

Story writing in Iran and Arabic world

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Abstract: As the title implies, the present work is on trend of story writing in Iran and Arabic world. The author tries to develop a picture of the evolution of story writing in Iran and Arabic world. Short story was first emerged in Iran and Arabic world in 3rd and 4th decades of 20th century, when pioneers of modernism found it essential to trigger evolution in literature. In this process, authors were successful in utilizing modern Western techniques for narrating stories pertinent to their society. Gradually they emerged as rivals to their Western counterparts.

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Introduction

History of story writing in Iran and Arabic world shows that short story in Iran experienced faster development rate, whether in time or motivation. Consequently, Iranian authors play the leading role in the region.

Once known as story writing, narrative literature has a scientific definition and definite borders. It is now discussed as a scientific field and course. A routing life is of no value for being recorded and what makes a life worthy for narration are challenges and happenings which push the train out of its usual track. There are different ways for recording such events such as report, essay, diary, history, and most importantly story.

The gist of the issue lies with fundamental and constructive role of narrative literature in evolution and formation of cultural and literal heritage of society. In addition, there is a need to recognize and determine role of this type of literature in Iranian society and make a comparison with its Arabic counterpart as both have many in common.

History of narrative literature

Due to poetic tendency of Iranian and Arabs, story writing in Farsi and Arabic literature is not comparable with poem. This is why that there is no definite principle regarding narrative literature in Iran and other Arabic countries. Social and economic revolutions brought in social changes and led poem and stories toward taking more understandable tongue. Studying the trend of evolution and consequent results in contemporary literature might help us to develop a reliable understanding of contemporary literature.

First groups of Iranian student in the West brought back new beliefs and ideology concerning relation between government and people and many admired the Western civilization. Narrative literature in Iran and Arabic worlds showed first sign of

evolution and innovation at this age and introduction of new meaning broke the age-old boundaries of literature. Those who supported the traditional literature were challenged by new generation. Relation with the West also promoted publications, translation, and journalism as well. Thereafter, narrative literature, once part of prose literature, was also defined as an independent field of literature.

One of the Arab's first contacts with West was in 1798 when Napoleon invaded Egypt and afterward an invasion of European culture ample with English, French, Russian, and Italian words to different parts of Arabic words was triggered.

It is not reasonable to think that stories and novels were emerged at once. The fact is before modern story writing techniques, different types of story writing were popular. Indeed, story changes along with changes in society life and ideology. Sometimes it emerges as myth and once as drama, epic, biography, or novel. Modern society nowadays experiences it as movies and TV series. While dynamic form of story gives authors plenty of tools in their work, it also help the reader for better perception of literature.

To put this in another term, in spite of narration, story writing has a short history. As pointed out by Foster, primitive human narrated their day every night while eating prey meat. History of story writing can be traced back up to four centuries. (Foster, translated by Younesi, 1990, 32)

Modern and classic novels and stories were first born by Don Quigote of Servantes and short stories were first introduced in early 19th century. (Moam, translated by Degan, 1985, 327-328).

The effect of Europe on Iran and Arabic world in this regard is not deniable and the outcome is emergence of Jamalzadeh, Sadegh Hedayat, Jabran Khalil Jabran, Amin Alreihani, and Najib Majfouze. To open the discussion first an introduction on story

frame, types, and form is presented in the following section.

Story is a narrative text aimed to narrate realities or feelings. The term narration refers to any type of story (tale, event, and incident) with a narrator. There are two types of narration: traditional and modern. Concerning characteristics of modern narration (story), its logical structure, and absence of any presumption is noticeable, so that everything is created throughout the story.

The story (modern narration) can be classified based on two features:

1. Objective: entertaining or analytical
2. Volume and magnitude: short story or long story

By definition, the term "tale" refers to works where more emphasize is put on extraordinary events than changes and evolution of characters. Centerpiece in tale is an extraordinary event, which is basis for development of other events, and it is based on chronological order (Ajand 1984, 71). Another distinguishing feature between the tale and the story is that the former features a hero while the latter represents characters.

Both story and tale can be traced back to ancient ages where tales by Egyptian magician were common about four thousand years before Christ. Gilgamesh legend is recorded in 1400bc and Homer wrote his epic about 1000bc.

Studying modern story writing starts with introduction to short story. Bernard Mathews an American critic first coined the term in 19th century and distinguished it with the truncated story. The term "Short story" was first coined by the French and some believe in some difference between this type of story and tale. One is difference in form and structure, and another is content. In spite of story, short story is featured with well-constructed cause and effect organization.

According to Shams Langeroudi, the first novel in Farsi is Shams va Tagareh by Mohammad Bagher Khosravi. The work is in three volumes, which narrates a romantic and historical story. On the other hand, Ehsan Abedi introduced "the Story of Old and Young" by Naserdin Shah (there are doubts about the true author of the book, as some believe it was written by Abdolkarim Monshi Tehrani the monarch secretary of the king) as the first novel in Farsi.

History of story writing in Iran

Modern story writing in Iran is greatly influenced by translated novels and short stories from Western culture. A surge in translation was after Mashroute Revolution, which faced with considerable acceptance by middle class of that age before being promoted among the public. Iranian artists first started by

novels, which were under influence of travel accounts, biographies, political diary and translation of romantic and action novels. Their works mainly dealt with social and political underdevelopment of Iran's society with a complementary of criticism of the status quo and education system. Among the pioneer works were "Siahatnameh Ebrahim Beigh or trouble of his zealotry" by Zeinalabedin Maraghehi and "Masalek Almohsenin" by Abdolrahim Talboui. The second wave was historical novel featured with nationalistic attitudes. These works were developed around on honoring historical characters and galvanizing nationalistic emotions. "Shams and Toghra" by Mohammad Bagher Mirza Khosravi, "Betrayals or revenge seekers of Mazdak" by Abdolhosseing Sanatizade Kermani, and "Love and Kingdom or Victories of the Great Cyrus" by Sheikh Mousa Kaboudarahangi. The last wave was romantic novels with social criticisms that targeted social crises and disasters. Novels like "Horrrifying Tehran" by Morteza Moshfegh Kazemi and "Dark Days" by Abbass Khalili are some to name in this wave. Technical faults and being rather a report than a novel were some reasons why these works failed to form a reliable base for Modern Farsi narrative literature. This gave more room for popular novels and short novels and consequently, in spite of general trend of other countries, short story writers such as Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh, Sadegh Hedayat, and Bozorg Alavi developed modern Farsi narrative literature. (Mirabedini, an essay, 2010)

From historical viewpoint, there are three major stages in Farsi story writing:

1. Initiation and evolution;
2. Development and promotion;
3. Heterogeneity

Initiation and evolution was triggered in 1922 by short stories like "Yeki Bod Yeki Nabod" by Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh and, it went on by works of Sadegh Hedayat and Bozorg Alavi. Jamalzadeh was the one who introduced short story to Iranian readers and afterward was recognized as father of Farsi story writing by critics. Adventurous and tender structure of short and long stories of Jamalzadeh had profound effect on writers afterward, which was actually an evolution in Iran story writing. Many critics, therefore, believe that Sadegh Hedayat founded modern Farsi story writing. Variety of his works encompasses and creates a wide range of story writing, which affected others in different ways. However, global development of story writing, many innovations, translations of Western outstanding works, and ever-increasing improvement of Iranian authors and their technical knowledge have had undeniable effect on Iranian story writing.

Bozorg Alavi and his stories with defiance theme, after Sadegh Hedayat, also made a great contribution to Iran's story writing. His stories generally were challenging as the author found it vital to fight against dictatorship and thus many of them are feature with realism and criticism. (Mirsadeghi, 2007, 145)

In Post-World War II era, Sadegh Chobak and Ebrahim Golestan followed American authors and made a great contribution in story writing whether in style or in theme and technical features. Sadegh Chobak shows influence of Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and Erickson Kaldoul on his works, where situations and realities are naked and there is no trace of customary euphemism. He successfully revealed the reality of corrupted society and intrinsic needs of the characters.

After September 1941, many authors showed more interest on writing stories. Chobak and Alahmad adopted more colloquial tongue and Ebrahim Golestan and Azin later showed tendency to rhythmic and literary prose. Moreover, Al Ahmad led a trend of story writing that later evolved as leader of political – literary movements. This group of authors was known as “thesis-oriented” authors; they sought an ideology in their work and used their work as medium to transfer their beliefs. Along with Al Ahmad, Azin, Freidon Tonekaboni, Samad Behrangi, Ali Ashraf and Darvishan are some others to name. One of the authors of initiation and evolution stage is Simin Danshvar how was the first female author in narrative literature with “So va Shoun” as her outstanding work. (Mir Sadeghi, 2007, 146)

As the second stage, development and promotion of Farsi story writing was started after the 19th of August 1953 coup and continued until Iran's revolution in 1978. The stage was triggered by relative freedom of speech after September 1941, translation of Russian, and American works caused significant evolution in Farsi story writing. The magnitude of the evolution was not clear until the coup of 1953. Some of the authors of previous stage such as Al Ahmad, Golestan, Beazin, and Simin Daneshvar found the chance to publish their master works. This stage also introduced some outstanding characters in narrative literature.

Short story is still an undeniable part of narrative literature, though “Yeklia and His Loneliness” by Taghi Modaresi as a short novel and “Ahou Khanoum Husband” by Ali Mohammad Afghan as a novel are classified in this stage.

There are also some more creditable novels in this stage such as “Ahou Khanoum's Husband”, “Sang Sabour” by Sadegh Chobak, “So va Shoun” by Simin Daneshvar, “Deraznaie Shab” by Jamal Mir Sadeghi, “Neighbors” by Ahmad Mahmoud, “Sharab Khanoum” by Esmaeil Fasih and a short novel by

Hoshang Golshiri “Sahzdeh Ehtejab”, and “Yeklia and His Loneliness” by Taghi Modares.

Thirdly is heterogeneity, which takes its name after emergence of several literary movements; in some cases quite controversial. The faster and faster pace of changes in Iranians' lives after the Revolution formed the perspective of story writing at this age. This stage is featured with considerable growth in works volume especially by women. Generally speaking, there are three groups of story writers:

1. Official authors mainly focused and affected by myths, Hadithes, religious interpretation, and religious narrations along with political issues.

2. Modernist authors who tend to copy extremist quality of modernist masterworks.

3. There is a third group between the extremes of the two groups above who try to find a moderate way. Concerning quality, the major portion of works at this stage belongs to the third group. (Mirsadeghi, 2007, 147)

Contemporary Iranian Authors

Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh: by his “Yeki Boud Yeki Naboud” Jamalzadeh opened new path ahead of others, which was unprecedented. He took the first step in modern story writing and this brought honor of being father Iran's modern story writing. The main contribution he made was brining informal and colloquial tongue into the stories. Jamalzadeh adopted a specific style in writing ample with idioms, simile, hints, and proverbs commonly used by the public. (Aryanpour, 1978, 50)

Some of the features of Jamalzadeh works are:

1. Informal tongue; he is rather close to colloquial as used by the public, though his works have a long way to achieve independency, firmness, and flexibility.

This is the opening of “Shekar”:

“you won't find anywhere like Iran where good and bad are sentenced the same. After a 50 years homelessness and hardship, I heard a Gilaki rhyme before I could see Iran's territory from the deck. I was as if they have found a poor grasshopper, they were huddled up around the ship to win one or two passengers to the shore.” (Jamalzadeh 1978, 22)

2. Using idioms and proverbs commonly used by the public: this made a great contribution on popularity of the stories, while there are issues regarding difficulty in understanding: “indeed he is like a beggar, a pet cat or jew businessman how strives to get his money back or as tight as Isfahanies who you may never possibly get rid of.” (the same 111)

Admitting novelty of Jamalzadeh's style, this novelty is not evident in the content and meaning. Many argue that among his works, “Yeki Boud Yeki Naboud” is the only one of any value of a

story, while others are reproduction of previous works or sort of diaries. "Sahraei Mahshar", "Saro Tah Ye Karbas", and "Daralmajanin" are some of Jamalzadeh's works.

Sadegh Hedayat: As another main author of contemporary storyteller in Iran, Hedayat made a great contribution in evolution of Farsi Prose. Although, profound effect of society on his work is undeniable, his works do not target specific groups in the society. He tries to show his loath of empty and meaningless traditions and this feature leads his work to be national-biased with stronger concepts, structure, and technique. Hedayat's works are more popular with more effect on next generation authors. His humanistic and nationalistic approach made a great contribution on his success.

His style is simple and straight, ample with publicly used idioms and proverbs though he keeps balance in using them. He adopts a narrative and well-structured language in harmony with his characters. He successfully mixes Farsi and European styles into an easily understandable language for the public. His language is rooted in folk tales and he has done a great job in nurturing and reproducing the stories that makes his works effective on many other works. Regarding the content, Hedayat's works may be classified into two groups:

a. Works based on regret of hatred toward government and attention to low class of society, where people under social and economic pressures are at the center. His perspective in this regard is admirable. Haji Baba, Alavie Khanoum, Talab Amorzesh, Patriot are some of the work in this group.

b. The second group of his work mainly expresses the author's attitudes and his love to Iran, its culture and Iranian customs. In addition, he tries to express his thoughts and desires along with his dreams. Akharin Labkhan, Afrinegah, Dash Akol, Three Drops of Blood, Zende be Gor, Dark Room, and Blind Owl are his works in this group.

Hedayat's masterwork is the Blind Owl; a mixture of reality and imagination, where the imaginary characters resemble the reality. The story is based on reincarnation where human seeks their lost ones of the previous life. Next generation inherits emotion, rationality, revolutionary attitude, and aesthetic.

Some of Sadegh Hedayat's works are Three Drops of Blood, Rambler Dog, Chimp that its Master is Dead, First Day of tomb, Last Light, The Rock.

Story writing in Arabic world

Arabic word is known for its centuries of poems ruling Arabic literature. Amr Alghes the master of poets of under-civilization age, Mtbani the great poet of Abbasi era, neoclassic poets like Ahmad Shoghi and Aljavaheir and modernists like Nazar Ghabani, Adonis, Mahmoud Darvis, etc. continued the poem throughout Arabic history. However, poem has found new rival in the new age, which is novel and story. Arab society has introduced international authors such as Najib Mahfouz, Yousef Edris, Ghadetsaman, etc., who managed to break the unrivaled rule of poem in Arabic literature.

Apparently, Mohammad Hosseing Heikal (Egyptian author) triggered story writing in Arabic world in 1914 by his work "Zeynab". However, Bathine Shaban a researcher and ministry of Syria Refugees recently admitted in his research that "Zina Zeinab Foaz" with her work "Hassan Al Vaghib" is the first Arab story writer. She published her novel in 1998 before Hossein Heikal. The researcher is going to publish his work titled "Arabic Women Authors 1898-2000" by New York Publications. (www.rahenejatdaily.com)

To achieve better understanding of contemporary Arabic literature we need to go back to the roots of evolutions.

French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Egypt in 1797 (Aljandi 1976, pp.3), afterward schools, libraries, and journalism were developed in Egypt and many Egyptian found the chance to learn about scientific development and achievement all around the world. In 1805, Mohammad Ali Pasha sat under thrown in Egypt. He helped development of publication and journalism in Egypt and sent many students to Europe. In general, new style of story writing was triggered by establishment of newspapers such as "Al Vaghaei Al Mesrieh" – founded by Mohammad Ali Pasha in 1828- (Alfakhori, Biti, pp.844). Such measures eventuated in revolution of journalism in Egypt until 1875 when a wide circulation newspaper titled "Alahram" was established by two Lebanese brothers (Salim and Basharith Taghoula). The movement went on by publication of many magazines all with one common feature; to inform people about tyranny and dictatorship. Alhelal published by Jorji Zeidan one the magazines was established in 1892 with its motto "Move Ahead." Another noticeable change was translation wave in Egypt and other lands ruled by Ottoman Empire. The West and East collision gave Arab authors a chance to express themselves. In other words, journalism helps development of Arabic story writing. Generally speaking, there are two main stage of story writing in Arabic world. First, translation and adoption, which cut story writing from its classic frame. The separation is not perfect yet as the themes

are elements are the same. "Hadis Eisa Bin Hashem" by Almoayelihi is one of the works at this stage, which is a copy of "Maghamat" by Badie Alzaman. The second stage is when the foundation of modern Arabic story is formed through adopting Western style in writing. The Story of Zeinab by Mohammad Hossein Hekal (1888-1957) is one of the pioneer works where we can find matured story elements, while the work is not outstanding by itself.

Arabic Story and Tale

The two most dominant trends are "historical trend" and "social trend".

Ottoman history abounds with oppression and crime and the main body of society kept underdeveloped for ages. At those ages, journalism turn out to be an effective tool to galvanize the public against tyranny of Ottoman. Tales at this stage are mainly about history. Salim Albastani, Jorji Zeidan, and Farah Antoon are some of the authors at this stage. Salim Albastani wrote training tales full of adventures and extraordinary events (Zenobia Queen and Sargash-tehi Belad Sham) and Jorji Zeidan wrote 21 historical tales about Islamic narrations. (Khafaji 1957, pp.30)

A specific social narration is evident in Salim Albastani's work such as "Salmi" and "Asmae" which are based on accident and exaggeration. His characters are completely in service of the story and show no independency. However, traces of social and moral critic are visible here and there. The works by Anthoan Venghoula Hadad (1872-1916) show the same features.

Arab master storywriters: 1960s plays a dominant role in contemporary history of the Arab and its sociological effect on social evolution is undeniable. At this decade, all Arabic countries took great steps toward democratic system. In September 1965, they endorsed a charter in Alexandria, Egypt for unity against Israel.

Therefore, Arabic tales' perspective is mainly focused on nature of Arabic society and negligent to external factors – surely effective on structure of Arabic society after invasion of Western powers. In this regard, some politicians such as Seyed Jamaledin Asadabadi and Mohammad Abdeh took some steps. That is why that the main concern of Arabic authors is fighting traditions of their society; some dominant figures like Jabran Khalil Jabran believed that fundamental changes in Arabic society is critical for the movement against tyranny. The same idealistic approaches are evident in the romantic Egyptian author Manflouti.

To put it in another term, there is a paucity of narrative works in Arabic literature before June 1967 (Arabs – Israel war). Results of the war (Arabs were defeated) was a shock to the Arab world and reminded

them that they need to define their status in the world (Farzad 2001, pp. 40-41). Narrative literature continued its path toward development and finally shocked the world of literature when Najib Mahfouz won the Nobel Prize in 1988. The point was the Nobel winner was from a culture with no considerable history in narrative literature and was indebted to Europe for their success in the literature. In other words, Egypt is the home of Arabic novel and Najib Mahfouz is the founder of modern Arabic novel (Aldsoughi, 1997, 190). However, there are differences in novel writing between Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, while Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and African-Arabic country follow Egyptian school. Thanks to publication development, Egypt is pioneer of novel writing among other Arabic countries. In fact, Egyptian newspapers such as Alahram acted as tribune for Arabic novel, while Arabic countries in Persian Gulf region started their work after oil exploration and formation of middle class. At any rate, contemporary Arabic countries all have introduced noticeable authors to the world.

Amin Alrehani a Lebanese author was born in 1876; he was one of the top Lebanese scholars with global thoughts and concerns. He dreamed about concepts such as establishing a united Arabic Empire. He is known as Arabic neo-poet who fought against tyranny, and in spite of Jabran Khalil he was rather realistic and tried to keep his work from romantic and sophistic thoughts. Youth issues, poverty, and underdevelopment of Arabic worlds are the main themes of his works. His stories are, in some cases, criticism and training in some other cases. Almahalefat Alsalsiat, Alrihaniat, and Alghomiat are some of his noticeable works. (Albert Alreyhani, 1987, 34)

Knowing the undeniable role of translation in emergence of Arabic narrative literature, what follows is a brief introduction to translation:

Some believe that translation was mainly aimed to help the Arab society and to let the Arabic Nations have access to literary masterworks. Recent translation trend was started in 1798.

At its early days, there was no evident trend and purpose in translation works. Gaining revenue was the main reason for translation and translated works were in contrary with common Arabic culture. This deprived the authors of that age from a reliable source for training and growing. Gradually, authors criticized the general trend of translation and started to compose domestic stories based on domestic raw materials. However, profound effect of some translators in Arabic literature is undeniable. Michael Naeim says "although it is not easy to devour and analyze the great invasion of Western literature, we are passing the age of dependency with high pace. In addition, we

have learned what is good for us among the options provided by the Western culture as we also know how to manipulate it for better usage.” (Naeimeh, 1998, pp. 4).

Conclusion

We discussed that geographical vicinity and many common religious, historical, and social features have created considerable ties between Iran and Arabic world. One of these ties is evident in literature.

Similarities of narrative literature of Iran and Arabic world are undeniable; the similarities can also be found from chronological viewpoint. Comparison of narrative literature between Iran and Arabic world showed that in spite of being home to masterworks such as “*Kelile va Demne*” and “*One thousand and one night*,” narrative literature in the region is in its early days and under great effect of the West (Aboheif 2004, 51). Story writing was triggered in both territories after translation of Western works. French literature among other played the dominant role in this regard. One of common features between the two territories is the role of political/social events in leading the literature movements. Mashroutiat movement and Iran’s Revolution on one side, and Napoleon invasion to Egypt, political/military defeat of Arab nations in June 1967 and 1982, and Resistance movement in Arabic world played undeniable role in evolution of narrative literature in Iran and Arabic world.

Of other common feature between the two nations is the role of journalism and narrative literature rings, which played considerable role in navigating ideologies and styles in narrative literature field.

In summary, it is noticeable that Arabic story and novel movement is on the same path of Arabic literature, while no connection between classic and modern Farsi literature can be found in the last two centuries. One reason is deeper effect of vanguard Western movement on Farsi literature, which has eventuated in a chaos. However, both cultures have showed noticeable growth in narrative literature.

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