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## TAHEREH SAFFARZADEH POET OF HUMANITY

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Tahereh Saffarzadeh is a committed poetess, thinker, translator and renowned university professor of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Her power of imagination, unique technics, mystic and rich content of her poetry has opened a new horizon in modern Persian poetry. For the last four decades her poetry has depicted the socio-political dilemma of Iranian nation as well as other nations.<sup>1</sup>

Tahereh Saffarzadeh was born in Sirjan, near Kerman, in 1936. Unlike many of the earlier women poetesses, she enjoyed the privilege of a university education. After graduation from high school, she enrolled at Pahlavi University, in Shiraz, and obtained bachelor's degree in English literature in 1958. After divorcing her husband (about whom not much is known), and saddened by the death of her

only child, she left Iran in 1967 for England and then to the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Upon acceptance as a member of international writing program at Iowa University, she enrolled for the M.F.A, which is essentially designed to enable writers, poets, painters, etc, to teach their respective fields of art, both in practical workshops and theoretical courses, at University level. For her post-graduation degree, she studied major contemporary world literature with a special focus on practical literary criticism and translation workshops, which were new courses.<sup>3</sup>

Fourty nine years ago she started her first poem *Rahgozar-e Mahta'b* (*Moonlight passerby*), were published in 1962 under the pen name "Mardomak", which means the pupil of the eye. It was based on the theme "God and poetry is my eternal nexus". As days and time passed this eternal tie of the poet became more and more compact. As a result love, grievance, birth, death and the ever existent history and tradition of human being came to her poetry frequently and a simple spiritual motive has become evident through these things.<sup>4</sup> Following is the poem entitled "Stranger":

I am a pantheon of feelings,  
and I will not hold you-Snowdrift of lies-  
I fear you will turn to ice the memories I cherish,  
remember of humanity.  
I am that lonely one who understands,  
the agony of loneliness,  
the silence of the tolerant,  
the wrath of the inflamed.  
But I never understand you,  
-all insouciance and silly cheer.<sup>5</sup>

The inner experience conveyed through this early writing is one of frustration. It is the embodiment not of wholeness but

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of separateness, not of integrity but of alienation. Her all ten short stories of *Bitter unions*, too, revolve around the theme of loneliness. The impulses and aspirations of the female characters depicted in these stories, like the poetic personae in *moonlight passerby*, collide with existing social codes and norms. Their relationships with men end in failure: they voice distress and agony rather than joy and gratification. None of the women protagonists are sucked into the solaces of conformity or domesticity; instead they experience a dilemma in its crudest form. On the one hand, they don't feel at ease with traditional roles and relationships. On the other hand, they find themselves imprisoned in depressing, mismatched alliances. Acquiescing to the limitations placed on them, they spend their lives mourning their lost freedom. Seeking refuge outside conventions, they find themselves paralyzed by doubt and guilt, disillusioned by the discrepancies between their romanticized expectations and their real experiences.<sup>6</sup> The poem titled "Lone Tree" epitomizes the forlorn and solitary tone prevalent throughout the work of this period.

A lone tree I am  
in this for reaching desert  
on this sorrowful plain  
I have no soul mate  
no one whose steps tread in unison with mine  
the friendly murmur of streams  
the happy rush of springs  
die in a space far away  
and my ear  
fills with parched strains of solitude.<sup>7</sup>

When she was in Iowa, this trip to America proves to be a formative influence. In her own words :

I must say my knowing and living with foreign poets in American educational surroundings - along with my contact with a lively and fervent artistic milieu - had an incredible impact on me. Witnesses to the evolution of my poetry were those contemporaries of mine, who did not suffer from sexist, nationalistic, or narcissistic hang-ups and viewed my poetry with a healthy and objective attitude.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, in *Chatre Sorkh (Red Umbrella)* we witness a change occurring in the technical form and poetic content as well as corresponding change in the poet's relationship to herself. She not only talks freely about her unconventional experiences and desires but also deliberately disregards the dominant standards of her society. She is a woman who wants to develop a self in the image of her own ideals.<sup>9</sup> She is for more uninhibited in expression of sensual themes. Actually, never again will Saffarzadeh make such open references to lust and celebrate physical love. Perhaps her being away from home, having a different category of interlocutors and experiencing the release afforded by a foreign language that does not invoke internalized taboos all account for the explicit voluptuousness of these poems :

Invite me to a sandwich of love  
I am tired of all the big lunches  
the big preparations  
the big promises

remember I am not the women out of Maugham's  
Luncheon

I am the traveler  
who has experienced the weight  
of too much baggage  
who only thinks of  
a light snack

light stomach  
 light memory  
 invite me to a sandwich of love  
 serve me in your hands  
 wrap my body  
 in the warm paper  
 of your breath  
 at the table of this cold winter night.<sup>10</sup>

The *Red Umbrella* contains fifteen poems in English, which was published in 1969, when she lived in America. It was famous in international areas. One of the most attractive poems of this book is as follows :

Death has come to the dinner table  
 the sound of teeth on the morsel  
 Is accompanied by the sound of the bullet  
 Which behind this same square  
 And at the beginning of this alley  
 Aims at your young chest  
 And spreads it like a table-cloth.  
 The morsel becomes a grudge  
 Becomes a bullet  
 And closes my throat.  
 My throat is closed  
 My throat is closed  
 Death has come to the dinner table.<sup>11</sup>

*Tanin Dar Delta (Resonance in the Bay)* was published in 1971. After that Saffarzadeh returned to Iran. The poet reflected her rebellion against almost 2500 year long monarchy and autocracy of the "Pahlavi dynasty" in Iran.<sup>12</sup> Besides this, the poem entitled za'dghah (Pilgrimage to My Birth Place) best expresses resentment toward society's injustices even at the moment of a girl's birth. This moves beyond the earlier sense

of confinement and pulsates with fury and a will to change. The Path pursued by the traditional mother - her acceptance of her lot, her inaction is rejected by the speaker, who, in the character of the daughter, seeks to appropriate a new version of life and identity.<sup>13</sup>

I have not seen my birth place  
 where my mother deposited under a low ceiling  
 the heavy load of her inside.  
 It is still alive  
 the first tick-tick of my small heart  
 in the stove pipe  
 and in the crevices between crumbling bricks.  
 It is still alive in the door and walls of the room  
 my mother's look of shame  
 at my father,  
 at my grandfather,  
 after a muffled voice announced,  
 "It's a girl!"  
 The midwife cringed, fearing no tip  
 for cutting the umbilical cord,  
 knowing there'd be none  
 for circumcision.<sup>14</sup>

*Safare Panjum (Fifth Journey)*, is the more transparent and integral form of the book *Resonance in the Bay*. It was published in 1978. Within two months of its first release, three editions were published and thirty thousand copies were sold which is the best circulation in the history of Persian Literature. The reader's devotion to poet is manifested through this.<sup>15</sup> One of the popular poems of the book is as follows :

The wing of the pigeons of the neighbor  
 with the touch of sunshine  
 goes past my window

seat on-  
 the Plane  
 on the design less wide yard of the carpet.  
 In the silence of my home  
 this movement  
 a regular game of appearance and departure  
 colored the villages.<sup>16</sup>

*Beyyat ba' bida'ri (Allegiance with Wakefulness)* was published in 1980. The writer nicely portrayed the aspects of life and death and the tradition and history of everexistent people. The poet's desire to be reality comprehensible make her rely on the familiar, the unambiguous, the cliché. By pushing her work into political events, she actually pushes political poetry out of her poems.<sup>17</sup> The following poem..

Walls have started moving  
 Walls have started talking  
 Walls of silence and surrender  
 Walls of servitude that hold up castles  
 bent walls of government.  
 From the blessing of the attack of masses  
 old walls  
 and middle- aged  
 these blind witnesses of yesterday's disaster  
 these mute witnesses of oppression and torture  
 have just started talking  
 they have just started walking  
 but now fast they can walk,  
 these children  
 who have just started talking  
 these old people  
 who have just started walking.<sup>18</sup>

Her another book *Dida're Sobh (Morning Visitation)* was published in the mid of 1980 to 1986 with a collection of 38 poems. The poet demonstrated her expression against social oppression and injustice, deception and autocracy through adornment of poetry:

The Shameless people with white eyes  
 live in the dark of torture and aggression.  
 The white and purity can only be dispersed from  
 the architect of light.<sup>19</sup>

Her cogitations and fantasies are more strong and empirical in the book *Daftare Dovvam (Second Note Book)*. The elucidation of the poet goes around the mind most of the time. There are 37<sup>th</sup> short poems in the book. The poet presented this enchanting book to the readers based on her experience and effects of India tour.<sup>20</sup> One of the short poems of this book is as follows :

The breeze of the dawn blows over the basin of the Ganga  
 carrying the ashes of corpses  
 Incessantly  
 wind tries to quench its brightness.<sup>21</sup>

In *Second Note Book* she ebulliently enumerated the life cycle of human being in the poem "Horizon"....

Father was my blue, Mom was ground and  
 I am the horizon  
 but my Geography teacher says:  
 Horizon is an imaginary line only.<sup>22</sup>

The inner experience conveyed through this early writing is one of frustration. It is the embodiment not of wholeness but of separateness, not of integrity but of alienation. All ten short stories of *Peyvandha'ye talkh (Bitter Unions)*, published in 1963, too, revolve around the theme of loneliness. The

impulses and aspirations of the female characters depicted in these stories, like the poetic personae in *Moonlight Passerby*, collide with existing Social codes and norms.<sup>23</sup>

Many people think that the poet is more spontaneous and efficient in long poetry. She composed nine of twenty four long poems after the inception of modern practice in Persian poetry by the publication of "Nima's Afsa'neh". Though Eliot, Lorca and Neruda were her favourite poets, she is distinct in style and philosophy in her poetry.<sup>24</sup>

Tahereh Saffarzadeh has published some fourteen collection of poems and ten books on the principles of literary, scientific and Quranic translation. She has presented several translation theories including 'the Scientific Progression via Translation'. She published the first bilingual translation of *Quran in Persian and English*, in 2001.<sup>25</sup>

In Dhaka in the international poetry festival of 1987 due to her creative contribution to the field of teaching translation she was elected as one of the five founders of Asian committee of translation.<sup>26</sup>

In mid-March 2006 Afro-Asian writer's organization elected Tahereh Saffarzadeh as exemplary personality among Afro-Asian women in the world. In the related declaration the reason for this election is expressed as follows.

Since Dr. Tahereh Saffarzadeh the distinguished Iranian committed poetess and writer is an exalted example for the muslim women, that all muslim honour her status and due to her political fighting background and her profound knowledge, this year she was elected to be celebrated by this organization.<sup>27</sup>

At last Dr. Tahereh Saffarzadeh, left for her heavenly above on Saturday, October 25, 2008, at the age of 72. Her funeral

procssion was held at the mosque in the Tehran University campus attended by a large gathering of scholars and admirers. President Mahmood Ahmadinejad in his condolence said:

I condole Iranian nation, the academicians and men of culture and arts on departure of master and artist, Tahereh Saffarzadeh .... may God grants her divine ascension the survivors patience and the society of cultural figures and artists success to follow her brilliant path.<sup>28</sup>

Tahereh Saffarzadeh couldn't be pinned down. The fascination with movement and mobility never ceases for her. In her own words :

This is the nature of the walk  
to go  
to turn  
to return  
to view and to review  
going leads to the road  
staying joins stagnation.

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