Amīr whose name ironically means leader, is in no way satisfied with the new situation and cannot stand the narrator's content from living in such place. This life does not match the high ambitions of his; he constantly dreams of immigrating to Canada to get rid of this hand-to-mouth life that does not leave him in peace for a single moment. So, unlike the narrator, this house is more of a cage for her husband and its small despicable space deprives his inner *bird*

<sup>1</sup> All Farsi quotations of the novel are from Vafi, Fariba. *Parande-ye Man*. Tihārān: Našr-i Markaz, 1st Ed. 2002 Print.

<sup>2</sup> All English quotations are from Vafi, Fariba. *My Bird*. Trans. Mahnaz Kousha and Nasrin Jewell. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 2009. Print. Middle Eastern Literature in Translation.

from the feeling of liberty. The contrast of emotions and attitude of the female and male characters towards the meaning of happiness sets an appropriate basis for a precise characterization of the two. Vafī has principally characterized the narrator through showing the contradiction between her beliefs and those of others around her particularly of her husbands. By emphasizing on such determinant contrasts, she highlights the loneliness and powerlessness of the protagonist in her life. The narrator loves the house and enjoys discovering every corner of the building, its weird residents and their tense relationships. On one hand, the sound of 'tambour' from a neighbor's place gives her a mystic rapture (Ibid, p.6) and on the other hand, like a nosy idle person she enjoys sneaking around to find out about people's affairs (Ibid, p.12). The new house is like a locker she peeks into curiously. Her husband, however, not only has no interest in the new house but selfishly announces his intention to sell the house to make it a starting point for immigration. Being aware of the potential consequences of Amīr's dissatisfaction, the narrator has learnt to conceal her happiness in his presence and express her affection for the new house only when he is not around. (Ibid, p. 4) The idealistic ambitious attitude of Amīr constantly seeks moving from one point to another, but – due to reasons we later learn about – in the fuss of life, the narrator seeks a quiet corner and opportune moment to deal with her past.

"امیر به طرف آینده می‌رود. عاشق آینده است. گذشته را دوست ندارد، آن هم گذشته‌ی زنانه‌ای که نه از دیوار پریدن دارد نه دوچرخه‌سواری نه فوتبال در محله. گذشته‌ای که پر از پیچچه و حرف‌های درگوشی و خاله‌بازی است. گذشته‌ای که به زیر زمین‌های تاریک و پستوها منتهی می‌شود. امیر حاضر نیست حتی یک قدم با من به عقب برگردد. من هم گذشته را دوست ندارم. تأسف‌آور است چون گذشته مرا دوست دارد." (همان، ص. ۱۵)

"Amīr is moving toward the future. He loves the future. He dislikes the past. Especially a girlish past that does not include climbing the walls, riding a bicycle, or neighborhood kids playing soccer, a past full of whispers, gossip, and women's games, a past that ends in dark basements and closets. Amīr is not willing to take even one step back with me. I don't like the past either. It is sad because the past likes me!" (Ibid, p.9)

For the narrator, enduring a confined feminine atmosphere as a child has fundamentally limited her dreams and expectations along the way. Her dull girly childhood was restricted to tedious games, conversations, and experiences that no one wants to hear even the protagonist's husband who is now her only audience. (Ibid, p.10) The narrator, on the contrary, always craves to listen to Amīr. Every night, she becomes a perfect stimulating listener; as soon as he comes home from

work she brings him nuts and crackers so he starts telling her all about his day. Ironically, Amīr always has sad disheartening things to talk about while the narrator looks for stories to make their life sweeter. (Ibid, p. 13) Unlike Amīr, she believes that there is no world without contradictions, without suffering and regrets. (Ibid, p. 62) and happiness and relief come from the love people feel in their hearts and it is only with this inner flame that one can go anywhere and live there (Ibid, p. 62). The major difference in views between the narrator and her husband on the meaning of contentment and how to achieve it, broadens the distance between them day by day and gradually causes annoyances and harms beyond repair which overshadows their relationship like an ominous veil. But it is not surprising that in an unequal gender binary, the power always lies with the controlling man who is prepared to sacrifice everything just to have the last word; that is why Amīr frequently interprets the narrator's desire to stay in her motherland as laziness and cowardice, and sometimes expresses his anger with intentional destructive criticism of his wife's behavior and appearance.

"همین رفتارهایت باعث می‌شود به تو بگویم خرس قطبی. تو از تغییر می‌ترسی. از تحرک می‌ترسی. ماندن را دوست داری... این قدر سرت توی لاک خودت است که فراموش کرده‌ای زندگی دیگری هم وجود دارد و این زندگی نیست که تو می‌کنی." (همان، ص. ۳۷)

"It's this kind of behavior that makes me call you a polar bear. You are afraid of change. You are afraid of moving. You like to stay put... You're so withdrawn into your own life that you have forgotten there is another way to live. This is not life you're living." (Ibid, p. 30)

Sovereignty of the patriarchal discourse in the society has created lots of constraints for female gender particularly for housewife women. Such discourse gives the man a power that makes him dominant and the woman who is not strong enough to stand against such oppression or who is unaware, becomes passive and oppressed. (Ḥasanzādi Dastjirdī, 2014, p. 61) Thus, Amīr's determination gives the narrator a deep sense of despair as her married life, her small precious house and all she has are on the verge of being lost. Such deep neglected feeling along with a tedious impoverished life give the narrator poignant ideas about the commitment of marriage. It is through such ideas that she sees all memories of her marriage, giving birth and raising children filled with countless negative points and assures her that the reality of marriage is way far from romantic perceptions of unmarried girls waiting for their prince charming. Her description of

motherhood is far from the stereotypic image of a self-sacrificing woman embracing her children; on the contrary, it is from the perspective of a person who has just responsibility but not choice.

"یک وقت چشم باز می‌کنی و می‌بینی هر جا می‌روی حال بچه‌هایت را می‌پرسند و هر جا می‌روی مجبوری آنها را هم با خودت بکشی... امیر کوله‌پشتی‌اش را آماده می‌کند که به کوه پناه ببرد. از دست این زندگی پراز نق و نوق بچه... برف می‌بارد. باید مایعات به خورد شادی بدهی که اسهال دارد و کمی هم تب. شاهین پشت سر هم سرفه می‌کند. بچه‌ها باید بزرگ شوند." (همان، ص. ۷۷)

"Before you know it, wherever you go they ask about your kids, and you have to drag them with you everywhere... Amīr is packing his backpack to seek refuge in the mountains. From this life that is filled with whining kids... It is snowing. I have to give Shadi lots to drink because she has diarrhea and is running a fever. Shahin is constantly coughing. Someone has to raise the kids." (Vafi, 2002, p.68)

The narrator's loneliness in bearing all the burden of life and the irresponsible behavior of her husband has obviously aggravated the sense of helplessness in her and has accentuated the fear she has from the potential destruction that is threatening her fragile life and home. As the loser of such lopsided treaty, the protagonist's way to avenge all this is immersing herself in short daydreaming and fantasies in which she imagines herself betraying her husband and experiences another life full of excitement and pleasure. (Ibid, p. 35) But interestingly even in her silent monologues, she never reveals any details about her fantasies, just briefly says some declarative sentences. However, this might be the result of censorship in Iran and the avoidance of the author to bring forward a taboo-breaking issue like unfaithful thoughts of a housewife, at the same time it can be interpreted as the profound fear of the narrator of the power of her husband who might be able to hear even her very own soliloquy.

Vafī in *Parandi-yi Man* (Vafī, 2002) portrays the peak of loneliness of a woman; from one side her irritating marital experience and from the other side the cold relationship between her and her family further deepens her loneliness. Frequent refers to her bad memories of childhood, shed light to significant aspects of her character through which the reader grasps the roots of her being accustomed to powerlessness and being overlooked and consequently indifferent towards her family. A significant part of her identity is based on her childhood filled with fear, humiliation, inattention and sexual abuse; as a daughter, she has always been aware of her mother's wish to



have a son. And she was well familiar with her father's apathy towards his children – as he was a truck driver in love with women, pistachio, and music (Ibid, p. 55). As a victim of neglect and ignorance of her parents, she has realized that her significance for others is absolutely related to her function in their lives, and to draw attention she must adjust her character to the wish and demand of them; therefore, as a child, she deliberately chooses to be taciturn and secretive since others admire her reticence and interpret it as a sage attribute that gains their trust. The only bright side of her childhood was her rich aunt who gave her special attention because the narrator had been quiet and confidant. But even the sweetness of this attention was poisoned too by the aunt's husband; a deviant pervert man who uses every opportunity to sexually harass her and she has never exposed him due to fear as a child. This horrible experience is the core of the every now and then conversations of the character with her little daughter to teach her not to be quiet against sick abusive people. Thus, one can see how such harsh past has dominated present of the character, and its burden bends her knees.

"از این که دخترم شبیه من بشود بیزارم... نمی‌خواهم شادی همان رفتار مرا تکرار بکند. من می‌ترسیدم از تاریکی، از زیرزمین، از سایه‌ها. از عمو قدیر و حتی از مامان و خاله محبوب هم. برای همین صدایم در نمی‌آمد. صدجور بازی در می‌آوردم که دیده نشوم." (همان، ص. ۴۶)

"I hate for my daughter to be like me... I don't want Shadi to take after me... I was afraid of the dark, the basement, and the shadows, afraid of Uncle Qadir, even Maman and Aunt Mahboub. That is why I kept silent. I would do anything to go unnoticed." (Ibid, p.39)

Among the noticeable memories of her past is the night of her father's death in the basement of the house. The bitter ending to the father's life and his miserable last days, provokes narrator's pity to him more than any other member of her family and cause her having hidden anger towards her mother because of her cruel treatment with the father. However, she herself was annoyed by her father's behavior, witnessing his misery, his continuous humiliation by her mother, and the narrator's silence against her mother all have put a heavy disturbing burden on her shoulders. To relieve the pressure of this burden, even now, she recalls her father with pride and in her mind, she compares the always empty pockets of Amīr with the generous attitude of her father. (Ibid, p. 11) However, the narrator profoundly suffers from not being important to her father, she speaks about him with a nostalgia and in her mental comparison game between her father and her husband, the

latter always loses. Interestingly, it puts her at unease to hear her mother speaks badly of her father, and consequently she is unable to sympathize with her about the past.

"امشب برای مامان نعناع دم نکردم یا حتی وقتی گفت "خدایا فشارم بالا رفته". نگفتم که می‌توانی یک قرص بخوری. چیزی که شهلا می‌گفت. مشغول بودم. در یخچال تمیز بود ولی من دوباره روی آن دستمال کشیدم." (همان، ص. ۲۷)

"Tonight, I didn't brew mint tea for Maman even when she said, "God, my blood pressure has gone up." I didn't say, "You can take a pill." As Shahla would have said. I was busy. The fridge door was clean but I was wiping it again." (Ibid, p. 20-21)

Revealing the narrator's challenging past, the writer gives her nameless character, who was up to that point one of the many women from helpless class of the society, a specific individuality. As if from the beginning, Vafi has been following an ordinary female character in the narrow alleys of a noisy neighborhood to distinguish her with perusing into her mind and life, and to tell the unique story of her ups and downs. This is where the reader discovers why the heroine prefers to crawl in a cozy corner of the house to deal with the heavy burden of the memories she still struggles with. Her memories of childhood and her father's house are unfinished chapters of a story needing to be revised and reviewed. Therefore, like a brave loser, she finds every opportunity to start speaking about them; something her mother and sisters avoid. She, however, persistently tries to share her emotions about the past. Seemingly, reverberating those memories is the only way she can cope with their weight, and consequently, she succeeds to reconcile with the memories entangled with dark frightening basements through her very own inner monologue.

"زیرزمین را دوست دارم... مدت‌هاست که فهمیده‌ام همیشه زیر زمینی را با خودم حمل می‌کنم. از وقتی کشف کرده‌ام که آن جا مکان اول من است زیاد به آن جا سر می‌زنم. این دفعه شهامتش را پیدا کرده‌ام که در آن راه بروم و با دقت به دیوارهایش نگاه کنم... زیرزمین دیگر مرا نمی‌ترساند. می‌خواهم به آنجا بروم. این دفعه با جشمان باز و بدون ترس." (همان، ص. ۱۳۸)

"I like the basement. Sometimes I like to go back there. It's been a long time since I realized that I have been carrying a basement within me. Since I have discovered the basement is my starting point, I stop there often. This time I have found the courage to walk there and carefully look at its walls... The basement no longer scares me. I want to go there. This time with my eyes open, feeling no fear." (Ibid, p. 129)

Facing the most painful memories that others are afraid of and escape from, does not decrease their bitterness of course but, gradually allows the narrator to overcome the annoying fear that had always suffocated her outcry of protest and caused her feeling like a coward inept person. Therefore, she becomes her own psychotherapist who accompanies her wounded self in the darkest corners of her mind, and gives her the power to confront with her past filled with failures, deficiencies and sorrows. "Flying out of confinement and silence, the narrator breaks out of the cage of her former self. Celebrating her ability to speak her mind, she announces with great pride that "I write about me and the world around me" (Vafi, 2002. p. 110). Intoxicated from her sense of power and agency, believing in the transformative power of the pen, she thus moves from muteness to communication, from immobility to flight... She converts her secrets and sorrows, the unwritten tale of her muted and concealed identity, the alienation written on her body, and the frustration scripted through her assigned roles into a novel." (Milani, 2009, p. 149) After years of being captive of the suffocating basement of the past, she finally understands how talking about it can help her to heal from her old wounds. Thus, she finally brings light into her once dark world of her memories and accepts her former self as an individual full of contradictions, needs, and imperfections. Her success to make peace with her past, however, coincides with the deterioration of her marital life as her husband sells the apartment and takes all the money to accomplish her dream of Canada, while the narrator is left alone with little children and a new rental house. The new situation brings about contradictory emotions in the character she herself cannot understand. On one hand being far from her husband bothers her with annoying thoughts that ignites her jealousy (Vafi, 2002, p. 95). On the other hand, a love letter from him where he speaks of homesickness and missing her makes her forget all her anger and write a calming reply about how everything is fine. This situation, however, finally gives her a strength to deal with difficult hassles of life.

"انگار برای اولین بار است که با واقعیت زندگی‌ام روبرو می‌شوم. انگار تنها امشب قادر هستم مزخرفاتی مانند زندگی مشترک و کانون گرم خانه و کوفت و زهرمار را دور بریزم و تعریف‌های خودم را ابداع کنم. این زندگی من است و این دو بچه تنها مال من هستند. حالا تمام مسئولیت فقط به عهده‌ی خودم است که چه جوری ادامه دهم. از پس فشار دردی سنگین اشک‌هایم را پاک می‌کنم. احساس می‌کنم قوی شده‌ام." (همان، ص. ۱۱۵)

"It's as if for the first time I face the reality of my life. As if only tonight I am able to throw away such nonsense like a shared life, the warm family unit, and other rubbish, and make up my own

definitions. This is my life and these two kids belong only to me. Now I have all the responsibility to continue as I see fit. The heavy pain makes me wipe away my tears. I feel I have become stronger." (Ibid, p. 106)

embracing this bitter truth that in such harsh social condition, a woman would have to take care of life on her own is the next phase for the character to accede her life as a never-ending responsibility and commitment towards her children. Nevertheless, at the same time she comprehends the extent of self-centeredness and indifference of the man who once pledged to be with her till death. The narrator's life is thus, a perfect class that constantly teaches her emotional independence and self-reliance. The sociocultural compulsion of a masculine geography once has led her to marry, then the sociocultural constraints of that society turns her to a repressed victim who has no choice but compliance with the demand of her male partner. Therefore, she has the same destiny as her mother's; both have been neglected and humiliated by the behavior of their husbands and both share the same feeling of anger towards them. So, it is not surprising if Amīr one day faces the same poignant fate that once the narrator's father had; soon or late the oppressor of today becomes the oppressed of tomorrow whom no one would forget how he sacrificed the family for his own sake.

## **Conclusion**

*Pranadi-yi Man* (Vafi, 2002) is a tragic life recount of a woman who like a wounded but hopeful bird has been captive in the depth of the darkest crypts of discrimination and inequality in a patriarchal geography. Despite the narrator's growth in an oppressive society that constantly imposes the stereotypic identity of an obedient woman on her, deep inside her soul she feels heart beatings of a liberty bird that cannot tolerate unequal gender roles, and restless and bewildered of the unjust game of her life, strives to change or even manipulate her situation. Though because of the ravages of her difficult life and the never-ending selfishness of her husband, she rarely has power over her life, the narrator never gives up efforts to improve the conditions. She resembles a hardened veteran who has found elixir of life in the acceptance of the harsh reality and in continual effort to make changes, albeit rather tiny.

The protagonist of Vafi's story has no name, or more correctly throughout the story no one calls her name: her anonymity ironically reflects the collective identity of the house-wives who have

lost one of the most basic aspects of their individuality in the family/marital life as their particular given names have been concealed and gradually forgotten behind their personal pronouns. On the threshold of her forties, the challenging years of middle age, she has encountered profound questions about her identity; remembrance of memories from childhood, youth and marriage causes her to introspect her being and to understand shifts of her characteristics in favor of others' expectations. Vafī has shown how from the childhood a girl learns to set up and change her identity and characteristics under the influence of the ideas, and according to the satisfaction of the people around her; her choice as being a taciturn and secretive child because of the admiration of others, her fear to break her silence and to loudly talk about the sexual abuses of her uncle, her tendency to become talkative and to avoid any conflict with her husband, all in all show how surroundings of a woman indirectly impose the intended identity features on her and skillfully manipulate her individuality. In the middle of this never-ending injustice, the only hope of the character is to teach her daughter not to be mute and scared against the probable abuse and avarice of others; her dissatisfaction of the inattentive and unjust behaviors of her family gives the character enough motivation to seriously try to raise a strong and conscious girl who does not follow the fearful manner of her mother. The effort of the protagonist to influence the future life of her daughter, something that her mother had not even thought about, promises training of a new female generation that in the contrast to their mothers, does not easily accede to the tyranny of any patriarchal society because they have learned how to oppose it.

**6.**

***Az Šiytān Āmūht va Sūzānd* (She Learnt from Satan and Burned)**

**Farḥundih Āqā'ī**

**Quqnūs Publication**

**Tihṛān**

**2005**

## About the Plot

Vulgā is an Armenian homeless woman that poverty and loneliness have forced her to live in cramped quarters or in public places like parks, libraries and rehabilitation centers. She can hardly cope with the miserable condition of her current life, since she had spent a wealthy youth life and lived in London for some years as the secretary of a chief of executive in a British Company. Therefore, she constantly blames those around her of indifference and cruelty towards her. She was the only child of a low-income woman who wished for her daughter to become a doctor, so had sent her to one of the most expensive and best schools of the city, 'Joan of Arc'. In the last years of her life, Vulgā's mother was hospitalized in a mental hospital due to a severe mental problem and died soon. Finishing the school, Vulgā starts her work in a British Company and gets married to a Muslim man which costs her to become ignored among the Christian community. Because of the opportunity made by the British company, where Vulgā works, the couple then moves to London for some years and returns to Iran due to the man's decision. After giving birth to her son, Vulgā discovers the adulterous affair of her husband with his niece. She tries to save her marriage, but her husband ruthlessly calls her untouchable, throws her out of the house, and files for divorce. Because of her Christian faith, she loses her son's custody according to the Islamic laws. The divorce, unemployment, and loneliness make her life more and more difficult and she slips into destitution, living temporarily in other's houses. Her attempt to get visa for Britain fails, and finally all her relatives leave her alone. Thus, she must live in a rehab and then a public library. At the end of the story, Vulgā succeeds to rent a tiny room with the help of some charity organizations in a poor neighborhood. But still her struggle to find a permanent job sees no results, and she spends life with meager amount of borrowed money, and if she is lucky earns a living doing temporary jobs with a hand to mouth income.

## About the Author

One of the well-known Iranian contemporary writers, Farhūndih Āqā'ī was born in Tih-rān in 1956. She studied administrative management and social sciences, and has worked in the Central Bank of Iran since 1983. Āqā'ī published her first collection of short stories, *Tappi-hayi Sabz* (The Green Hills) in 1987, and continued with the form of short story for her next series of writing: in 1993 *Raz-i Kūčak* (A Small Secret), in 1997 *Yik Zan – Yik 'Išq* (A Woman – A Love), and in 2003 *Gurbi-hayi Gačī* (Chalk Cats). *Raz-i Kūčak* (Āqā'ī, 1993) won her the Golden Pen of *Gardūn* Magazine

as well as the Iran's 20 Years of Narrative Literature Award. Having literary diversity in setting, form, language and characterization, Āqā'ī's short stories are mostly about women's issues; *Tappi-hayi Sabz* (The Green Hills) (1987) contains surrealistic stories which reflect the horrified minds of some female characters who face realities that are more like nightmares *Yik Zan – Yik 'Išq* (A Woman – A Love) (1997) recounts solitude and seclusion of women after romantic heartbreaks. *Ġinsīyat-i Gum Šudih* (The Lost Gender) (2000) was the first novel of the author in bookstores. In this novel, for the first time in Iranian literature, a controversial topic about transsexuals, one of the most neglected minority group in Iran, was proposed by the author; life of a young man who is on the threshold of the transgender surgery. The novel focused on the probable agonizing and complicated situation the character should confront in the society after becoming a woman. The bold topics of Āqā'ī's stories about the lives of ordinary people, and the constant endeavor she made to highlight the issues of women and sometimes minorities witnessed the presence of an author whose main concerns are social harms and conflicts. Releasing *Az Šiytān Āmūht va Sūzānd* (Āqā'ī, 2005) in 2005, and its remarkable success among both critics and public audience, stabilized Āqā'ī's status as a prominent author in Iran's contemporary literature. In *Az Šiytān Āmūht va Sūzānd* (Āqā'ī, 2005), the author picked her protagonist from another oppressed minority; a Christian woman who got expelled from home because of her religion and must live in public places across the city. This novel brought Āqā'ī the award of the 7<sup>th</sup> round of the Book of the Year by authors and press critics.

Proposing social issues such as livelihood of women in various strata of the society, complications of marital relationship, family bonds, and also the chaotic urban life are among the main themes Āqā'ī has developed frequently in her stories. She, times and again, has said in her interviews that her characters are images of real people she knows closely.<sup>1</sup> On how a female writer can elaborate on specific subjects related to women, without falling into the trap of self-censorship, she says that prudency and personal boundaries, consciously or unconsciously, affect writing. I do not think about them that much though, and in my opinion what the author thinks about eventually finds its

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<sup>1</sup> Look at the following interviews; Farhunda Āqā'ī; An Interview with Mohammad Reza Madihi. Pāyāb. 16. Print. ISSN 1605-3915. 2007. p. 55; and Farhunda Āqā'ī; An Interview with Mihdi Yazdāni Hurrām. Samfuni-i Sāmit-i Īn Zan (The Mute Symphony of this Lady). Hamšahrī Newspaper. No 3046. 11/05/2008. URL; <http://www.hamshahrionline.ir/hamnews/1382/820221/world/litew.htm>; and Farhunda Āqā'ī; An Interview with Ihsān Raḥīzādih. Jamejamonline. 29/12/2009. URL: <http://www1.jamejamonline.ir/papertext.aspx?newsnum=100926536186>.



way to be said. (Āqā'ī, 2013) To encounter with the ineluctable censorship which frequently is imposed by the government on literary products, she says: "we need patience. In my opinion, no government exists around the world that likes a writer who talks about social issues to shed light on their darkest angels. An author necessarily, weather s/he wants or not, learns to be patient." (Āqā'ī, 2013) Āqā'ī's own patience and not hastening in writing and publishing her stories are among the most significant features of her writing-career, that causes her to spend plenty of time on knowing her characters, arranging the setting for the story, and developing the narrative style. Replying to a question on why she publishes her work at long intervals, she explains: "I spend minimum 6 months and in average one year for each short story; in other word selecting a subject, contemplating over it, examining every aspect of it, choosing the proper view point and finding the appropriate language for each story take me a long time." (Āqā'ī, 2004)

In 2015, after ten years of silence, Āqā'ī published a collection of stories called *Zanī Bā Zanbīl* (A Woman with a Shopping Bag) which includes 52 stories, all centered on the lives of women from poor strata of the society. About her reason to focus on this topic, she says: "During these years, I was thinking that our literature has become more of a literature belonging to Cafes and apartments. You find less number of works recounting the story of forgotten strata of the society. That is why I reached out to them." (Āqā'ī, 2015) In the same year, in addition to this collection, another book from her hit the bookshelves called *Si Nafar Būdīm* (There Were Three of Us). The book was resulted from her long interview with one of the oldest actors of Iranian Cinema. Her forthcoming novel, as she has announced, is a travelogue-novel about her own experiences of pilgrimage to Mecca, entitled *Bā Azīzġān dar Azīzīyih* (With Azīzġān in Azīzī'ah). As she has announced in an interview: "recently one of my stories named *Pardīs* (Paradise), has been translated into Italian and published by Anna Vensel in a series called *Nine Stories from Iranian Women*. Foy Moto has turned another story of mine into English: *Rāz-i Kūčak* (A Small Secret) (1993). *Az Šiytān Āmūht va Sūzānd* (Az Šiytān Āmūht va Sūzānd (Āqā'ī, 2005)) (2005) has been also translated into English and is in the final steps of publication by *Quqnūs* Publication." (Āqā'ī, 2016)

*Az Šiytān Āmūht va Sūzānd* (Āqā'ī, 2005) is one of the best novels written after the Islamic Revolution Of 1979. The unique life-story of its narrator, the appropriate setting of the narrative, and the unsentimental language of the story, hand in hand, have created a wonderful narration. As

one of the most remarkable stories that focuses thoroughly on the life of a woman, I have chosen the novel as one of the case studies of my research.

## Literature Review

Though *Az Šiytān Āmūht va Sūzānd* (Āqā'ī, 2005) is among one of the best examples of social-problem novels in modern Persian literature, just few scholars have studied this story and its components. The literary magazine *Pāyāb* (No. 16, 2007) has published two articles about the book alongside an interview with the author. One of the articles named *Hīč Vaqt Hudam ra Našikastam* (I never cheapened myself) (Rājī, 2007) was written by Maḥmūd Rājī who relying on sociological approach, has focused on content of the story and action and reaction of the character. Rājī states that a main part of the novel can be considered as behavior pathology of the society in which *Vulgā*, me and you are in touch with. (Rājī, 2007, p. 29) In another article in *Pāyāb* (Ibid), Muḥammad Rizā Madīḥī has described Āqā'ī's impressive skills in story-writing, and through reviewing the life and personality of the character, he has concluded that the author is concerned with humans' defenselessness and the complication of their unstable situation filled with fear and insecurity. The people who have fallen far apart from each other and have always felt the fear of this separation. (Madīḥī, 2007. P. 40-41) In a review of the novel in *Šarq* Newspaper, Miḥdī Yazdānī Ḥurram has concentrated on the elements of urban life used in the novel and studied the importance of place in the mind of the homeless character. (Yazdānī Ḥurram, 2007) In another review named *Rumān-i Šahr-i Buzurg* (The Novel of the Big City) that was appeared in *'Itimād-i Millī* Newspaper, Abūturab Ḥusravī classifies the novel in the category of absolute realistic stories and writes that the story can be a considered as a perfect example of realistic works that alongside proposing sociological analysis, in substratum, it depicts the condition of human being in the context of modern society or big city; the human being who is alone despite having lots of connections. (Ḥusravī, 2006, p. 10) Fīrūz Fāzilī and Fātimih Taqīnījāad have studied narrative time and focalization of the story using classification of *Gérard Genette*. And finally, in a critical note named *Lazzaṭī ki Ḥalq Našud* (A Pleasure that Was Not Been Created), Maryam Siyyidān has described her ideas about Āqā'ī's failure to proceed the story appropriately and believed that the novel lacks coherent structure and sincere or spontaneous language or narration. (Siyyidān, 2007, p. 32)

## About the Narration

*Az Šiytān Āmūht va Sūzānd* (Āqā'ī, 2005) is a 311 pages novel that is designed in the form of diary entries of the protagonist of the story. The notes begin in the middle of the summer 1998, the first night Vulgā sleeps in a public library and last till two and half years later, when she finally succeeds to rent a tiny room. Thus, in 625 days/entries her feelings and thoughts, her everyday life-matters, her daily income and expenditure, and her places to sleep are recorded. Among the recount of her current humble life, the sweet memories of her happy youth days are told as well. The epistolary form of the novel has turned the story into a long monologue in which every event is represented to the reader exclusively from Vulgā 's perspective. Despite the large number of minor characters who sometimes play significant role in Vulgā 's life, the reader only receives more information about those who are important to the protagonist. She is thus, an internal focalizer who describes and interprets all the information presented. Most of the entries are written in less than a page, and their resonant topics are Vulgā 's complaint about poverty, and her persistent effort to change her condition. Her writings are addressed to no one, and her repetitious daily routines can easily tire any reader, but within her ever-repeating life-story, this is the author's ingenuity that has brought up Vulgā 's story to the level of a significant and meticulous documentary in which we face a specific sort of 'the death of the author' that is not result of various interpretations of the readers, but the direct confrontation of the reader and the main character. (Madīhī, 2007, p. 36) The intimate diary-form of the narration has considerably faded the mediation of the author between the reader and the character. Reading her diary, the most personal thing of the character's life, we can directly read her very own thoughts and feelings.

Of the most memorable characteristics of these daily notes is repeating tedious matters like list of Vulgā 's bills, and daily food which all have been recorded with meticulous precision. 300 pages of repetition of these routines – even similar in form or content – portrays the unbearable reality of vagrancy. Within two years, Vulgā is forced several times to change her place of residence. She experiences many good and bad days and naturally goes through different moods and feelings in each of those days. However, despite all these changes and differences her miserable condition of life does not see any auspicious transition in any part of the story. Although at first glance, reading such long unvarying narration may sound intolerably boring, but what arouses the reader's curiosity to continue the story is confrontation with a dogged female personage who never

surrenders to her seemingly tenacious fate. Considering the unique form of the story as diary entries, the element of time and its different aspects – order, duration and frequency – have special significance in this novel ... relying on the factor of order and using anachronisms, the author tells the background of the narrative and introduces the protagonist more, thus, she fills the blanks in the narrative and proceeds action of the story; through the factor of duration and its different forms, she provides a basis for deceleration, so, she analyzes psychological emotions of the character; and through the factor of frequency, with an intentional emphasis she recounts the events that have affected protagonist's mind and life. (Fāzili; Taqīnizād, 2010, p. 28-29)

*Az Šiytān Āmūlht va Sūzānd* (Āqā'ī, 2005) is the story of seeking a protected shelter in which man can live without the fear of homelessness threatening his/her peace and dignity. That is the reason behind the name of the novel which is taken from an elegy depicting vagrancy of Armenians in Ġulfā district.<sup>1</sup> The author is concerned with humans' defenselessness and the complication of their unstable situation filled with fear and insecurity. The people who have fallen far apart from each other and have always felt the fear of this separation. (Madīhī, 2007, p. 40-41) In this novel, the protagonist wishes for a house that maintains her privacy; a place concealed from the questioning eyes of every passerby who bluntly comments about her life-style. In the orbit of her roam, Vulgā drifts into the library, churches, shelters, streets, charities, forensic centers, people's houses, psychotherapy centers, doctors' offices and other places, seeking a ray of hope; a moment of peace and quiet. But instead, in every place that primarily promises security, the hurt locker – the nature of modern society – emerges. Her whole struggle then is to survive, to live fearlessly. (Husravī, 2006, p. 10) It is interesting that among the public places that are open 24 hours, the narrator chooses a library, and prefers to live between bookshelves and among people who are entertained with reading. In the narration, Tih-rān's appearances resemble portrayal of a contradictory city; a city whose spatial dimensions, as the main and most basic aspects of its existence, function in the way that evicts and expels one of its citizens. From this perspective, Āqā'ī's protagonist prefers the very mental place that she has personally built for herself; the place that in the novel has been symbolically built in the form of a public 24-hour library. (YazdānīHusram, 2006, p. 9) Among the novels of this research, the element of place in this narration has a more remarkable

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<sup>1</sup> During Shah Abbas era, Armenians migrated from Russian Ġolfā to Ġolfā district in Isfahan. They were skillful and educated people who contributed a great deal to construction of Iran. After Shah Abbas's death they went through so many hardships and the title of the story is part a long requiem for them by one of the Armenian Ašiqs. (Āqā'ī, 2007)

significance in the life of the protagonist; as a social writer, Āqā'ī has succeeded to well depict the twists of a homeless person's life in a metropolitan city where the people only and only are after their own affairs. The precision and perceptiveness of the author in using the element of place in this novel turns it into a very successful example of realistic stories, in which the complicated and ghastly aspects of urban life have been portrayed from the perspective of someone who does not own even a meter of that city.

Āqā'ī has said that this story is inspired by the real life of a woman whom she knew from a very long time ago. "It took me almost 15 years to gather my information and notes. I talked to this lady for so many days. We taped about 20 cassettes together. I went to see some places she had stayed in; to investigate and reimagine them... fortunately Vulgā , herself, had kept daily records which I used them as well. At times, I integrated some of them together, shortened some and changed their order in some cases." (Āqā'ī, 2007, p. 57) In narrating Vulgā 's life, the author is a mere reporter, who never tries to provoke the reader's emotions, and always maintains her reportorial narrating tone. Even in describing the most horrendous experiences such as repeating sexual assaults or diseases caused by hunger and pollution, the author clearly avoids to invoke reader's emotions by changing the tone of her narration. Her commitments to keep this tone is an indication of her command of the reporting style she has picked; she perfectly knows the features, limits and boundaries, as well as the purpose of the selected narration. The long period of time she has spent on the process of research and writing has resulted in the creation of a remarkable narrative language which is one of the most impressive characteristics of the novel; a simple, smooth, quasi-formal and reportorial writing in which words have been handpicked with precision, and sentences are rarely broken or unfinished. This language perfectly conforms to Vulgā 's character as an educated decent woman who persistently tries to convince others about her real merited dignity, and indirectly reminds them that her current situation does not diminish her rank and personal values at all. The polite expression Vulgā uses in her notes is different than the prevalent informal language people often use in diary-writing; it causes her entries to become more like a long-fragmented petition stands to the readers who judge her life soon or late; so, they need to be informed of what she has been through.

"مأمور زن در فرودگاه از من پرسید: "چرا توی این فرم نوشتی منشی مدیر عامل؟ منشی‌های مدیر عامل با شخصیت هستند. خانه و زندگی دارند. مثل تو بی‌کس و بی‌کار نیستند..." ساکت ماندم. جوابش را ندادم. بدنم می‌لرزید. چشم‌هایم می‌سوخت." (آقای، ۱۳۸۵، ص. ۳۱)

"The officer in the airport asked me: "Why you have written in the form you have been secretary of a CEO. CEOs' secretaries are classy people. They have homes and possessions. They're not homeless and poor like you..." I kept silent. I didn't answer. I was shivering. My eyes were burning."<sup>1</sup> (Āqā'ī, 2005. p. 31)

*Az Šiytān Āmūht va Sūzānd* (Ibid.) is among the best stories whose narrative elements have precisely and artistically combined together, and created an attractive and influential recount of life-experience of a homeless woman. As most of the scholars who have studied this novel affirmed, in this work Āqā'ī has shown the apogee of her story-writing skills. Besides her rigor and innovation in choosing narrative's setting and language, the meticulous characterization of the protagonist of the story is another valuable achievement of hers. The narrator/diarist of her story is a Christian homeless woman who beyond all these traits, reflects the alone human being of the modern life. At the same time, her portrayal mirrors new aspects of femininity in the society of Iran; the femininity interwoven with minoriteness, and the femininity interwoven with vagrancy. Thus, in the next part we will study how the author has proposed such novel aspects of life of a poor woman who belong to minority group of Christians.

## About the Protagonist

*Az Šiytān Āmūht va Sūzānd* (Āqā'ī, 2005) recounts an unchangeable sad life story of a vagrant that is filled with failure, hope, hunger, effort, and hardship. The protagonist of the story, Vulgā, is a 40-year old Christian woman who is seemingly sentenced to life imprisonment in the dungeon of poverty; a pauper whose presence or absence would not be noticed by any one, and her absolute misery does not bother at all people around her. It has been years that she cannot even afford to buy food, nevertheless, she constantly tries to re-experience the days of prosperity and happiness she had had in the past; the past that is long gone, just like the protagonist's youth, as if it has never existed; the past that others including her psychologists, social workers and relatives believe that

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<sup>1</sup> Farsi quotations have been translated into English by the author of the research.

must be thrown out and forgotten. (Ibid. p, 83) But despite others' advices, the image of this lost happiness revives in the character's mind again and again, and doubles her pain in facing the present reality of mere poverty. The two and half years' period of homelessness of the character in the novel is only a part of the annoying vagrancy that has started seven years ago, when she had opposed infidelity of her husband, but surprisingly he had compelled her to leave the house and filed for divorce. Consequently, as an absolute victim of a patriarchal society, the character receives no spousal support, and because of being Christian she loses the child custody too.

"آن موقع که از خانه‌ی شوهرم آمدم بیرون سی و سه سال داشتم. با یک چمدان لباس، مقداری وسایل شخصی، چند کتاب شورت‌هند و منشی‌گری، و هزار دلار پول. می‌خواستم از قبرس بروم به انگلستان، ولی نشد... نتوانستم ویزای انگلستان بگیرم." (همان، ص. ۳۷-۳۸)

"When I left my husband's house I was 33-years-old. With a suitcase of clothes, some personal things, several shorthand and secretary guide books, and a thousand dollars. I wanted to go to the UK through Cyprus, but it didn't work... I couldn't get Britain's visa." (Ibid. p. 37-38)

Now, seven years after the divorce and being ejected from the house, the character not only does not have a visa to any country but to stay in a library her moral health must be officially confirmed. (Ibid. p. 209) As though, she is in the center of concentric circles that while are not that related but their hardships are multiplied and give her a more and more narrow space to survive. first, her situation as a lonely person without any support from any institution; second the sorrow of being a woman under the pressures from social conventions; third confining ethnic limitations; forth being a divorcee as well as uncertainty on the religious side as the church has excommunicated her and she is not Muslim neither. (Husravī, 2006, p. 10) Her life has gone downhill with such unthinkable pace that even after seven years, she still cannot believe she is only a destitute and no way of salvation can be found for her. The contradiction between her current situation and the golden days of her past, may at first cause the reader to assume her memories only as the imagination of a mind shell-shocked because of being homeless and broke, but gradually we realize the authenticity of her remarks; indeed, the jobless Vulgā of today has once been secretary of a British company and has stayed at best hotels in Europe, eating in the best luxurious restaurants of London (Āqā'ī, 2005, p, 22); the homeless Vulgā of now has once lived with her husband in a full-furnished suite in the UK (Ibid p, 33). The miserable Vulgā once used to go to beauty salons

to spend lavishly on her look and beauty (Ibid. p, 22). Here and now, though, she is penniless in the real sense of the word, who mostly must borrow money for every breakfast, lunch and dinner.

"خیلی وقت است که برای صبحانه، چیزی ندارم و شب ها هم شام نمی خورم." (همان، ص. ۱۶۰)

"It has been long time that I do not have anything to eat for breakfast and I do not eat dinner either."  
(Ibid, p, 160)

Poverty has been woven into the warp and woof of Vulgā 's life, and it deepens her misery day after day. Although, in such situation, it is expected that the character gradually learns the habitudes of living poor, her personality does not get along with such lifestyle in no way possible. The humiliation of impecunious lifestyle brings her the strongest emotions of shame. And she, unable to cope with such unbearable emotions, strives to recreate a few moments -though very short- of her past prosper life by borrowing little amounts of money from people. (Ibid. p. 103; p. 159) Not only for daily meals but also for buying new shoes and clothing, or even cosmetic treatments she always owes to others. (Ibid. p. 119; p. 149) She is a "*pauper prince*"<sup>1</sup> who, despite absolute indigence, does not accept her current pitiful situation, and cannot/does not want to be seen just as an unimportant poor woman whose everyday feeding depends on the donations of ordinary people around her. Her life thus, has turned to a ceaseless conflict between her present and her past; between her desire and her reality. But tragically her pertinacity and the transient happy moments of borrowed wealth do not last long, since her actions do not match the truth of her current life; poverty, the strongest actor of her life, soon takes her back to her modest status of not being able to survive without help of others.

"دوشنبه ۱۵ آذر، موقع غذا خوردن، آقای پرستاری در مورد بدهی ام به بوفه به مبلغ ۵۰ هزار تومان تذکر داد. گفتند غذای مرا قطع می کنند تا تصفیه حساب کنم... سه شنبه ۱۶ آذر، امروز آقای قربانی هم در مورد تصفیه حساب رستوران به من تذکر دادند. همه با هم تیانی کرده اند که من محتاج یک وعده غذا باشم." (همان، ص. ۱۶۴-۱۶۳)

"Monday 6. December / While eating, Mr. Parastārī reminded me about my 50,000 tomans debt to the buffet. I was told I will not be given food unless I pay the money back... Tuesday 7.

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<sup>1</sup> The Pauper Prince is a nickname that one of Vulgā's relatives has given to her. (Ibid., p. 215)



December / Today Mr. Qurbānī also reminded me about repaying the debt to the restaurant. They have all joined together and conspired to make me be in need of a single meal." (Ibid. p. 163-164)

In such breathtaking battle with poverty, however, her character shows an unbelievable perseverance that amazes the reader; if one person/group refuses to keep lending her money, it does not mean she must give in to misery and to stay hungry. As soon as someone disappoints her, she finds another way to fulfil her needs; on the same days two restaurant owners stop giving her free food, she finds another dinning room. In her selected way, disappointment and surrender have no meaning. She plays the game of her life as she wants and proceeds due to her self-nurturing and desires, and does not cope with the accepted order. (Madīḥī, 2006, p. 35) Her inexhaustibility to continue such frustrating endless game often gives rise to the anger and negative reaction of those around. Doctors, therapists, library staff, grocery sellers, neighbors, all and all accuse her of spending lavishly and carelessly and not having a habit of thrift. They use every instant to pick in on her about her way of spending and managing money. Vulgā, however, is in no way willing to fit in other's criteria and to live according to their definitions. Despite her absolute dependence on others to survive, she insistently remains faithful to the way of life she has chosen. She considers great dignity for herself for which she constantly persists on her rights as a human being; for the city council election, she chooses doctors and engineers for a better future (Ibid. p,79); she objects not practicing hygiene in the library environment, and threatens the staff to take her complaints to the higher officials, so lets them know how she is aware of the rules and administrative mechanisms. (Ibid. p, 70). Her sensitivity to sanitation and hygiene in the melee of the society and the people who do not show any reaction to her absolute misery is so striking that at times creates comic situations in the story. She gets angry when post office personnel close the envelopes using their saliva, and wish to had money and could buy them glue, tape and other things like that for one complete year. (Ibid. p. 81) Her anxiety of lack of hygienic habits in public places, truly amazes the reader; the pollution of people's work places annoys the character, while she herself cannot bathe due to being indebted to the public bathhouses. (Ibid. p. 94) Thus, one can expect if Vulgā's comments and punctilios about general lifestyle infuriate others and lead them to humiliate her in return. For her, the mess is on the highest peak in rehabilitation centers of Rāzī and Šafaq where she has had to stay during these seven years. Both centers are among the oldest and most recognized state-owned therapy and rehabilitation centers in Tihrān province, and are basically

defined as shelters for homeless women. Nevertheless, what the patients really experience there is life on its humblest way possible.

"زن‌ها با لباس‌های پاره و سوراخ و با دمپایی‌های پلاستیکی لنگه به لنگه این طرف و آن طرف می‌رفتند... طفلکی‌ها هیچ چیز ندیده بودند... استخوان‌های مرغ را می‌جویدند و قورت می‌دادند. بدترین حرف‌ها را به هم می‌گفتند و باز با هم غذا می‌خوردند... خیلی از آنها آن قدر گرسنگی کشیده بودند که ته بشقاب‌ها را لیس می‌زدند." (همان، ص. ۷۳)

"Women move around wearing worn-out clothes with holes, and ill-matched rubber slippers...poor creatures, they had not seen anything.... They were chewing and swallowing chicken bones, talked dirty, insulted each other and then kept eating together...many of them were too hungry they licked the plates even." (Ibid. p. 73)

The images Vulgā constantly remembers from these centers and their patients are literally horrendous and poignant; what do these female helpless paupers go through in the places which are their last resort? As one of the victims of these state-funded centers, the character narrates how in the eyes of doctors and therapists of the centers, poor women are just some hungry baggers and nothing more; to whom providing place to sleep, and feeding are such great generosity that any other request by them sound like a huge audacity. Seemingly Rāzī and Šafaq which are supposed to support people in recovery, were torture centers in which the personal identity and dignity of the help-seekers were smashed constantly. On the contrary to the expected function to assist patients improving their lives, they push them towards losing hope for living and preparing for death. (Ibid. p. 265) Among these miserable women who have surrendered to their fate, Vulgā was a misfit whose nobility was considered by both officials and patients as unacceptable egotism deserved to be humiliated and punished. Admitting the indigence and accepting to be equal with others were the only constitution everyone had to respect in rehabilitation centers. Thus, Vulgā's disobedience to these rules has prompted the most humiliating reactions in others; if there was a chance, patients attacked and beat her, while social workers always humiliated her. (Ibid. p. 247; p. 25) Nevertheless, the protagonist, representing a rebel without a gun, ardently plays her life-game due to her own values, and never accedes to the social stratification that cruelly defines her identity as a mere worthless creator.

"روانپزشکان مرا دوست نداشتند. آن‌ها احساسی به فقر و فقرا ندارند. اگر بتوانند همه‌ی بیماران را با تیر می‌زنند... من هرگز وارد بازی آن‌ها نشدم. خودم بودم. خودم ماندم. زن‌ها در شفق بازی می‌کردند. یکی شوهر می‌شد و چند زن داشت. زن‌ها را حمایت می‌کرد. کارهای‌شان را از من پنهان می‌کردند. من بیگانه‌ای بین آنها بودم." (همان، ص. ۷۲)

"The psychiatrists did not like me. They did not have any feeling about poverty or poor people. If they could, they would shoot all the patients... I never entered their game. I was myself, and I remained myself. Women played in Šafaq; one became husband who had few wives and supported them. They hid their affairs from me. I was an alien among them." (Ibid. p. 72)

Although the character finally succeeds to free herself from secretive prisons of state-funded rehab centers, her hope to escape from other abysses that always ambush vagrants never comes to reality; her struggle to maintain her independence never matches her narrow monthly income. Moreover, she is thrown out of the library with cruelty and can only stay at her relatives' places for one or two nights. So, she must stay in the house of lonely stranger men who, sooner or later, reveal their unmoral sexual intention of helping her. (Ibid. p. 198; 215) All men that Vulgā is forced to stay at their places share the same behavior pattern; they warmly welcome her at first and then frankly ask her to leave when they sexually harass her several times. But tragically there is no way out of this breathtaking impasse, and poverty has forced her to accept such humiliations again and again. Mirroring Vulgā's struggle as a vagrant who has no choice but to keep living, the author reflects the darkest and most bitter aspects of homelessness alongside womanhood; being oppressed because of her gender in a male-dominated society, being ejected from the community of Christians because of marrying a Muslim, being persecuted by her husband and relatives because of her faith in Christianity, being sexually abused because of her loneliness, all and all, intensify severity of her situation, and diminish her identity to a powerless creature who has nowhere to seek resort to. Thus, when she seeks shelter in the church out of absolute despair, the janitor of the church, like a hungry animal, beats and rapes her with no shame or fear. The scars that these humiliations leave on her soul are far more lasting than the bruises on her face since after taking complaint to officials and telling people what has happened to her, she really cannot "*do shit*". (Ibid. p. 229)

"در ورقه‌ی پزشکی قانونی ذکرى از تجاوز نشده و قابل پیگیری نیست... خانم روحانى و مسئولان کتابخانه‌ی اندیشه همه به من گفتند به کسی نگو برایت بد می‌شود. هیچ کس دلش به حال من که یک مادر مسیحی هستم و پسر مسلمان دارم نمی‌سوزد." (همان، ص. ۲۴۹-۲۵۰)

"There is no mention of rape in the forensic medicine report so it cannot be legally pursued...Ms. Rūhānī and staff in the Andīša Library all told me I should not tell anyone because it has consequences. Nobody feels pity for me: a Christian mother who has a Muslim son." (Ibid. p. 249-250)

Despite the offensive advice of others to her to keep silent, the character frankly speaks about being brutally raped in the church; recommendations of other to stay silent and forgetting such incidents only assure her that she is unimportant to them. However, Vulgā 's insistence on not forgetting and not being forgotten save her at last. (Rāgī, 2007, p. 28) Considering the fragile and horrifying situation the character lives in, her resistant personality turns her personage into an indomitable character. Despite being insignificant to others and at the same time needing them to remain alive, the protagonist in no way accepts to live based on other people's notion. Their judgement and conservative advice are of no significance to her to convince her make any change, albeit rather minor, in her lifestyle. So, after two and a half years of correspondence and bureaucracy when she finally receives a meager deposit from a charity, she manages to rent a 12-square meter room in a poor neighborhood in Tihrān. Although having a room of her own can bring the promise of an end to her homelessness and misery, but she remembers that she has been the tenant of such rooms before. Therefore, the reader is assured that the swampy road of her life would again take her back to the same dead-end of vagrancy, because she is trapped in a vicious circle whose knot does not seem to be ever opened. Somewhere in the novel there is a quotation from Imam Ali saying that Poverty is the most formidable death (Āqā'ī, 2005, p. 272), and as we observe Vulgā 's life is the drama of this horrific death. In the middle of this endless misery and forgottenness, the one medicine to heal all the pains of the character is the hope for a day when she, like a real mother, can live with her son under one roof; a roof that can principally cut the hands of countless rapists of the society in which, from Vulgā 's perspective is not even safe for vulnerable ordinary men like her teenage son.

"نمی‌توانم به او بگویم، ولی می‌ترسم به او تجاوز شده باشد... دوست دارم همیشه با من زندگی کند. غذا بپزم. شیرینی بپزم و او احساس آرامش و امنیت کند و همه چیز به اندازه‌ی کفایت باشد." (همان، ص. ۲۹۱-۲۹۳)

"I cannot tell him but I fear he has been raped too...I want him to live with me forever; I cook for him, bake cakes and pastry for him, and he feels at peace and secure, and we have enough of everything." (Ibid. p. 291-293)

As a stubborn rebel who has nothing to lose, the character of the story accentuates her existence even as a hungry homeless through documenting her trivial life whose quantity and quality are of no importance for others. She writes her unvarying days so she exists. Writing as the primary sign of being literate is the only credibility that distinguishes her from other vagabond beggars like Mr. Rāmišī, a minor character of the novel who sleeps in a park adjacent to the library. (Ibid. p, 83) Nobody never expects to see a beggar eager to write, know and learn, but Vulgā's character is a unique destitute who reads enthusiastically, participates in free educational workshops and cultural events of the library, and takes notes of the points with a memorable motivation. The significance of the daily writings for Vulgā are way higher than keeping a diary that people normally do; for her, whose life is exposed to others, these notes function as a secure shelter that at the moment, she sorely wishes for. In her diary, she can frankly speak her mind without the fear of being judged, and can describe her own definition and perception of life and happiness. Notebook of the character thus, turns to the home she yearns for; the only secure privacy in the public place of Vulgā's residence where no one can disturb her autonomy. As a vulnerable and impotent woman who cannot live independently, her notes objectify her desired sanctuary where at least, she has the power of writing her mind. On the contrary to her homelessly naked life, her personal notes give her the feeling of ownership of a private territory where the character is the only person who can record, describe, judge and tell the last word.

## Conclusion

*Farhundih Āqā'ī* in *Az Šiytān Āmūht va Sūzānd* (Āqā'ī, 2005) shocked her readers with the image of a vagrant woman who is entrapped in the closed circle of powerlessness and misfortune; a character who is forced to be content with a more and more humble earning every day – more frustrated than the previous day. Although apparently Vulgā is the main performer of the drama, there exists another actor that quietly and invisibly plays the most negative horrifying role of the

play: destitution. The brutal and powerful destitution that follows the character like a shadow, and its strong presence stultifies her every moment of happiness and hope. The story thus, reflects the paralyzing clash between poverty and people; an apparently familiar struggle that anyone to some extent, could grasp even without reading the novel. Yet this narration, far from sentimentalism and through the form of repeating, portrays the never-ending terrifying moments of this conflict. Within the unwritten lines of this story, in between the daily mentioning of Vulgā 's food and her sleeping places, the forgotten pivotality of humans' primary needs has been spotlighted. Like an enlightening reporter, the author takes the hands of the readers and take them to visit one of the numerous vagrants who have reached the fearsome threshold of being forgotten. In having the reader accompanying this homeless person, Āqā'ī fades her role as a mediator to the possible extent so the encounter between the two, reaches its peak and becomes an immediate direct contact. This is how the reader asks herself/himself all throughout the story that “If I see a Vulgā one day, what would I do for her?” The resonance of this question in the mind of the reader that effectively motivate his/her social consciousness, was the main aim of the author to narrate this story.

*Az Šiytān Āmūht va Sūzānd* (Āqā'ī, 2005) is indeed one of the great social novels in Persian literature which artistically and soberly criticizes degrading social stratification based on gender and religion. The novel notably reflects hardship of womanhood in a male-dominated society alongside loneliness and helplessness of Christian minority in the heart of a Muslim community. The destiny of the character is a blend of consecutive misfortunes on the bed of an indifferent society whose ears are filled with the stories of people's failures and disasters; a society whose citizens unintentionally join each other to let the most horrible things happen to one of its most oppressed groups like homeless women. The novel thus, reflects a harsh reality in which prevailing social problems of urban lives are dramatized through their irreparable effects on the life of a vulnerable female character. Despite struggling with such sheer misery, however, the author has created a unique protagonist who – with all her strength – breaks the rules of the breathtaking game of her pitiable life, and persistently follows her preferable lifestyle. The heroine of this drama mirrors the stubborn soul who respects herself more than anyone else. Whether being a vagabond or secretary of a British company, she always admires her identity as a decent woman whose personal values have never changed. Her remarkable self-esteem thus, is her last but not least wealth that distinguishes her from ordinary impoverished people and rescues her from the abyss of insignificance and scorn.

7.

*Nigarān Nabāš* (Don't Worry)

Mahsā Muḥibālī

Čišmih Publication

Tihrān

2008

## About the Plot

Tihrān witnesses foreshocks which are supposed to culminate into an earthquake soon. The story opens through depicting the turbulent atmosphere of Šādī's family and home. Her mother and elder brother are leaving Tihrān for a city located in north of Iran and insist on taking the rest of family with them. The mother, who once had been a brave and fearless guerilla in the years of Islamic Revolution (1979) is now frequently concerned with her looks and the safety of her family. Āraš, Šādī's younger brother, is interested in cyberspace and takes addictive pills. Happy with the destructive earthquake, he wishes to conquer the city with his friends from cyberspace. Šādī's father is a licentious university professor who does not care about his family; he hasn't come home yet and doesn't answer their telephone calls. Meanwhile, Šādī, not caring for anyone or anything, leaves home and goes in search of drug dealers she knows. The city is in a terrible situation; some people have left their homes and taken refuge on the streets, some of them who are stuck in the traffic jam wish to escape from the city, and some have plundered the stores. Amid this chaos, Šādī goes to her friends' home and hopes that they still have some opium left for her; a boyfriend who has committed suicide taking pills and opium, a girl who has hid her drugs somewhere that her lover won't find .... Yet, in spite of all these efforts, no one gives her what she wants; therefore, overwhelmed with withdrawal syndromes, she takes refuge in her younger brother's pills.

## About the Author

Mahsā Muḥibalī was born in 1972 in Tihrān and studied music in University of Fine Arts. She started writing fiction since she took part in Rizā Barāhinī's workshops during 80s. She published her first book, a collection of short stories entitled *Sidā* (Sound) in 1998, when she was 26 years-old. Four years later, Muḥibalī's first novel entitled *Nifrīn-i Hākistarī* (The Grey Curse) (2002) was published by *Ufuq* Publication; unlike her previous work which focuses more on form and language-games, *Nifrīn-i Hākistarī* (The Grey Curse) (2002) is a novel full of fantasy, myth and mystery. This novel was nominated as the best novel of the year in *Yaldā* Prize. In 2004, Muḥibalī published another collection of short stories with *Čišmih* Publications, the title of which was '*Āšiqīyat dar Pāvaraqī* (Being in Love in the Footnotes) (2004); a successful collection which was nominated as the best collection by critics and writers of the press and won the Best Short Story Collection title in fifth year of *Hūšang Gulšīrī* Prize. The major themes of these stories can be summarized in love and death. Except these two themes which have been also reflected in her



previous works, Muḥibalī does not concern herself with other issues such as social conflicts or problems. In fact, in her fictions, the center of gravity is more often located into the minds of the characters. When it comes to dealing with inner conflicts of her characters she says: “I feel a great joy when I write, and I always write with joy because I love to take tweezers and pluck out all my feelings, thoughts, and motivations from life” (Muḥibalī, 2010). *‘Āšiqīyat dar Pāvaraqī* (Muḥibalī, 2004) was republished three times in 2004 and it was banned by the ministry of culture and Islamic guidance for its fourth publication. *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muḥibalī, 2008) her magnum opus, was published by Čišmih Publication in 2008 and caught the attention of various literary societies; it won the title of Best Novel of the Year in Association of Critics and Writers of the Press Prize in 2008 and was awarded the Best Novel of the Year by Hūšang Gulšīrī Foundation. This Novel was also nominated as the Best Novel of the Year by Rūzī Rūzigārī Prize and Mihrigān-i Adab Festival. The same year after its first publication, *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muḥibalī, 2008) was quickly reprinted four times. In 2010, two years after publication the book was suddenly banned from the market by the Committee of Observation and Evaluation of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. In 2016 the novel again was reprinted for twelfth time by Nīmāž Publication.

Like most Iranian woman writers, Muḥibalī is concerned with women’s issues; therefore, she frequently chooses the main characters of her works from women. During recent years she held several workshops and in 2013 she was invited to an international writing program from Iowa University in which she presented her essay entitled “A New Definition of Sexuality.” She also wrote *Masīḥ-i Marmarin-i Man* (My Marble Christ), a short story for Tihrān Noire collection, which was translated and edited by Sālār Abdih and published by Akashic Books, USA. Mahsā Muḥibalī is one of the writers of *On the Map* website which works under the supervision of Iowa University. *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muḥibalī, 2008) was translated into Swedish by Rubāb Muhib and published by L’Alehp Förlag in 2015, and into Italian by Giacomo Longiter. During recent years, Muḥibalī has been one of the Juries of various independent literary festivals.

## Literature Review

As one of the successful stories in recent years, *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muḥibalī, 2008) has been subject of some studies. Alīrizā Aḡlī has looked at the portrayal of Tihrān as a ruined and demolished city in the novel. (Aḡlī, 2011) In a short note on the novel, Mustafā Tayyibī has considered different components of the story and announced it at the best literary work of the author. (Tayyibī, 2011)

In the online Magazin of *Mard-i Rūz*, Vandād Zamānī has published a short note about the protagonist of the novel, named "*Duhtarī Dar Ğustuġūy-i Tiryāk; Naqd-i Nigarān Nabāš*" (A Girl in Search for Opium; Critique of *Don't Worry*). (Zamānī, 2012) There, he expresses his idea that *Nigarān Nabāš* is indeed a picaresque novel whose protagonist talks about her life with an offensive and complaining tune. (Zamānī, 2012) In another online article, Zamānī Has also written about the common literary techniques used in Muḥibālī's novel and Virginia Wolf's "To the Lighthouse" (Wolf, 1927). (Zamānī, 2013) In a panel discussion about the novel, Miḥdī Kamūs has reviewed the story and stated that Nigarān Nabāš reflects the wounded society through the secretive language and argot of ordinary people. (Kamūs, 2014) Zahrā Mulūkī has comparatively studies the portrayal of the city of Tihrān in Muḥibālī's novel and a documentary by Parvīz Kalāntarī. (Mulūkī, n.d) Ḥussayn Nūšāzar, an Iranian literary critique in exile, has written on the main theme of the novel and highlighted the story as representation of the historically fruitless rebellion of Iranian young generation. (Nūšāzar, 2015). In "*Talḥ, Sīyāh, Ḥīs; Nigāhī bi Rumān-i Nigarān Nabāš*" (Bitter, Black, Wet; A look into "Don't Worry") Nubaḥt briefly talks about themes and narrational techniques in the novel. (Nubaḥt, 2009) And finally, in an article named "*Naqd-i Ğāyġāh-i 'iġtimā'i-yi Zan-i Mu'āšir-i Īrānī dar Rumān-i Nigarān Nabāš*" (Critique of Social Position of Modern Iranian Woman in the Novel Don't Worry) Dr. BahmanīMutlaq and Sumayyih Yūsifpūr have used the theory and classification of Amazon Feminism<sup>1</sup> to analyze the characterization of the heroine of the novel. They say that the author has tried to transfer some social inequalities and customary problems into the enmity and [mental] complex of the main character, thus to turn the protagonist into a perfect amazon woman who intends to violently oppose outside world. (BahmanīMutlaq and Sumayyih Yūsifpūr, 2016, p. 369)

Despite the distinct characterization of the protagonist of *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muḥibālī, 2008), the personage has not been subject of much debates. Her personality, as a combination of opposite feelings, indeterminate thoughts and strange behaviors reflects new era in Persian story-writing in representation of female identity. Thus, in the following pages we will study her character and try

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<sup>1</sup> The first time that the concept of Amazon Feminism was brought up it was in connection to, of all people, Ayn Rand. It was Thomas Gramstad in his essay "The Female Hero, a Randian Feminist Synthesis" who is credited for having coined the term. In his essay, Gramstad attempts to bring together Ayn Rand's concept of heroism with modern feminism, and the radical yet ancient vision of the Amazon as the ultimate hero while including some discussions of postandrogyny and nonpatriarchal sexualities. For more information please look at the following link: <http://folk.uio.no/thomas/po/female-hero.html>

to understand how through giving her the central role of the story, the author has changed the familiar literary discourse of female identity as previously being oppressed and innocent.

## About the Narration

*Nigarān Nabāš* (Muḥibālī, 2008) which is 147 pages long, follows 24 hours of the protagonist's life in a linear present time and through interior monologue style. The story begins in the morning of a day that the metropolitan of Tihrān is constantly and violently shaking, and the narrator describes the strange and sometimes humorous consequences of what happens on the verge of the probable severe earthquake in the city. Debate on the possibility of earthquake in Tihrān is not a new one; it's been years since the geologists have seriously warned residents of the capital<sup>1</sup>; thus, the reader's mind is ready and curious about encountering the red status which might happen just tomorrow. Although most of the story happens in private places such as the narrator's home or her friends', the writer has tried to paint her desired collage of the turmoil of the city through placing the protagonist in public places of this metropolis. The element of city and its appearance in the story, whether being limited to a small apartment of a couple that loathing each other, or being in the frame of city like Tihrān whose people are alienated from each other, eventually lead into the single internal concept of loneliness and perplexity of human beings. (Nubaḥt, 2009, p. 92) The capital's image that the author gives us is frightening; a shaky city all the areas of which are quickly devoured by a chaos-storm; a disorder for the people who are afraid of being buried alive and they only want to survive; thus, their ears have become deaf to the warnings of the armed and armored police forces. On the similarity of the images of Tihrān in reality and as reflected in the novel, Muḥibālī says: "I believe that Tihrān is always on the brink of explosion. Just like a bowl full of soup. Now try to imagine an earthquake striking this city. When we had a slight earthquake in Tihrān shortly after Bam earthquake (2003), lots of people fled to streets, slept in parks and showed lots of different and strange reactions" (Muḥibālī, 2009). Tihrān in *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muḥibālī, 2008) has turned into a whirlwind and it seems that the more you escape from it the more you will get dragged into its belly. Peoples' reactions to persistent foreshocks that suggest a horrible demise are weird and unbelievable to the extent that the reader might think they, like the addicted narrator of the story are high on psychoactive pills too. From the narrator's perspective, the capital has

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<sup>1</sup> For more information look at the following links; <http://www.rense.com/general46/SQUSAKE.HTM> and <http://www.express.co.uk/news/science/704275/BIG-ONE-Los-Angeles-Iran-Istanbul-cities-DEADLY-earthquakes>.

changed into an enormous circus and people are performing instead of wild or domestic animals. Muḥibalī's depictions of this probable condition, aims at the most essential problems of urban man and her/his complicated life; the terrible confusion of human relationships, lack of safety in urban life, humankind's absolute alienation in regard to nature and earth, and her/his loneliness during tough times.

Muḥibalī narrates the story in present tense which is an appropriate measure to create a sense of sympathy between the reader and the narrator. The narrator's moment by moment recount causes the reader to feel her/himself inside the story hand in hand with the character; what we know becomes one with what the protagonist knows from the present; therefore, we can feel the impact of her account of immediate events. On the reason of choosing present time narrative, the author says that because of the addiction of the character and her constant worry about finding drugs in that chaotic situation of earthquake, Šādī doesn't have the time to narrate herself and her environment in any other way. She doesn't have the time to get nostalgic and think about past, and maybe this is the reason why the novel should have been narrated in present tense (Muḥibalī, 2010). Using present tense for the narration, the excitement and anxiety of an earthquake in a metropolis is conveyed to the reader in an appropriate way. On the other hand, through using the free association technique and review of the protagonist's memories alongside micro-narratives about the heroine and people around her, the writer has managed to analyze the identities of the novel's characters for the reader. The micro-narratives in the story cause the formation of several images inside the readers' minds (Kāmūs, 2010), and they can answer the readers' questions about the profoundly confused state of the protagonist and her family, therefore draw a rather clear picture of Šādī's family's collapse and rupture. Despite consequent shocks of the earth that highlight the importance of present time, the protagonist's not minding the chaos surrounding her provides the reader with the time to wander in Šādī's memories and her past; when her worried mother is screaming, the narrator closes her eyes and remembers the bitter day when she had had to play the violin in a family party to please her father's sense of accomplishment while her mother was alone with another man in another room. (Muḥibalī, 2008, p. 20). Thus, through burrowing into Šādī's fragmented and scattered conscious and unconscious narratives, Muḥibalī manages to slow down or even freeze the time, both technically and thematically. (Zamānī, 2010)

*Nigarān Nabāš* (Muḥibālī, 2008) is a blunt and explicit narration of a young girl in search of drugs. Appropriate to character's state of hangover, she is not in the mood for linguistic restraints and the words she uses are sometimes vulgar. The protagonist's language, which is derived from the common language among the majority of Iranian youth, has given the novel a sense of friendliness. Muḥibālī has given the responsibility of narration to someone who doesn't care if anyone understands her or not; it's a bold action from the author to choose such a language the many ironies and expressions of which are hard to grasp by middle-aged and elder people. She personally describes the language of her novel as follows: "this language, which is a bit indifferent and rude, full of sarcasm, expressions and secrets is the underground language that is very common in Tihrān. This is very natural because we lead double lives inside and outside our homes. On the one hand, we have an official language which we use in formal situations and we also speak it when talking to grown-ups, on the other hand, we have this secret and hidden language of youth" (Muḥibālī, 2010). *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muḥibālī, 2008) is the first novel in Persian literature that is written with this common language of younger generation. Through using this language, Šādī becomes the representative of a part of society whose voice, namely the world of whom, was not taken seriously before that. The character thus, epitomizes reckless youth who understand the solemn language of their parents but don't like it, so they have coined new terms and expressions according to new social spaces they have experienced such as cyber-space or cafés. Their flippant language conforms their very initial characteristics as being frivolous and hedonist.

*Nigarān Nabāš* (Muḥibālī, 2008) is one of the significant novels in the modern Farsi story-writing. The hesitant narrator of the story has enabled the author to incorporate the essential elements and factors of modern fiction into contemporary Persian literature without it being a mere superficial imitation; elements such as shift of point of view, interior monologue and constant shift of narrative time. (Zamānī, 2010) Focusing on the life of a deeply indifferent drug addicted girl in the turbulent time of an earthquake, Muḥibālī has tried to narrate story of the absolute chaos in the modern society of Iran; the portrayal of the violence and riot in the society whose young generation as its main hope is lost in the trance made by drugs. The protagonist of *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muḥibālī, 2008) has thus, a strange and unusual personality that different than previous characters of this research, reflects an antiheroine character who lacks conventional heroic qualities such as idealism, courage, or morality. Therefore, in the following pages we will discuss about this character and her change and transformation throughout the narrative time.

## About the Protagonist

*Nigarān Nabāš* (Muhibalī, 2008) is reflection of collapse and decay of society of Tihirān and its human relationships. Throughout the narration we unpromisingly observe moral and cultural decline caused by progressive fear of death among people. Corresponding to this despondent theme, Šādī, the narrator of the novel, represents a tired, rebellious and dead-end young girl; someone who has no concern except finding drug; someone who isn't affected by warmth of family bonds and is not in the mood for getting emotional at all. In the middle of horrifying foreshocks, the character, slipshod and numb, savors opium, enjoys her elevated mood, and terrifyingly does not care about anyone or anything. On the contrary to the literal meaning of her name that means "happiness," she embodies a never ending labyrinthine frustration who mocks the passion and emotions of people around her. The pleads of her mother and brother who hopelessly wish to get together as a family and take refuge in somewhere safe does not arouse her sense of pity. She even feels a weird sense of hatred when she touches the body of her mother.

"[مادرش می‌گوید] همه آماده‌ن.. بابات هم الان می‌آد..." دارد زور می‌زند مهربان باشد. "توی بم هم همین‌طور شده... اول لرزه‌ها شروع شده و بعدم اصل کاری اومده..." خوب است سعی کن همین‌طور آرام بمانی... "پاشو... یا ابولفضل..." تخت خواب موج برمی‌دارد، می‌رود و می‌آید. خودش را روی کمرم می‌اندازد. چندشم می‌شود. (نگران نباش، محبعلی، ۱۳۸۸، ص. ۸)

"[Šādī's mother speaks] everyone's ready. Your dad's also coming soon ..." She is hardly trying to look kind. "The same thing happened in Bam ... first there were the shocks and then came the main tremors..." This is good; try to stay calm ... "Get up... Lord give you strength..." "the bed moves in waves, she goes and comes. She lies on my back; I feel gooseflesh."<sup>1</sup> (*Nigarān Nabāš*, Muhibalī, 2008, p. 8)

From the very first pages of the novel, the absolute indifference of the narrator toward her family convinces the reader that this character is not going to get moved through emotions, and we should not expect any emotional reaction from her side. Through following the narrator's minor and scattered memories and descriptions about her bitter past and present experience of family, we gradually find out about her downfall and lack of human relationships; her mother's attempts to take her daughter away with herself is another side of a woman who, in ordinary time, is either at

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<sup>1</sup>. Farsi quotations have been translated into English by the author of the research.

beauty salons or at parties or in Boutiques and does not really care about her children. (Ibid, p. 30) Her father is more reluctant compared to her mother because he is not with the family even during the events related to the earthquake and not caring about anything unless all physical, mental and emotional problems of his students and employees are solved. (Ibid, p.14) Trapped in a limbo as such that her parents have brought about, Šādī, the family's single daughter who once was their apple of the eye as a child, has now become rebellious to the extent that under euphoric influence of narcotics, has been recently found up on trees like a frog (Ibid, p.8)

"قوٹی را باز می‌کنم. فقط شش تا. یعنی یک روز و نیم. اگر سیامک جنس نداشته باشد؟ اگر رحیم توی این خر تو خری یک جایی گم و گور شود؟ فکر نکن الاغ؛ قانون اول نیوتن یادت نرود. هیچ وقت توی خماری فکر نکن، چون از ماتحتت فکر می‌کنی." (همان، ص. ۹)

"I open the can. Just six balls [of opium]. It means one and a half day. [What to do] If Sīyāmak doesn't have drug? If in such disaster, Raḥīm just disappears? Don't think, idiot; don't forget Newton's first law; never think in hangover otherwise you dig your own grave." (Ibid, p. 9)

Her contentment with current situation and her refusal in regard to her family's expectations suggest a joy from a revenge she takes from her parents; a fatal revenge the price of which is the addiction of the narrator and a voluntary and cheerful acceptance of her mental and physical corruption; her character symbolizes disobedience to family norms and revolt against ethical values in the context of a self-destructive game. In her rebellion, the role of a beautiful gentle doll that her parents had chosen for her turns into the role of an indifferent tomboy who only thinks about finding more opium on the day that the earthquake soon or late will ruin everyone and everything. Therefore, through creation of an atypical character and assignment of such unusual characteristics to her, the author portrays a protagonist different than familiar samples in Farsi fictions; based on these negative traits of Šādī's character, Zamānī categorizes this novel as a picaresque novel<sup>1</sup> that in fact uses an anti-hero, and is different with general novels in terms of characterization assumptions. He writes that Šādī's complicated and unusual character is a

<sup>1</sup> Picaresque novel, early form of novel, usually a first-person narrative, relating the adventures of a rogue or lowborn adventurer (Spanish *pícaro*) as he drifts from place to place and from one social milieu to another in his effort to survive. Unlike the idealistic knight-errant hero, however, the *pícaro* is a cynical and amoral rascal who, if given half a chance, would rather live by his wits than by honorable work. The *pícaro* wanders about and has adventures among people from all social classes and professions, often just barely escaping punishment for his own lying, cheating, and stealing. He is a casteless outsider who feels inwardly unrestrained by prevailing social codes and mores, and he conforms outwardly to them only when it serves his own ends. The *pícaro*'s narrative becomes in effect an ironic or satirical survey of the hypocrisies and corruptions of society, while also offering the reader a rich mine of observations concerning people in low or humble walks of life. (Britannica)

frustrated soul like the ones in picaresque novels, who can no longer tolerate morality and rules governing the society. (Zamānī, 2012). Yet, despite her unconventional insolence and rebelliousness, when compared to her younger brother Āraš, Šādī is a gentlewoman; as his brother doesn't humiliate his family like the narrator does in her mental reflections, but he does it publicly even when others are present and he also does whatever he enjoys during the earthquake events when his mother is crying and moaning.

"صدای انفجار و خرد شدن شیشه و جیغ های مادر و سوت بلبلی آرش با هم قاطی می شود... از لب پله ها خم می شوم. آرش تفنگ به دست وسط پذیرایی ایستاده و برای خودش گف می زند. بوفه ی تمام شیشه ی مامان پودر شده و ریخته کف زمین. "حال کردین؟ صاف زدم تو اون گلدون بلژیکیه؟ نه، جون من، نشونه گیری رو حال کردین؟" (همان، ص. ۳۳)

"The sound of the glass exploding and crumbling down is mixed with mother's cries and Āraš's nightingale whistle. I lean and look from the stairs. Āraš stands in the middle of the living room with a gun in his hand and applauds himself. Mother's buffet which was all made of glass was now all on the floor. 'Did you like it? I hit the Belgian vase, didn't I? Did you enjoy my aiming skills?'" (Muḥibālī, 2008, p 33).

When asked about the family's three children Muḥibālī says: "although each of these three children (Bābak, Šādī, and Āraš) is two to three years different in terms of age, none of them express their real age. Each of them represents a decade. Bābak is from 60s, Šādī belongs to 70s and Āraš represents the 80s. Children from 60s are still the good child of the family and the ones born in 80s are resistant to any kind of regulation. Children from 70s are the wasted ones. They neither have the boldness of 80s generation, nor the docility of children from 50s. They are a kind of characters who are irresolute and passive. Šādī is one of them." (Muḥibālī, 2010) The uncertainty and passivity which the author appropriates to her *wasted* protagonist can be interpreted as modesty, conservatism or even the inevitable bewilderment that the writer believes the children belonging to 70s (and Muḥibālī was also born in 70s) still feel bound to. In order to show the complicated and in-between condition of this generation, the author shows the difference between the choices and behavior of Šādī and her brothers. Šādī is an opium addict; a traditional drug whose euphoria is not enough for Āraš, who is addicted to psychoactive pills (Muḥibālī, 2008, p. 28). Šādī is shy about asking her parents for money directly; therefore, she steals from their pockets; however, Āraš acts like a gangster who thinks their home is Texas and gets the money through threatening and fighting (Ibid, p. 35). In comparison to Āraš, we can still distinguish some faint



traces of morality and respect towards the family in Šādī's rebellion. The narrator's elder brother, Bābak, stands on the opposite side of Āraš and, is the neat and good son of the family who always tries to solve the problems and keep the atmosphere calm. Yet, Šādī cannot understand none of them and what they have in mind; the children are profoundly strangers and cannot make sense of each other. The only thing which still retains the faint emotional bond between Šādī and her brothers is their lost memories from childhood.

"آرش یک تکه‌ی دیگر پیتزای سرد توی دهانش می‌چپاند. دلم می‌خواهد بغلش کنم. دلم می‌خواهد کله‌ی فرفری‌اش را بگیرم توی دست‌هایم و لپ‌هایش را بکشم. آخ... کاش بزرگ نشده بودی! کاش این همه پشم و پیلی روی سر و سینه‌ات نبود و مثل آن وقت‌ها دست‌هایت را دور گردنم حلقه می‌کردی و من شنا می‌کردم." (همان، ص. ۲۱)

"Āraš pushes another slice of cold pizza inside his mouth. I feel like to hug him. I like to take his curly hair in my hands and pinch his cheeks. Alas! Wish you didn't grow up! Wish you didn't have so much hair on your face and chest and that you would hang from my neck and I would swim just like the old times" (Ibid, p. 21).

Even though the narrator frequently quenches her sense of nostalgia deliberately, clearly, she regrets the lost pleasures of their home. Seemingly, the horrible tremors of the earthquake have made tiny cracks onto the walls and roof of the house and Šādī's soul and mind as well; in the middle of this chaos, the character mildly misses her happy and safe childhood in her father's house. A home that its current state of confusion and destruction is in complete harmony with critically disintegrated relationships of its inhabitants. The earthquake disaster in *Nigarān Nabāš* (Ibid.) thus, establishes the balance between the mere appearance and the true reality through its destruction. It makes a mess out of the house in order to evoke the actual depravity that had hid itself under luxurious furniture for years. Surprisingly, remaining inside that ruined bleak house does not scare the narrator like others, on the contrary, she wishes to stay alone in the house and get buried under its rubbles. Her devotion to the father's house reflects her emotional contradictions in confrontation with probable death; despite suppression of her emotions, her recall of her childhood memories and her feeling towards the house signify the value of safety and peace even for the most indifferent character of the novel.

"دلم می‌خواست تیرآهن و آجرهای تو هوار بشن روی سرم، ولی می‌بینی که نمی‌ذارن. تازه لنگِ جنس هم هستم. خدا رو چه دیدی، شاید برگشتم... یا علی..." (همان، ص. ۳۶)

“I wished your bricks and joists would fall on me, but you see they don’t let it happen. And I’ve run out opium, you see? Who knows what will happen? Maybe I come back again... farewell...” (Ibid, p. 36)

The destruction has struck not only Šādī’s house, but also the entire city. Tihṛān has turned into a whirlwind and it seems that the more you escape from it the more you will get dragged into its belly. Encountering with astonished people who have lost their mind because of the earthquake is the thing that makes Šādī cheerful. (Ibid, p. 40) Seemingly, in such mess, everyone must do something based on their power, even if it is hilarious and nonsense. Peoples’ reactions to persistent foreshocks that suggest a horrible demise are weird and improbable to the extent that the reader might doubt Šādī’s account of the events; a man is carrying an old chair on his head; a tiny woman is holding an iron bar normally used for fastening drapes; a foxy chick is leaning on traffic light. (Ibid, p. 40-41). From the narrator's perspective, the city has changed into an enormous circus and people are performing instead of wild or domestic animals. However, Šādī’s, or we could also say Muḥibalī’s depictions of this probable condition, aims at the most essential problems of urban man and her/his complicated life; the terrible confusion of human relationships, lack of safety in urban life, humankind’s absolute alienation in regard to nature and earth, and her/his loneliness during tough times. As the only observer of the situation, Šādī unlike others, does not react to the earthquake but profoundly enjoys watching people's last-ditch efforts in response to the frightening natural disaster. The character is thus, the only personage in the novel who eagerly wants to watch the city while everyone tries to flee from it or conquer it. Like the last survivor of the tribe, she stays to witness the progressive collapse of all human values.

"آسفالت کف خیابان هم دارد حرف می زند. من صدای ترک خوردنش را می شنوم. قرچ و قروچش درآمده؛ انگار دارد قلنجش را می شکند و خستگی درمی کند. خسته شده..." (همان، ص، ۷۵)

"The asphalt on the street is talking too. I hear the sound of cracks opening in it. It looks like it is stretching its body and wants to take a rest. It’s tired ..." (Ibid, p. 75)

In the story of Šādī, Muḥibalī constantly depicts disappointing images of the people and their behaviors to complete her intended collage of the society as being without values and future. She has picked up her protagonist among a *wasted* generation whose parents once have been devoted leftist guerillas. During the narrator's search for opium she pays a visit to friends, who are also

children of revolutionary guerillas like her mother; the parents who fought for their values and despite their braveries in the time of the revolution, they were eradicated by statesmen in the commotion of violent political incidents of 80s, and now their political-social endeavors have no result other than hangover exhausted children who loathe their parents and look for all remedies in the euphoria of opium.

"اصلاً به من و تو چه که مامان پروین تو و آذر و مامان مینوی من یک روزی همکلاسی و بعد هم‌رزم بوده‌اند؟ حالا که مینو ... با بابک عزیز دلش در راه کلاردشت است... پروین هم دارد توی خیابان‌ها دنبال آخرین بازمانده‌ی دوران مبارزاتش می‌گردد... به من و تو چه که آذر زیر آن همه خاک که معلوم نیست کجاست خوابیده؟ اصلاً چرا من و تو سارا باید میراث‌دار این همه دیوانگی شویم؟" (همان، ص. ۶۴)

“[Šādī towards her friend] What is it to you that your mother Parvīn, Āzar and my mother Mīnū were once classmates and then they became comrades? Now that Mīnū... is on the way to Kilārdašt with her sweet Bābak ... Parvīn is looking for the last survivor from her days of political activism on the streets ... what is it to you and me to know where Azar rests under this city of rubbles? I’m asking you, why should I, you and Sarah be the heirs to this much madness?” (Ibid, p. 64)

Despite different destinies of those comrades, their children exhibit institutionalized similarities; they don’t care about the world and life and try to forget them with the help of drugs. The protagonist of *Nigarān Nabāš* (Ibid.) is one of these purposeless children who are not in the mood for paying attention to the relations between human beings, and on the day, that might be the last one for helping other people, heroine’s sense of sympathy is rarely aroused. In her opinion, even falling in love is nothing but body’s chemical interactions, describing it as a stepping down or up of some hormone in blood. (Ibid, p. 64). Šādī’s descriptions of people’s reactions and the similarities of their behaviors and actions to those of wild animals, is an evidence of her being angry and loathing them inside. Watching the death of people who were someday cruel does not move her at all.

"جناب سرهنگ با همان بلوز شلوار کشفاف سفید و عبای شتری اش روی سینه افتاده... نبضش را بگیرم که چه بشود؟ بزند یا نزند چه فرقی می‌کند؟ اگر بزند یعنی هنوز زنده است و من لابد باید بدوم بیرون، داد و هوار بکنم، کمک بخواهم تا بیایند نجاتش بدهند؟ آخر کدام الاغی می‌آید این دایناسور را که به اندازه‌ی پدر دایی جان ناپلئون سن دارد نجات بدهد؟" (همان، ص. ۶۲)

“Colonel has fallen on his chest wearing his white jersey and brown cloak ... why should I check his pulse rate? What would be the difference if it has any pulse or not? If it does then it means that he’s still alive and I should probably run out and search for help? What dumb ass will ever try to save this dinosaur that is as old as the father of Uncle Napoleon<sup>1</sup>? (Ibid, p. 62).

But at the same time, unlike her serious indifference toward the people who have lost their minds in fear of death, she shows few unanticipated human reactions throughout the novel; subtle encouraging reactions that she only shows to helpless creatures who don’t play a role in the grown ups’ hypocritical drama. She tries to set her insane grandma who is wearing the guerilla outfit free from police custody; she saves her poor friend who has committed suicide before the onset of total annihilation; she holds a baby who is left outside shelter less in a baby carriage crying, and tries to calm him down for some time; she protects a stray dog that runs around her faithfully and gives some painkiller to a lonely afghan watchman who is afraid and doesn’t have the power to confront the disaster. These are the only cases in which her sympathy is aroused; just for poor forgotten creatures who no one cares about their lives; the people whose parents/supervisors are either lost or are busy packing and collecting gold, jewelry, coins, checks and silk carpets (Ibid, p. 49-50). Nevertheless, those human behaviors are ephemeral and concise; because other’s weakness bores Šādī quickly and limits her getting involved in their expectations and demands. There are several of these behavioral paradoxes in the novel; paradoxes which have their roots in the in-between condition which we talked about and distinguished as the main trait of novel’s *wasted* protagonist. In this regards, Muḥibalī says: "When I was writing *Nigarān Nabāš* my main concern was to characterize Šādī as a girl born in Iran’s 50s. I wanted her to strongly contrast the environment she lived in, not understand the grownups and her parents’ logic of life and also not to have any logic of her own at all. I was completely concerned with Šādī’s identity crisis; a crisis which nowadays exists for me and lots of my friends" (Muḥibalī, 2010). The protagonist’s identity crisis is characterized by being stuck in a spectrum, one side of which is the obedient and pragmatic ways of his elder brother, and on the other side, there is the stubborn rebellion of her younger brother. The narrator’s avoidance of approving or denying any of the two sides of the spectrum has resulted in her belief that every endeavor is destined to perish; the logic of the people who are hardly trying

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<sup>1</sup> The old character of a very famous Iranian Novel entitled *My Uncle Napoleon* by Īrağ Piziškzād.

to survive is as stupid and absurd as the youth's impatient enthusiasm to conquer the half-ruined city.

"انگار امروز آرش را مثل باربایاپا توی شهر تکثیر کرده‌اند. معلوم نیست لرزه‌ها توی زمین است یا توی مخ این‌ها! اگر من می‌فهمیدم این "شهر تو دست ماست" یعنی چی خوب بود." (همان، ص. ۷۹)

"It looks as if they have duplicated lots of Ārašs in the city. It's not clear the shocks are happening inside their heads or in the ground! Wish I could understand what it means when they say: 'the city is in our hands.'" (Ibid, p. 79)

Yet, at the end of the novel she finally admits to quench her hangover through taking psychoactive pills of her younger brother; seemingly in this famine, she is forced to experience a hallucinatory euphoria that changes the reality, and unlike her preference to remain in isolation because of taking opium, these pills fill her veins with the futile tremendous force of younger generation. Nevertheless, she still feels reluctant to join them and takes refuge in a cellar under a bridge (Ibid, p. 146). She neither escapes from the disaster nor does she choose to conquer the vacant city. She stays there like the city itself, and gives her body to earth and her dancing tremors so that they can watch the world collapsing along with all its loose structures and buildings together. Hope that this destruction promises the true salvation that she and the people of that city have waited for it for so long.

"زمین می‌لرزد و لرزه‌ها توی تنم راه می‌روند... وای! رقص بندری است. حتماً سینه‌های درشت و پرگوشت زمین آن پایین دارند می‌لرزند. لرزه‌ها با من حرف می‌زنند... حرف می‌زنند... حس می‌کنم اولین بار است که روی زمین دراز کشیده‌ام. بوی چمن‌ها را می‌مکم. زمین آرام می‌شود، مثل مکث میان یک جمله‌ی طولانی." (همان، ص. ۴۴)

"The ground shakes and the tremors are walking through my body ... yeah! It's a belly dance! I'm sure the earth's huge and plump breasts are shaking in the deep too. The shocks talk to me ... they talk ... I feel it's the first time I'm lying on the ground. I suck the smell of grass." (Ibid, p. 44).

## Conclusion

The apocalyptic story of *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muḥibālī, 2008) ends without the earthquake happening; an incomplete ending that doesn't meet the expectations of the reader who enthusiastically finishes 147 pages to see the last act of this tragedy in the theatre of a miserable society. Nevertheless, the

story suggests the radical opinion of the author towards life experience of people who reside in the capital; the opinion of the existence of a fatal infection of distrust and hatred which has grown inside the relationships of all people. In this context, Šādī's character reflects fatigued youth of a chaotic society for whom morality has totally broken down; a generation which is quite happy and pleased with the bitterness of the opium it has swallowed, and is sitting on the grave that has already dug, waiting for the final blow from the earthquake so that it will finish everything. The horrific impact coming from the collapse of human values is far more annoying than the earthquake itself; the earthquakes only give us a chance so that people can throw at each other the fire of hatred and repressed anger of living together for so many years recklessly. *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muhibalī, 2008) echoes this message that even if there isn't any earthquake, the people are already capable to destroy each other. What would be the difference if earth ripped apart or if it just moved up and down in waves? No disaster can worsen the end of this decomposed society. Therefore, through drawing such a horrible picture of people who live in the capital and describing the disruption of human relationships and the collapse of social norms in a minimalistic style, Muhibalī has written a novel that harshly criticizes the individuals and the society of contemporary Iran; a criticism that was recognized by officials of the regime rather late and resulted in its being banned after being published for three years.

8.

*Iḥtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Probably I'm Lost)

Sārā Sālār

Čišmih Publication

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2009

## About the Plot

*Ihtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) narrates one day in the life of an anonymous woman who, despite being busy with the ordinary life issues, recalls her memories of the past. The narrator who lives now in Tihrān with her husband and son, has been grown up in the city of Zāhidān, one of the most deprived cities in Iran. Among her fragmented memories of living in Zāhidān, the main part allocates to her friendship with her classmate, named Gandum. Two friends had uncanny resemblance, however their personalities had remarkable differences; Gandum was an energetic courageous girl who always strived to get relieved from the old inhibiting constraints of the city, but the narrator was a descent conservative girl who always begrudges Gandum her strength and bravery. Despite possessing different characters, their relationship lasts for years; they finished the school, and both were admitted in Tihrān University, so hand in hand they left their stagnant hometown and its rigid people. But at the time of the marriage, the narrator finishes this friendship and the girls do not meet each other anymore. Now, eight years after the break up, the memories of this complicated friendship bewilder narrator's mind. From the other side her marital life is in an unpleasant situation too; long continuous business trips of her husband have given her a feeling of profound distance with him. Spending time with her son, the hard responsibilities of being as a single mother intensifies her dissatisfaction. Unable to withstand her current difficult situation, she meets a psychotherapist; however, their sessions and the advices of the therapist do not help her that much. The narrator is the only person who independently must find a way to reconcile her troublesome condition and her friendship with Gandum.

## About the Author

Sārā Sālār was born in 1966 in the city of Zāhidān. Studied English Language and Literature in Tihrān University, she began her literary activities through participation in story-writing workshops and writing short stories. Then she translated two collections of short stories from English to Persian; "The Elephant Vanishes" by Haruki Murakami and a collection by William Boyd that has not been published yet. But the translation could not content her, as she says in an interview: "gradually I realized that translating stories of others is not my job, because I, personally have somethings to say, things that I wanted to write them down." (Sālār, 2014) *Ihtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) is her first novella that has been written during the months of her presence in the story-writing workshop conducted by Muḥammad Ḥasan Šahsavārī. About the process of



writing this story she remarks: "that workshop caused me to write regularly, though the plot had been specified and formed in my mind before attending that course. I mean I had already known the story, but that one-year discipline, story-reading with a group, comments of others about your work, and the possibility of using some of their ideas or rejecting the others, altogether were very helpful." (Sālār, 2014)

In 2010, *Iḥtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) was awarded the Best First Novel Prize from Gulšīrī Foundation, and shortly after the first publishing it was reprinted four times. The jury of Gulšīrī Foundation described the reasons of the merit of the novel as follows: "the relative success in merging the narratives of different times and simultaneous appropriate usage of plot layers for the progress of the story; success in the creation of a suitable narrational language, corresponded to the main character and the narrative world, that embodies and concretizes the inner and outer conflicts; success in portraying the dominant presence of the city of Tīhrān with the usage of the elements of urban design like billboard Ads and highway noise pollution, and inducing the heaviness of an invisible roof that generally strengthens the narrative world of the plot; the lack of the author's predominant presence in the narration that makes the novel captivating and attractive." (The statement of the Jury in 10<sup>th</sup> Gulšīrī Foundation Award, 2010) Despite the success of the novel among the critiques and readers, the ministry of Culture and Guidance prevented the reprint of the book and the book was proclaimed to be banned.

The next novel of Sālār, named *Hast yā Nīst* (Is or Isn't) was released in 2013 by Čišmih Publication. The narrator of this story, a woman at the beginning of her forties, is in the turmoil of middle-aged fears. About the difficulty of publishing and reprint of her novels, she says: "my first book, *Iḥtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) became unpublishable after fourth reprint, and they gave a modification order to my second book, "Is or Isn't", after four editions. This modification will totally ruin the book. Actually, they did not want to say directly that it is banned. I am writing my third novel hopelessly. So, it slowly moves forward but finally will be done. The narrator of this story is a fourteen years old boy who lives with his mother. The story is about the maturation and contradictions of boys in this age in house, school and society. Writing this story is more difficult than my previous works." (Sālār, 2014)

Like the other women authors selected for this research, the stories of Sālār are centered around a woman and her unsettled inner world. Yet, the unique strengths of her first novel are

emphasis on the importance and depth of the identity crisis among women; taboo breaking and propounding ignored issues in marital life like heroine's affair with a friend of her husbands; and, focus on the complexities of mother-child relationship. Considering the characters that have been created by Sālār so far, we can surely say that she is appropriately familiar with the profound worries, concerns and responsibilities young women have in the current society of Iran, and through the medium of story-writing, she could succeed to delicately represent some parts of the mental complexities of modern Iranian women.

## Literature Review

As one of successful books of 2009, *Ihtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) has been first debated by some literary critiques in a panel discussion in Farāz Publishing House, where the critiques talked about different aspects of the novel. (Amīrī; Zarlakī; Tarākimah; and Qulāmī, 2009) In a short note named *Su'al-hāyi Bīpāsuḥ* (Unanswered Questions) that has been appeared in 'Itimād Newspaper in 2009, Mahmūd Qulīpūr and Kāvah Fūlādīnasab have studied story-components of the novel and concluded that despite the author's efforts to create a complicated protagonist, the narration has a main problem because it proposes important questions for the readers that no one never answers them; why the narrator does not want to return to Zāhidān? How she has no idea whether mother or brothers are still alive or not? Why does she think about Gandum again after eight years? (Qulīpūr and Fūlādīnasab, 2009) AlīpūrGaskarī has traced the Freudian concept of "doubleness" in the novel and writes that though the main theme of the story as being centered on a mentally sick woman, is not a new topic the author's style in characterization of the character, the speedy retheme, precise setting of the events, alongside unique language of the narrator are among the strengths of the narration. (AlīpūrGaskarī, 2009, p. 15) In a short note on the winners of Gulšīrī's Award in 2009, Šīvā Bahrimand and Ardavān Tarākimah looked at the reasons of selecting Sālār's novel as the Best First Novel of the year. (Bahrimand and Tarākimah, 2010) They described the narrator of the story as a bewildered woman who recounts one of her routine days in the city of Tihrān; a woman who is seemingly stuck in some constraints. (Bahrimand and Tarākimah, 2010, p. 9) Durūdgarī'ān and his colleagues have studied the narrative time of the novel using the ideas of Gérard Genette. (Durūdgarī'ān, Kūpā and Akbarpūr, 2012) In an article named *Nigāhī Ġāmi'īšināḥtī bar Rumān-i Ihtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (A Sociological Look at "Probably I'm Lost), Nīlūfar Insān has used the ideas of Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx to study

the concept of friendship in the narration. (Insān, 2011) In a study about the narrator of *Iḥtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) Nā'ibpūr and Varqā'īyān used the ideas of Wayne Clayson Booth (1921-2005) and James Phelan (born 1951) about the reliable and unreliable narrators in stories. (Nā'ibpūr and Varqā'īyān, 2013) According to their definition and classification, the anonymous narrator of the novel is an unreliable narrator who is not sure whether her narration is a report of the reality of her life or not; she is not even sure if she is really lost. (Nā'ibpūr and Varqā'īyān, 2013, p. 109) As we observed, the studies about this novel still lacks an exclusive all-around analysis on the characterization of its unique protagonist. Therefore, in the following pages we will study the portrayal of the anonymous narrator of this novel whose personality has dramatically changed the previous discourse of portrayal of female psyche.

## About the Narration

*Iḥtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) is a short narrative with a speedy rhythm in which the narrator, within the context of her normal life events, continually delves in past and recalls the most significant events of her life. The story is narrated through the first-person perspective and in the form of a long interior monologue that appropriately sheds light on the bewildered condition of the protagonist for the reader. The usage of I-narrator viewpoint for this novel is a good choice that provides the writer with the possibility of travel back and forth in time in the narrator's mind. (Qulīpūr, Fūlādīnasab, 2009)

The present timeline of the novel is limited to one day in which the protagonist wanders through the city and visits different places like her son's kindergarten and Darband Promenade. The main part of this timeline is allocated to the narrator's description of the city of Tihrān and its backed up highways; the Tihrān that she portrays is seductive and glossy; its walls are covered by the attractive billboards that continually draws the attention of the narrator, from the Molineux blender (Sālār, 2009, p. 15) to Sony's sharp image of some handsome men (Ibid, p. 47) Within these billboards, symbols of intense consumerism in urban life, the author also embeds short narratives of some radio programs in the story. These narratives have two aspects; the radio news that emphasize on the turmoil of the outside world through brief remarks about the war, political conflicts and economic issues. The other aspect contains happy, conventional and clichéd sentences by radio broadcasters who invite the listeners to kindness, peace, trust, brilliance and purity. To set up the sociocultural background of the story, the usage of these brief illusionary

hints instead of long explanations, seems to be adequate, and it represents a level of societal culture of the urban middle class. (AlīpūrGaskarī, 2009, p. 13) The Tīhrān of this story is obstreperous; small and big autos occupied the city, and the tedious traffic gives a chance of chatting to the young idling passengers. Despite having multiple thoughts in her mind, the narrator precisely watches the city; her fragmented images of Tīhrān are like disorganized colorful pieces of a puzzle that is seemingly supposed to visualize the portrayal of a suspended anarchic capital.

"از دیدن این همه برج سر به فلک کشیده توی خیابانی به این باریکی مو به تنم راست می‌شود. به هیچ‌کدامشان نمی‌شود اطمینان کرد. انگار بین زمین و آسمان ول‌لند، انگار با تکانی کوچک می‌توانند مثل آب‌خوردن از هم بپاشند و فروبریزند." (سالار، ۱۳۸۹، ص. ۱۶)

"Seeing all these skyscrapers in such a tiny street, I'm filled with horror. None of them is reliable. Likely they are loose between the earth and the sky, likely they can crumble and collapse with a little shake." (Ibid, p. 16)

The attention and gaze of the protagonist towards the city reveal the undeniable attractions of this chaos. Tīhrān, comparing with the deprived hometown of the protagonist, appears to be so much absorbing and exciting that she, in her most difficult days, prefers to sit in her car and slithers into the traffic and the idling people of the town. The tumultuous Tīhrān, therefore is the sanctuary in which the narrator takes refuge from her fears and annoying memories, hoping to find safety and peace in this immense labyrinth.

Using continual moving back and forth in time, Sālār proceeds the narrative in three time-levels; the first level is the present time and the ordinary life-events of the character, second level reflects the character's past and her long friendship with Gandum, and finally the last time level contains recounts of her recent sessions with a psychotherapist. Since the main character of the story has mental disorder and fragmentation of the self, she remarks all of her thoughts, feelings and perceptions ruptured and unorganized. She constantly moves back and forth in time, so always unsettles the order of time... Thus, the narrative time and the real time of the story do not have any chronological adjustment, and we observe the fracture of the linear narrative from the very first pages of the book. (Durūdgarīyan, 2012, p. 10) Nevertheless, Author's delicacy in the arrangement of the narration, her control over the regulated presentation of the events from different time levels, and her commitment to maintain this arrangement give a harmonic rhythm

to the novel by which tracking of the events becomes rather easy for the readers. In this regard, she says:" when I was writing this story, following the rhythm was so difficult for me. The back and forth moves annoyed me a lot. Sometimes I wanted to explain more, but it was not possible because the rhythm would be totally broken. When I was reading the written parts I felt that to keep the rhythm, some parts have to be shortened or lengthened. Yet, most of the times during writing, when the story went out of the rhythm I realized. Anyway, keeping the rhythm was a big job and I had to follow it to the end of the story." (Sālār, 2009)

The narrational language of *Iḥtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) is simple and folksy. Like the previous novels in this research, this story devoid of lingual or grammatical complexities, uses a familiar language to invite the reader into the protagonist's mind. The narrator of the story is exhausted and angry, consequently like her state, her tone is overfilled with unfinished sentences, irate construe and frequently vulgar remarks. Avoiding censor, the author uses ellipsis instead of most of the vulgarisms, however, the reader can easily guess the words from the context. As an element, language in this novel has a proper function that has been attuned with the narration's movement in time and space. Using repetition, unfinished statements, and ellipsis, the author has approached the free-flowing language of the high conflict character. (Alīpūr Gaskarī, 2009, p. 15) Thus, the heroine's tension and dissatisfaction with her life can be directly understood through her words and tune. The audacity of the author in the usage of this language can be considered as a sort of deconstruction in story-writing by women; she has created a character who is educated and very concerned that her son does not learn obscenity, yet in her interior monologue she always insults and scoffs at people and things around. The usage of informal language that has been also observed in the previous novel *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muhib Alī, 2009) suggests that the new generation of female writers grant new rights to themselves; to use their own preferable language and to ignore the stereotypic expectations of the society regarding women, pudency and politeness. The achievement to this point reflects a significant level of self-reliance and self-confidence in story-writing of Iranian women.

### **About the Protagonist**

The anonymous protagonist of *Iḥtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) begins her narrative at the climax of her emotional crisis; the crisis of perplexity and impotence to choose a unified and permanent identity. The main theme of the story is the inner conflict of the character over the

concept of self-identification; throughout the story the reader witnesses her effort to terminate her long mental challenge about her identity. The bewilderment of the protagonist can be understood from the very beginning of the novel; the title of *Ihtimālan Gum Šudi'am* which means probably I'm lost. In the middle of her thirties, the mind of the character has been overwhelmed with a deeply-rooted uncertainty which cannot be ignored or denied any more. In the absence of her friend, Gandum, the narrator is plagued with self-doubt. She is totally uncertain whether her decisions, behaviors, and remarks are originally of her own or under the influence of Gandum. The narrator is not satisfied with the way she plays her roles as a mother, neighbor, friend and so on, however at the same time she is not able to change her manner and reactions towards others. Her friendship with Gandum goes back to the years of adolescence and living in the traditional and underprivileged city of Zāhidān in which good women were expected to be unobtrusive and decent.

"داشتیم میرقصیدیم. فقط یک لحظه... یادم آمد که توی خیابان هستیم و دوباره سرهایی که تکان می خوردند، لب هایی که گزیده می شدند، دل هایی که اخم می کردند، پاهایی که نمی رقصیدند، تن هایی که زیر بار آن همه لباس له شده بودند، و دوباره پوزخند و متلک، جیگرت را... چادر را سفت کردم و روم را گرفتم که یک وقت کسی من را نشناسد." (سالار، ۱۳۸۷، ص. ۵۴)

"We were dancing. Just for a second... Then I remembered that we are in the street and again the heads which were shaking, the lips which were bitten, the hearts which frowned, the foots which were not dancing anymore, the bodies which were crushed under the heavy clothes, and again sneer, prank... I wrapped my face tightly with chador, hoping no one could recognize me." (Sālār, 2009, p. 54)<sup>1</sup>

Despite the conservative and fretted personality of the narrator, Gandum was a brave, ambitious and disobedient girl whose character has deeply occupied the narrator's mind; and this occupation has lasted for years even after their break up; though, she promises herself not to think about Gandum anymore, her dreams, her thought are all about Gandum. (Ibid, 2009, p. 16) In the memories of the narrator, two friends have had strange resemblance in appearance, though unlike the narrator, Gandum's personality was charming and marvelous; her character epitomizes a euphoric girl, eager to enjoy the moments and apathetic toward people around her and their beliefs. This relationship that primarily starts with the infatuation of the narrator with Gandum, gradually switches to complex dimensions. The contentions between them continually increased... Gandum

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<sup>1</sup> English translation of the Farsi quotations has been done by the author of the research.

is characteristically the opposite of the narrator. She encourages her to do things that are considered to be indecent from the traditional perspective and the consciousness of the narrator too. Nevertheless, despite all the disagreements and tensions between them, the narrator practically has followed her advices and admired her rebellious character. (AlīpūrGaskarī, 2009, p. 14)

"قسم خورده بودم دیگر با گندم توی خیابان نروم، از بس که توی خیابان کرکر و هرهر می‌کرد، از بس که دختر به آن گندگی دلش می‌خواست از روی جوی آب بپرد، دلش می‌خواست یک قوطی خالی گیر بیاورد و یک خیابان با پاش تلق و تولوق قلش بدهد، از بس که مقتعه یا روسری‌اش همه‌اش فرق سرش بود، از بس که حای‌اش نبود کجا زندگی می‌کنیم و بقیه درباره‌مان چه فکری می‌کنند." (همان، ص. ۵۱)

"I had sworn not to go out with Gandum anymore because she always guffaws in the streets; such an adult girl always wanted to jump over the water runnels, and kicking an empty can throughout the streets; her headscarf was always loose; she was never concerned where we are living and what others think about us." (Ibid, p. 51)

Gandum is indeed the attractive personage that the narrator wished to be. Nevertheless, the similar appearances of the girls, their strange awareness of the intentions of each other, and the contradictory feelings, perception and remarks of the narrator about this friendship, gradually obfuscates the certainty of the existence of Gandum. Although in the story, the author provides persuasive detailed information about Gandum's family (Ibid, p. 27), throughout the narration we repeatedly confront with the state of intertwining of these two characters from both physical and mental aspects.

"حالا تکلیف این چیست؟ دو یک به نفع گندم یا دو یک به نفع من؟... چه احمقی هستم من! به نفع من بودن در واقع به نفع گندم بودن است." (احتمالاً گم شده‌ام، سالار، ۱۳۸۸، ص. ۳۹) و یا "انگار زیر و روم را می‌شناخت، انگار از همه‌ی سوراخ سمبه‌هام خبر داشت، انگار از خود من به من نزدیک‌تر بود." (همان، ص. ۶۴)

"What about this? Was it two-zero to Gandum or to me? How much of an idiot am I! On my behalf is actually on the behalf of Gandum." ('Iḥtimālan Gum Šudi'am, Sālār, 2009, p. 39) or "Likely, she knew me inside out, likely she knew me through and through, likely she was closer to me more than myself." (Ibid, p. 64)

Throughout the narration, so much effort has been made by the author to maintain the ambiguous intertwining of the characters, yet the oneness of these personages is identifiable. By keeping the

ambiguity about the existence of Gandum, the author has given a profound psychoanalytic dimension to the characterization of the protagonist. The most debated topic in the assessments of this novel was over the guesses of the critics about the real or imaginary existence of the character of Gandum. In a panel discussion for the book, Zarlakī, a literary critic, says that the character of Gandum was real, though (the story) finishes with an ambiguous game. She considers the relationship between the character and her friend a guru-devotee relationship between two persons of the same gender that was popular in the high schools of Iran in that era; "it was rooted in the limitations and deprivation of relationship among opposite genders ... it goes back to the cramped sociopolitical situation of 80s. (In the same-sex relationship) Usually one side has better characteristics than the other one; in this story Gandum is the better sample with specific features that fascinate the narrator." (Zarlakī, 2009) (Also look at Durūdgarīyān and others, 2012) But most of the critics who wrote about the novel have confirmed the fictitious existence of Gandum in the mind of the protagonist. The combination of social suppressions, family pressures and religious restrictions leads into the arousing of a second self that named by Sigmund Freud as "doubleness". It means alongside the familiar self, a strange comes out from her inner world. Freud believed that the source of these reactions is the unconsciousness. Dealing with the (above-mentioned) conflicts, the narrator of the story encounters a personality duality, so her failures, suppressed dreams, and things left undone because of the family or society become fulfilled altogether through the presence of Gandum. It means the unconscious part of the narrator's mind stands against the conscious part that is filled with the social norms; the point where the contrasts of the narrator with her other-self apparently begins. (AlīpūrGaskarī, 2009, 14) (Also look at Insān, 2002; Bahrimand & Tarākimah, 2010, Na'ibpūr & Varqā'īyān, 2013) On the function of this ambiguity in the characterization of the protagonist, the author says: "when I was writing this story, I was concerned with this question that where exactly the borderline between the reality and the imagination is? Because I thought some imaginary things could be part of our reality, as some realities seem to be imaginary. I did not want to clarify this borderline very much. Because the reality and imagination are not that much different at the end. Whether "Gandum" exists or she is just a reflection of the other self of the character, the narrator is concerned about her, and for me this was important not clarification of her real or imaginary being." (Sālār, 2009) The embedded clues of the text, some of which have been just mentioned clearly affirm the oneness of the characters, though the author intelligently succeeds to transmute this ambiguity to one of the most significant strengths of her novel.



Nevertheless, if resolving this ambiguity would be the main topic in the scrutiny of the characterization of the story, the main concern of the protagonist will be marginalized; even if everyone is suspected about the real presence of Gandum, the faith of the character in her being is undeniable because the presence of Gandum is the sheer blessing in her life. Gandum links the narrator with the world of knowledge and freedom; fascinated by her ambitions, the narrator studies hard and admits to the best university of the capital (Sālār, 2009, p. 54); influenced by her advice, she reads books (Ibid, p. 86); and in strange situation, the presence of Gandum nerves her (Ibid, p. 112). Unlike the narrator that is accustomed to bitterly surrender to the expectation and authority of others, Gandum's attitude toward others was an intelligent combination of self-regard and helping-others.

"گفتم: "من! من عاشق پدرم هستم، مادرم را دوست دارد، برادرهام را هم همین طور، هیچ مشکلی هم با آدم های توی خیابان و دخترهای دبیرستان ندارم."

گندم گفت: "دروغ می گویی. به جای این که هی نفرت تو خودت جمع کنی، یکبار جلو مادرت بایست و جوابش را بده، آن وقت راحت می شوی."

گفتم: "یک جوری از من حرف می زنی که انگار توی منی."

گفت: "من توی من هستم، من توی تو هستم، من توی او هستم، من توی ما هستم، من توی شما..." (همان، ص. ۴۵)

"I said: "I love my father, I love my mother, my brothers too, and I don't have any problem with the people in the streets and the girls in high school."

Gandum said: "You're lying. Instead of filling yourself with hatred, just stand in front of your mother once and deal with her, then you'll be calm."

I said: "You're talking in a way that seemingly you're inside of me."

She said: "I'm in inside of me, I'm inside of you, I'm inside of him, I'm inside of us, I'm inside of..." (Ibid, p. 45)

Accepting the oneness of these two characters, the narration can be best interpreted through a psychoanalytical approach as follow; whenever we observe the actions and reactions of Gandum, the brave, daring and ambitious self of the protagonist has been reflected, and the narrator's conduct in the story mirrors the self-restrained, timid and passive self of the personage. So, when the narrator is sitting in the corner of the room and watching Gandum dancing, the situation can be understood as follow; in the same time that the character is happily busy with the party and her body undulates to the thumping rhythm of the music, there exists an another-self in the bottom of

her soul who lonely and sad watches the other excited self, unable to understand it. Although no one can realize the profoundly rooted doubleness of her identity, her two selves believe in the existence of each other.

"چرا توی آن همه آدم فقط گندم بود که من را می‌دید؟ چرا فقط گندم بود که وقت رقصیدنش به طرفم می‌آمد و قبل از اینکه دستم را بگیرد فرید رهدار از راه می‌رسید و دستش را می‌گرفت و دنبال خودش می‌کشاندش و می‌بردش و من یک‌آن احساس می‌کردم شاید آن دست دست من است که گرفته می‌شود و کشیده می‌شود و برده می‌شود." (همان، ص ۸۷-۸۸)

"Why could only Gandum, among those numerous people, see me? Why only she came toward me, while dancing? And before she took my hand, Farīd Rahdār arrived, took her hand, pulled her following him and carried her. And then I just felt that maybe that hand was mine that was token and pulled and carried." (Ibid, p. 87-88)

The identity crisis of the narrator in *Ihtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) has been propounded as a mental battle between the two selves of her character, but the battle, the perplexity over the self-concept, is indeed between what the character individually wants to be and what she is socially expected to be. This is the very fundamental conflict between the individual self of the character and her collective self; the former one has been defined by psychologists as "one's unique side. It consists of attributes (e.g., traits, goals and aspirations, experiences, interests, behaviors) that differentiate the person from others. This self-representation is relatively independent of relational bonds or group memberships." (Sedikides & others, 2011, p. 98) But the collective self "highlights one's intergroup side. It consists of attributes that are shared with ingroup members and differentiate the ingroup from outgroups. This self-representation reflects membership in valued social groups." (Ibid, p. 98) Being trapped between her will of being a free woman and her social commitment to play role of a virtuous woman has given rise to her endless mental conflict for years. The fears of her conservative self continually got derided by the courageous self, and from the other side the energetic manner of Gandum irritated the narrator. These innermost struggles continued until the end of the university, when the character had to select among the two students who propose her for marriage; one of them was Farīd Rahdār, an attractive bookish who fell in love with the brave self of the character, and the other man is Kiyvān who has known the character as the most descent and shyest girl of the university. (Sālār, 2009, p. 50) Optimistic about the traditional lifestyle, she chose to marry Kiyvān. Her decision to choose such partner despite her deep emotion towards the other suitor reflects the dominance of social values system which

promises individuals tranquil lives. Nevertheless, the narrator's attempt to deny or to forget her disobedient self leads to a more intense crisis; the crisis of being lost and lorn in the big city; her experience of living in the capital, without the consultant and accompaniment of her more cultivated self intensifies her fears and doubts. Now, she lives in the modern city of Tihṙān whose young residents unlike the narrator, independently decide about the modalities of their relationship while the irritating social or religious constraints cannot hinder them anymore; between the occupants of this city who have been grown up in different cultures and lifestyles a huge gap exists that can be best understood through the deep anger of the character towards the freedom of youth and the profound indifference of young people towards traditional values. Tihṙān in this regard, represents contradiction, difference and even enmity; the reader thus can see the symmetry between the city of Tihṙān and the protagonist of the novel; the bewilderment of the character, and her identical crisis resonate in the chaos of the capital. The friability and the collapse of the modern human being, residing in a metropolis, can be realized through every word of the narrator. (Insān, 2011, n. p.)

"فکر می‌کنم به جهنم که حالا دخترها این قدر راحت بیلاخ می‌دهند و پسرها این قدر راحت از بیلاخ دخترها حال می‌کنند...  
به خودم می‌گویم یعنی واقعاً به جهنم؟" (همان، ص. ۱۷)

"I think I don't care a whit if girls show their middle finger that much easily, and if boys that much easily get a kick out of the girl's finger... I ask myself "you don't really care a whit?" (Sālār, 2009, p. 17)

Despite the heeds the narrator's husband shows for her with his continual phone calls, she is emotionally distant and detached from him. (Ibid, p. 50) Being a temperamental mother, the character is profoundly disgruntled with her behavior with her son, and the question of the sufficiency of her qualification comes to her mind again and again; is she a good mother or not? (Ibid, p. 21) Her perplexity can also be traced through her seductive manner toward a friend of her husbands who obviously tries to flirt with her. (Ibid, p. 35) Her tempting behavior is not just limited to a friend, since throughout the story we observed her trying to attract the attention of other strange men too (Ibid, p. 39) But as soon as running into warm responses from these men, her reactions turn into mild refusal. (Ibid, p. 39) In the absence of the rebel self, the character has faced an undermining self-alienation whose endurance is not easy anymore. Under the influence of such turbulence, she begins her days with drinking alcohol that because of avoidance of censorship has

been called as *water* in the novel. (Ibid, p. 111) Considering her mental fragmentation, the character's effort to forget the other self and her wish to peacefully continue the life with her descent self is abortive. The ignorance of the rebel self that once has granted the protagonist the taste of freedom and ambitiousness, is synonym with the disorientation within herself.

"انگار سال ها پیش گم شده ام، گم شده ام توی آسمان سیاه پرستاره ی زاهدان." (همان، ص. ۱۰۷)

"Likely I have been lost for years, lost in the black stellar sky of Zāhidān." (Ibid, p. 107)

The burden of the current situation warns the significance of Gandum's return. Contrary to the character's expectation, meeting a psychotherapist cannot help her. but through their sessions and recount of her mental captivity in the memories of Gandum, the character personally reviews her inner conflicts. She thus acts like her very own psychotherapist. Relying on her intuition, she finally discovers her vital need to the presence of her other self/Gandum. Consequently, all her recent efforts to run away from the other identity of hers become meaningless, and this time she consciously recalls her other self; after long time, again she visits the most important place and person that connect her to the past; the university's dormitory and Fraīd Rahdār. Walking through the dorm and evoking nostalgic memories of the lost days prepare the ground for the reconciliation with Gandum, and meeting Farīd Rahdār who once has been the admirer of the vivacious self of the character is the best chance for the revival of Gandum. The character's certainty in the necessity of the presence of Gandum gives an end to her long debilitating struggle upon her identity. Now she is assured that Gandum's presence is always better than her absence; her presence with all the pain that she gave to the narrator. (Ibid, p. 95) In the shadow of a peaceful accompaniment between the different selves of the character, the things that previously annoyed the narrator now transmute into pleasant issues that fire her life.

"فکر می کنم نخیر، تمامی ندارد، این کل کل ها تمامی ندارد، و چه قدر خوشحالم که این کل کل ها تمامی ندارد، که وقتی به سکوت می رسی و به خالی بودن و به تنهایی، قدر این کل کل ها را می دانی." (همان، ص. ۱۳۰)

"I think "No". There is no end. Our barnies won't be finished. And how much I'm happy that these barnies won't be finished, that you understand their worth just when you achieve to the silence, to the emptiness and to the loneliness." (Ibid, p. 130)

The revival of Gandum does not lead anymore to the perplexity of the protagonist among her contradictory identities, conversely her satisfaction of Gandum's being illustrates her deliberate choice of an interstitial identity that can quickly moves between the undemonstrative self and the rebel self of the protagonist. The advantage of her choice is reflected soon in her pleasure of embracing her son. (Ibid, p. 96) Relying on her interstitial self, she adopts a moderate approach towards her husband too; from one side, she does not try any longer to be known as a perfect careful wife, so deliberately informs him about her mistake of parking her car in a dangerous position. And from the other side she avoids to frankly tell him her inner feeling of being detached from him. (Ibid, p. 106) Therefore, after the years of wrestling with her identity, the character finally learns how to accept the contradictory aspects of her existence, and relying on her own consciousness she identifies the cure of her prolonged bewilderment and dissatisfaction in life.

## Conclusion

*Ihtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) recounts the process of construction, deconstruction and finally reconstruction of the identity of a woman whose inner world reflects the puzzlement of women in the suspended era between tradition and modernity; the women whose individual identity has been shaped by the values of the traditional society, and any fundamental confrontation with these values results into their own inner conflicts. The anonymous narrator of this story mirrors the uncertain individuals who are unable to choose a definite and constant identity within the historical intersection of the modern Iran that is a mixture of new and old do's and don'ts. In the meanwhile, the womanhood of the character intensifies her skepticism for this choice and any other choice as well; alongside their responsibility upon the general traditional values, women are also faced with powerful gendered norms that maintain their ideal identities stereotypic and banal. The penetration of the traditional norms into the individuation of women is very abysmal that, consciously or unconsciously, these norms become a significant part of their innermost impressions about the concepts of womanhood and gender identity. Confrontation with these norms consequently appears more as an inner conflict rather than an outer struggle.

*Ihtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) depicts the uncertainty of a woman on the threshold of the most important dilemma of her life; choosing between the social expectations or her own will. From one side the character is not able to live as a cherished decent woman who conforms the social norms concerning femininity, however from the other side the choice of being an

independent woman who lives her own way regardless of the geography of her community terrifies her of becoming separated and alone. The narration is therefore the story of the deep fears that are given to women by society to forewarn them of the probable consequences of persistence on their own wills. Yet, conforming to the social norms, soon or late, causes discontentment of the individuals, and they unconsciously and gradually detest the society. Nevertheless, Sālār puts forward a solution for her protagonist and other bewildered women who are wrestling with such identity crisis; the absolute necessity of consideration of the other self whose will is against the social presumptions, and providing balance between the different selves that exist inside every human being. Only such combinative identity can emancipate women from their mental struggle over the concept of individual identity, and grant them a peaceful life that moderately satisfies everyone.

## **Conclusions**

In the conclusion about the portrayals of seven selected heroines in this research we aim to survey the process, due to which, these characters faced changes and evolutions coming to different aspects of their characterization. In order to achieve this, we are going to study their individuality through their wishes, concerns and lifestyles, their social identity which gets its significance from their relationship with people around them, and changes to writers' tendencies in using elements of fiction, which are closely connected to story's contents. In the following pages, these aspects will be discussed in four parts; at first, we will observe who each character is and what is her ultimate concern throughout the novel which will then lead us to studying the evolution of characterization in terms of content and new themes that writers have mentioned in their woman-centered works. The second part will deal with protagonists' two-sided relationship with their male partners. This section is focused on the quality of presence and influence of men in the lives of different generations of women. The third part will concentrate on the triangular relationship between the heroine and her parents and we will find out that most of our selected works of fiction follow the same trend dealing with this issue. And finally, in the last section, changes in selection of story components in the novels will be monitored to show how correspondent to new themes and perspectives towards women's issue, modern literary techniques have been adopted by the women writers.

## **Change & Transformation in the Portrayals of Woman**

Basically, all the selected narratives in this research are realistic and deal with social issues; consequently, the female protagonists within them are depictions of ordinary women we might meet in our vicinity. Nevertheless, the historical silence of women and patriarchal clichés which look down upon women's world haven't let us figure out their mentality in a precise way, therefore, reading these stories is a unique chance for going further and entering the maize of women's mentality. These seven protagonists manifest the thoughts and concerns of seven female writers whose works have gathered lots of attention during the years. The fact that these novels have been reprinted and republished several times indicates the significance of their subject matters; subject matters focusing on women's issues which have tried to deepen the reader's understanding of protagonists' mentality through reflecting or recounting their inner world. The variety of characterization in these seven different novels is their most vital feature which denies the cliché

that women are all the same and share the same mind and mentality. Despite the characters' major similarity in experiencing a difficult life in the context of male supremacy, their story represents a variety of concerns, drives, features and tendencies.

Tūbā, the protagonist of Pārsīpūr's novel is a representation of a perfectionist soul thirsting for liberation from the shackles of physical life; just like a restless trapped bird, she incessantly crashes her tiny body on the metal cage of her life, striving for the miracle of freedom. In Tūbā's narrative, Pārsīpūr tells us about the imprisonment and slavery of sublime human thoughts in the claws of most inferior and wretched human instincts. Her restless and uneasy protagonist and her spiritual concerns manifest the very few human beings who move against the mighty currents of life in this world. She desires a superhuman life, craving for being reunited with the God who is watching the miserable human life while sitting on the pinnacle of perfection and excellence. Her portrayal reflects a unique and complicated woman whose moods and desires stand in contradiction to the time she lives in, a time which, in opposition to Tūbā's perfectionist mentality which thinks beyond sexual roles, is always forcing her to accede the passive stereotyped female roles. Thus, her whole life becomes a series of clashes between her spiritual desire, and her real life as a woman who deals with various problems in society and her family. In contrast to persistent Tūbā, in the novel *Ingār Guftih Būdī Liylī* (Šāmlū, 2000) we have the obedient and shy character of Šarārah who in her marital life used to represent a satisfied and peaceful woman whose only concern was to love and satisfy her husband. However, after the demise of her husband, Šarārah faces the ugly and ruthless world as an alone mother and this works as a great and powerful drive for her to gain herself an independent identity. As opposed to Tūbā, Šarārah doesn't possess an internal drive to move her forward; rather, it's the difficulties of everyday life which makes her stand on her feet. Nevertheless, Šāmlū's protagonist practices the rituals of self-reliance and gaining independence in a memorable and impressive way and through this process, the submissive wife whose only concern was to look for her dead husband's beloved, becomes a well-known artist who is only one step away from marrying another man. The protagonist's movement towards art dramatizes her search for individual identity by exploring the innermost psyche and the interaction between the psyche and the outside world. Through describing two opposite aspects of her protagonist before and after her husband's demise, Šāmlū tries to show us how influential social clichés are on the relationships between women and men, and also women's paralysis when facing the structure of these limiting relationships. Thus, the lost identity of women in a patriarchal society becomes the



major theme of Šāmlū's novel and throughout the narrative the writer promotes her narrator from the position of absolute passivity of a housewife to the active position of a motivated artist.

Some other selected novels are also centralized on challenging the passive female roles, and criticize the male-dominance that corrodes feminine power; for instance, in *Čirāq-hā rā Man Hāmūš Mīkunam* (Pīrzād, 2001), the narrator, Claris becomes frustrated and disappointed with her calm and peaceful daily life and her role as a devoted mother to the extent that she almost proceeds to break down her marital life. Pīrzād commences the staging of her story with a meticulous installation of an ordinary life set in a traditional family, and gradually, through shedding light on the soul and mind of the mother, the writer proves that the price for this family's peaceful life lies in sacrificing the individuality of the mother. In opposition to Tūbā, Claris has totally succumbed to the current that life itself has provided for her; just like thousands of other women, she has matured, married, given birth to children and now she must attend to the never-ending works of home and family. Meanwhile, she experiences a romantic turmoil from the side of a stranger man and this provokes her dissatisfaction with her boring daily life. Yet, her ideology in putting out the fire of this romantic turmoil shows us the image of conservative frightened mothers who prefer the peace and quiet of their home over anything else; mothers who have learned how to heal their inner wounds in silence and loneliness, and how to resume their repetitive daily life anew through subtle changes in their surroundings. The portrayal of the sacrificed mother is also mirrored in characterization of Farībā Vafī's protagonist; moreover, through refusing to name her character, Vafī puts her narrator's identity beyond a mere definite personage and manages to generalize and extend her character to a mass of neglected women. The nameless protagonist of *Parandi-yi Man* (Vafī, 2002) is a young and lonely mother with a broody past, precarious present and an uncharted future. Using the narrative techniques, the writer constantly tunnels back to protagonist's bitter childhood in her father's house, talking about her sexual harassment and the financial problems that befell her in order to tell us about the darkest aspects of femininity in the context of a male-chauvinist society. The narrator of Vafī's novel represents the deep and all-round oppression of the devoted mothers who are incessantly fighting various difficulties that fate has provided for them, yet they try to improve their mental status and family life with a high morale. But at last she loses to the patriarchal system because of being unable to defy her husband's tyranny. Nevertheless, her courage in facing the painful memories of her father's house is memorable and impressive and her success in reconciling with the past is a reflection of mental growth and

maturity in her personal gamut. Oppression and vulnerability of women in Iranian society and their inability to alter their somber destiny have been also thematized in *Az Šiytān Āmūht va Sūzānd* (Āqā'ī, 2005) by Farḥundih Āqā'ī. Through getting inspiration from the piteous life of a homeless woman who keeps on wandering in streets and alleys, Āqā'ī shows us the utmost humiliation and misery of a woman in metropolis of Tihrān. Among the selected characters in this essay, Vulgā is the most preoccupied one always exposed to the most severe social harms. However, her narrative is not just about homelessness, poverty and loneliness, because, in spite of being in absolute need of little donation from people around her, she always reminds the importance of her human identity to others and bases her life upon her own personal criteria. Her dogged personality reminds the endurance of Tūbā in Pārsīpūr's novel. Nevertheless, poverty and loneliness use up all her intellect and energy for just making the ends meet, and because of her gender she is more and more humiliated and violated in the course of this horrible fight. Thus, through recounting the story of this woman's unending struggle with a ruthless society that is reluctant to pay attention to her misery, without any sentimentality Āqā'ī has given the tribune to one of the most forgotten masses of the society and has shown the readers the extent of poor and homeless women's feebleness and misery.

On the contrary to the above-mentioned portrayals of women who have deeply suffered from male-dominant structure of the society and by and large accepted their miserable destiny, in the latter two novels selected for this research we encounter disobedient and rebellious portrayals of women who have a radically different lifestyle compared to previous protagonists. In *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muḥibālī, 2008), Maḥsā Muḥibālī tells us about the degeneration of a young girl called Šādī who, as a reaction to the unorganized condition of her family and her parents' ripped relationship, turns to drugs and all she cares for is finding opium and getting rid of withdrawal effects. On the contrary to other selected characters, she isn't suffering from an identity crisis or frustration because of her gender; the bitterness of her lived experience is a result of familial turmoil in contemporary Iranian society and parents' destructive behavioral paradoxes in upbringing the children which have resulted in genesis of a rebellious generation that is determined to disrupt all social relations and can't stand any type of advice or warning. The narrator of this novel is our only single protagonist and also the most eccentric one, who isn't afraid of anything, even death, and her sole reason to live, is the joy of opium. Despite her few diluted emotional reactions throughout the novel, Šādī epitomizes non-commitment, boredom and epicurean of a young generation who look down upon

sublime human values and emotions and define life as only a chance for instantaneous joys. Therefore, Muhibali's protagonist represents a human being who chooses self-destruction and forgetting the reality in a reaction to her disorganized society and family. This theme of rebelliousness against the society and its norms is also the basis for *Ihtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) by Sārā Sālār. In this story, the protagonist is an angry and moody mother who drinks like fish and her unconventional behavior with other men, whether acquaintances or the strangers, is in deep contradiction to codes of decency. Just like the protagonist of *Parandi-yi Man* (Vafi, 2002), Sālār's protagonist has had a gloomy past which still haunts her; it is also noteworthy that these two characters that are trapped in the past don't have a name at all. Yet, in contrast to Vafi's novel, in which the bad memories revolved around the father, Sālār's heroine feels the weight of a past on her shoulders which is completely related to her own personal identity and her struggling between the tradition and modernism; she is in a constant conflict between a dual identity which is on the one hand a woman in alignment with clichés of traditional society, and on the other hand, a daring woman whose behavior is beyond the obsolete gendered boundaries. The character's bewilderment in choosing between the two identities and her spiritual crisis resulting from this dilemma reflect a deep contradiction between the clichés forced upon women from the society and the unique individuality which is based on women's own personal features. Yet, in contrast to gloomy narratives of other selected novels, the protagonist of *Ihtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) succeeds in solving her inner conflicts and achieves an identity which is a peaceful combination of respecting her own desires and meanwhile, taking care of her responsibilities towards others. Her success in achieving an independent identity based on personal values and respect for her relatives, is a sign that being moderate still works and that women's flexible but tough mentality is sure to succeed. Therefore, the protagonist of *Ihtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) beats the maize of self-awareness with satisfaction; the maize that none of our other selected protagonists could get out of.

### **Changes in Men's Importance and Influence on Women's Life**

The relationship between a man and a woman has always been one of the most crucial themes in fictions that mainly deal with women's issues, because the imbalance in gender roles within a patriarchal society has always had a great impact on the lives of women. In accordance to the traditional atmosphere of the Iranian society and its powerful sexual clichés, the depiction of

relationships between men and women and the procedure of changes in power axis between the two genders within the selected novels can be accounted as an important theme which reflects the social status of women in the society. It should be mentioned that what we mean by male characters in this section is not limited to spouses of female characters, but here we deal with protagonists' relationship with significant men who have influenced the general attitude of our heroines and made remarkable changes in their lives.

Generally, in the first five narratives of this research, *Tūbā va Ma' nāy-i Šab* (Pārsīpūr, 1989), *Ingār Guftih Būdī Liylī* (Šāmlū, 2000), *Parandī-yi Man* (Vafī, 2002), *Čirāq-hā rā Man Hāmūš Mīkunam* (Pīrzād, 2001) and *Az Šiytān Āmūht va Sūzānd* (Āqā'ī, 2005), male characters play a bolder and more decisive role compared to the two latter novels, and the relationship between man and woman is one of main axes of in these plots. Tūbā's narrative among the others represents the absolute repression/submission of women by men throughout the last hundred years of Iranian history. In this story, Tūbā's father has the most profound impact on her by his religious education to the extent that he makes Tūbā desire the experience of mystical life as her major concern. Because of Tūbā's religious upbringing in childhood, at first a pious politician clergy called Mr. Hīyābānī and afterwards GidāAlīšāh, the pole of dervishes in that time, play as Tūbā's idols of perfection and as a result, meeting and having a conversation with these men becomes the most important wish in her lifetime. In addition to the presence of such men who form and reinforce Tūbā's mystical concerns, we observe the presence of other men as well along the narrative who, through their misogynist and tyrannical approaches, bring misery upon Tūbā's life; her first husband, a middle aged man who shatters Tūbā's character through his particular distrust in female gender, turns her into a depressed and indifferent being, and then comes her second husband who ruins Tūbā's trust in males and strengthens her spiritual turmoil through his frequent betrayals and total irresponsibility toward Tūbā and their children. Apart from the positive or negative roles these men play in the life of protagonist, they determine the quality of Tūbā's life, yet the only thing she can do is to remain in the historical silence of women and conform to conditions that these men provide her. We can also observe this direct influence of men over the life of protagonist in *Ingār Guftih Būdī Liylī* (Šāmlū, 2000). In spite of romantic sense and mood of the narrator and her husband, this man's shade of presence over Šārārah's life marginalizes her individual identity to the extent that the narrator could have never thought there is a grand life-changing power within her humble and dependent soul. Thus, this man's demise and the character's inevitable encounter

with a world without him, provides the substrate for development of her personality and transforms her identity from a dependent and powerless housewife into a famous and progressive photographer. It is interesting to mention that the protagonist's tendency to photography has its roots in elementary educations that her father gave her, and her recent artistic success lies in a man's encouragements who have kept on strengthening the narrator's motivation after losing her husband. Yet, in contrast to the bright future which Šarārah is waiting for, the disappearing of her son, her other man in life, throws her down into a bottomless dungeon of misery which she is hopeless to get out of. Therefore, within this vicious Sisyphus-like circle of her life, the protagonist is always destined to conform to conditions that men have befallen her.

The most pivotal theme in *Čirāq-hā rā Man Hāmūš Mīkunam* (Pīrzād, 2001) is the relationship between the protagonist and a stranger man in her life; the narrative begins with showing us the repetitive life of Claris and her cold marital relationship and then friendship with a different man causes her emotional and ethical struggles in the mind. At last, as the narrator finds out about Emil loving another woman, the recent encouraging relationship turns into a stupid misunderstanding in the character's mind which was close to bringing down her valuable and many years old marriage. Interestingly, the character's deep dissatisfaction with lack of excitement in her lived experience, goes away when her husband pays just a little attention to her and the novel ends with an almost unreal happy ending. Therefore, Claris' narrative is a reflection of direct impact of male behaviors on female character's situation; as if the character is in an absolute passivity towards the men of her life and can't defy being emotionally influenced through their behavior. *Parandi-yi Man* (Vafī, 2002) is also based upon a similar situation in which the marital life of the protagonist and her husband has become tedious after many years. Yet, in contrast to the happy ending which occurred in Pīrzād's novel, the gap between the man and woman widens in Vafī's story and leads to the complete emotional detachment of the protagonist from her husband. *Parandi-yi Man* (Vafī, 2002) takes place in a society in which the men avenge their failures in life through humiliating their wives and forcing them their demands; the narrative's father was an unreasonable ladies' man who used to bring his mistress home in his family members' presence and spend some quiet time with her. The narrator's husband is another representative of the same male-dominated mentality that shows his power in executing his selfish decisions which directly disrupt the comfort of the protagonist and her children. In the context of this established gender inequality, the woman's role is to eventually succumb to her husband's bullying and conform to conditions that he provides.

The intensity of harms inflicted on the protagonist's life by the patriarchal system reaches its climax in *Az Šiytān Āmūht va Sūzānd* (Āqā'ī, 2005). Vulgā's absolute homelessness and poverty in this novel is a consequence of her husband's unilateral decision to divorce her. Moreover, her life as a Christian woman living in a masculine system impregnated with Islamic ideology would not let her gain even the tiniest rights; consequently, her divorce works as an abyss that suddenly turns her from a mother of a home into a despicable wanderer who always wishes to see her son. In such a gender biased system, the protagonist is destined to live in misery and experience an unending sexual and spiritual violation. As we observed in these novels, women often have to accept whatever the authentic representative of patriarchal system decides for them, and their role is just to supervise the events and get ready to face the more difficult situations that this system provide them.

In the two latter novels of this research we witness radical changes in the performance of female and male roles; in depicting the collapse of society in *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muḥibālī, 2008) the writer creates a heroine who is a tomboy. This narrator is not a victim of sexual inequality because she grew up in a home where she had equal rights to her brothers. Her total lack of any concern throughout the story is a result of a deep frustration that has befallen the younger generation in the society regardless of their gender. In narrating the social turmoil and the imminent extermination of society, Muḥibālī believes that women and men are both equally guilty; she portrays fathers who are absent when their family needs them most, mothers who only care about their appearance and beauty in the most horrible moments of life and a bored younger generation who are seeking intoxication and escape from reality or have confused the life with exciting video games. In such a chaotic world, the protagonist believes that love and affection between women and men is just an absurd physical activity. As a writer who belongs to the post-revolution youth of Iran, Muḥibālī's concern in this novel is a proof that the social sexual gaps have improved over time and consequently, the writers have surpassed the mere repetition of themes like women's exclusion from society and their being destined to accept whatever their opposite sex asks them. We can also find the trace of a similar theme in *Iḥtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009); in this novel we are faced with a minimum presence of protagonist's husband and we only hear him through his telephone calls; a man who seems to be present in protagonist's life yet in reality, we don't witness any effect of this presence and just observe the prosperous life which he has provided for his wife and child. Despite the narrator's unpleasant teenage memories from living in a closed traditional

city, her current life in Tihṙān epitomizes the absolute freedom of a married woman who lives as she likes in the absence of his husband. Her eccentric approach to life and communicating with other men has major differences compared to those of other married women in this research; she doesn't believe it's necessary for her to answer the questions of her husband, engages in non-traditional small talk with other men, and at last, in order to put an end to her identity crisis, goes to meet her lover from old times. She strives for freedom from mental constraints which the stereotypical social system has erected in women's unconscious. Her goal is to select an independent identity which results from her own personal taste. Amid such a personal struggle, the narrator's spouse doesn't have a noticeable function; because the conflict of this novel can only be solved by the female protagonist herself. Thus, her situation in this novel is a reflection of women going beyond marginality and achieving the level in which they select their own identity. The pivotal significance of individual choices in character's mind and her independence in the novel reflect a crucial change in the extent of men's decisiveness and impact on women's life in contemporary period. Therefore, we can conclude that women's endeavor throughout all these years in achieving equality in relation with men has been highly effective, because the concerns of contemporary women writers, in accordance to their more moderate gender lived experience compared to previous generations, have led them to more basic and essential problems and their concerns nowadays revolve around questions of complicated human soul.

### **The Complicated Relationship between the Protagonist and Her Parents**

The protagonist's relationship with her parents is among the most challenging issues within our set of selected novels. Speaking of which, we have to mention before anything else that one of the most common similarities among these novels is the absence/early loss of fathers and longer presence of mothers throughout the lives of the protagonists. In most of the stories, this installation of characters is accompanied by cold, complex and sometimes hostile sentiments regarding the mothers on the one hand, and more emotional reactions and a sense of missing regarding the fathers on the other hand. In Pārsīpūr's novel, Tūbā is incapable of understanding her mother's mentality who is an uneducated and taciturn woman unable to manage her life. Throughout these hundred years of narrative, Tūbā's mother only appears in a couple of pages of the novel and we will not be informed of her destiny. However, in spite of her father's early death, his memory rings throughout the novel and Tūbā tries to get closer to his father's mind through reading the books he

left behind. Although Tūbā's father believed women are of incorrigible and shameless essence and treated his wife and daughters with humiliation, Tūbā's devotion to him never wanes and she always remember him as a faithful thinker. A more balanced manifestation of this relationship is also to be found between the protagonist and her parents in *Čirāq-hā rā Man Ḥāmūš Mīkunam* (Pīrād, 2001); in spite of Claris' daily visits to her mother and superficial similarity between their roles as stay-at-home mothers, their mental worlds are miles apart and their relationship is only limited to small talks about daily and routine activities of a housewife. Yet, in contrast to this feeble relationship, memories of narrator's lost father give her heart strength in happiest and saddest moments of life and remembering his silent face among his pile of books calms the character. The interesting part is that the narrator talks little and is interested in reading books exactly like her father and deems her mother's judgments about him as unfair and annoying. Traces of this kind of relationship can also be found in *Parandi-yi Man* (Vafī, 2002); just like Claris, the nameless protagonist of this novel misses her deceased father and is deeply aggrieved because of her mother's unkind and indifferent behavior with him throughout the years leading to his demise. Although the negligence was a way for her mother for taking revenge on her husband because of his acts of debauchery and promiscuity, the narrator never looks it this way, and the grudge she holds against her mother has resulted in a cold and irritating relationship which seems unrecoverable. In *Az Šiytān Āmūht va Sūzānd* (Āqā'ī, 2005), the identity of protagonist's father is unknown and her mother has had a very difficult life as the single head of the house which has deteriorated her condition and caused her acute schizophrenia. The majority of Vulgā's memories of her mother remind her of the fear she felt seeing her nervous and sickly behavior, instead, she wishes to get to know her father one day. The narrator misses her father, although she has not met him even once in her lifetime and memories of her ill mother that are mixed with fear are manifestations of the same recurring pattern that we observed in previous novels. *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muhibālī, 2008) is also a reflection of narrator's hostile emotions toward her mother. In narrator's opinion, her mother's attempts at remaining by her children's side and praying to God for help during disaster are all scenes from her insincere hypocrisy drama. Though this protagonist has no emotional attachment whatsoever to neither of her parents, as they both proved to have no commitment to their family at some time, the grudge she holds against her mother and her behavior are much more severe compared to her indifference toward her father who left his family on the terrifying day of earthquake. The last but not least of the novels selected for this research,



*’Iḥtimālan Gum Šudi’am* (Sālār, 2009), is another reflection of this relationship scheme; the narrator’s father has burned away his family’s funds with his addiction to drugs. Because of his early death, a life filled with poverty and misery befalls his wife and children and the mother’s endeavors for improving the condition were all in vain. Meanwhile, the narrator has tried to give her friends an honorable image of her father and always reminded them that he used to be a landed man. Yet, her mother’s efforts were of no value in her opinion and her lack of interest in her was so intense that she no longer pays her mother a visit after leaving her hometown and immigrating to Tihṛān.

Just like their mothers, the protagonists of these novels have somehow been exposed to the harms of oppressive patriarchal system of their fathers, and naturally, having such a wound in common could lead to mothers and daughters getting along well and establish a relationship based on sympathy and compassion. Yet unexpectedly, in most of these narratives the emotions of these characters regarding their mothers mirror their dissatisfaction and anger from their mothers’ lifestyle and behavior, whereas the characters like their fathers more, although these men accustomed their daughters to the preference of male will and treating them humbly from an early age through their tyrannical behavior. Answering this question whether these writers drew such relationships among their characters consciously or are these relationships a reflection of archetypes fossilized in women’s unconscious is naturally difficult and requires more studies and interviews with the writers. But the important point of this research’s conclusion is paying attention to characters’ complicated and contradictory emotions regarding their parents which reinforces this perception in our minds that the issue of believing in men’s rightfulness and superiority and women’s historical condemnation has grown its roots not only in society’s structure, but also in women’s unconscious; and belief as such which go back to the old history of mankind develop an inseparable composition of social and psychological issues.

### **The Variety of Narrative Forms in the Novels**

Except *Tūbā va Ma’nāy-i Šab* (Pārsīpūr, 1989) which has an omniscient narrator, rest of the selected stories are narrated in first person point of view. Among the narrative styles, internal monologue has been one of the most popular techniques among women writers. With the usage of the characters’ inner voice, the authors have relied more on mental reflection than dialogue; thus, the narratives tell not only what the personages said at any given moment but also what they have

left unsaid. The focus on interior monologue of female protagonists has provided an ideal situation for the writers to penetrate female psyche and unveil the reasons behind the actions and reactions of the characters and their hidden thoughts and emotions. Although in most of the stories the characters directly face an oppressive system which marginalizes and degrades them, the centrality of their perspective and voice throughout the narration makes their mentality worth to be heard and seen. Encountering the innermost world of these characters through the resonance of their fearless and sincere monologues, gives the reader a precise and clear picture of women's world and manifests the contradictions and complexities of their mind. Such concrete depictions of female mentality acknowledge women as individuals and discredit the clichéd gendered belief that women share a group homogeneity in terms of identity and mindset.

There is a variety in techniques of narrative time used in these novels. In Tübā's novel the narrative time of the story is both linear and circular. From one side, we deal with a time span of 100 years of the Iranian recent history where Pārsīpūr has tried to exhibit the modern history of the country through the lives of the characters who represent ordinary people of the society. From the other side, alongside to the linear narration of the history, Tübā's life as a mystic is a voyage in the infinite mythological time to achieve to the origins of the facts. In *Čirāq-hā rā Man Ĥāmūš Mīkunam* (Pīrzād, 2001) the story moves in a linear and forward movement where we observe the significant events concerning the narrator's friendship with a stranger man during a couple of months. Thus, being aware of what is going to happen in the future becomes the reader's most important motivation for reading the novel to the end. Yet in other selected novels, the narration moves parallelly in two different directions; rereading what has happened in the past and following up what is going to happen in the future. *Ingār Guftih Būdī Liylī* (Šāmlū, 2000), *Parandi-yi Man* (Vafī, 2002) *Az Šiytān Āmūht va Sūzānd* (Āqā'ī, 2005), *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muḥibālī, 2008) and *Iḥtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) cover various time spans in which the reader becomes aware of what is going to happen to characters on one hand, and what has happened to them in past on the other hand. Meanwhile, the events of past become fragmented memories and the character tries to regain her identity through constantly ruminating on them. The resonance of the characters' past varies in these novels. For instance, in *Ingār Guftih Būdī Liylī* (Šāmlū, 2000), *Parandi-yi Man* (Vafī, 2002) and *Iḥtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) while the stories are told in present time the narratives are based on memories. In these narratives every chapter is thus, a passage of uninterrupted thought; the thoughts are presented in inner voice form, several thoughts run into

each other as perception of different things crowd into the narrators' consciousness. Mostly the protagonists of these novels bear the memories of times that weren't so pleasant and that were perhaps even painful or traumatizing for them. But they hold onto them because the past is not over for them but has overshadowed throughout their life.

One of most important reflections of the historical changes in life experience of Iranian women can be understood through observation of narrative space in the selected stories. In *Tūbā va Ma'nāy-i Šab* (Pārsīpūr, 1989), *Čirāq-hā rā Man Ḥāmūš Mikunam* (Pīrzād, 2001) and *Parandī-yi Man* (Vafī, 2002), novels in which the characters live in a traditional setting controlled by men, the majority of narrative happens within the closed walls of houses and kitchens. Presence of these characters often in the frame of domestic space mirrors their subordination to the male power; they mostly pass the time where the patriarchal culture has regionalized and allocated to them; interior, walled and feminine space of home. Their attachment to domestic area reflects both spatial and social dimensions of the geography of female life-experience in the context of masculine society. Their life's locale is limited to home, so is their social space which according to social relationships of male supremacy has been restricted to family bonds. Domesticity as narrative space is therefore not just a platform where interactions occur but a context that both produces and is produced by, gendered assumptions and relationships. In this regard, staying at home becomes an important sign of female submissiveness in relationship with the male spouse. Consequently, in these stories home becomes the sanctuary in which the female characters experience life, and in its corners seek for an answer to their questions regarding life. However, throughout the latter novels such as *Nigarān Nabāš* (Muḥibālī, 2008) and *Iḥtimālan Gum Šudi'am* (Sālār, 2009) the narrative space is expanded to the whole city in which the story takes place. Under the influence of their needs or emotions, the protagonists of these two novels prefer to wander in streets rather than crawling into the corners of their homes. The home no longer soothes them. Instead, it's the crowded and tumultuous city which gives them a sense of security and company. Thus, the unlimited outer space is not the definite heritage of men anymore, but a common zone in which both genders can take part. Interestingly, among the selected narrations, the narrative world in *Ingār Guftih Būdī Liylī* (Šāmlū, 2000) is a mixed space of both indoor and outdoor; due to the heroine's total dependency on her husband before his demise, we mostly observe her passing time inside the house, while when she faces the harsh reality of being an alone parent, her romantic artless character turns into a determinant and diligent artist who enthusiastically works outside confining realm of home. Such

sharp contrast in representation of narrative space among the narrations manifests the great influence of the social presence of younger generation of women in the society and their increasing interaction within it. It reflects the expansion of female life-experience from a cramped four walled world into a borderless realm where women shoulder to shoulder with men, can practice freedom and equality.

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