

# Symbolism in Contemporary Persian Poetry

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**Abstract**—Both external and internal constraints placed on a poet lead to discerning a trace of ambiguity and symbolism in literary works. The trace of symbolic approach to the contemporary poetry was extensively found in the works of either political or social poets during the era of Shah of Iran. Some symbols occurred at a higher frequency in particular when natural phenomena were being adopted as symbols while conveying symbolically identical messages in the majority of poets' poetry. Nevertheless, enjoying their innovative strength, sense of creativity and implementing the novel approach to phenomena, the poets created the exclusive and unique symbols in terms of their local words. The other poetic works have been produced without a trace of such characteristics within a history span of poetry. Symbols featured in defamiliarization are regarded as the most literary and artistic ones in the poetry of contemporary era.

**Keywords:** Contemporary, Iran, Poem, Symbol

## I. INTRODUCTION

**I**N Persian literature, Symbolism begins with epic and mystical literature; because there was no choice to express mystical experiences except through formal language.

Some of them are [1]: Phoenix, the sun and king (symbol of God);

Hair, spots, lines, stature and other physical beauties (signs of Allah);

Canebrake and the sea (the spiritual world);

Drops, sun rays, dust particles (mankind);

The mythic word Mount Qaf, mirror and Jam's bowl which showed secrets in primitive Iranian's belief (heart);

Jesus's needle, the needle that Jesus had been stopped from Ascension in the fourth heaven, because of it (worldly attachments and fondness).

The current article lays its emphasis on symbols of the utmost importance in Iranian contemporary poets' works irrespective of their uniqueness or generalities. These symbols are a variety of types; identical, dissimilar and even antithetical ones. Furthermore, established either personally or politically, the motives of employing symbols and the diversity of poets' sentiments on what some words denote as symbols have been regarded. Finally, an analysis was conducted to evaluate the utilization of creativity in symbolic language. The symbols applied in contemporary poetry mostly

belong to the era of King Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (The former Shah of Iran) which seems to be the result of Pressure and censorship by the government that caused ambiguity and symbolism in poem.

The high frequency of some words in poetry according to the structure of poems and political ideas of poets proves that these words are symbolic. Most of these symbols are based on nature and natural phenomena, which have been widely used to show the real situation

The cold and annoying winter is symbol of injustice in the era Pahlavi through which poets who disapproved of the lack of freedom of expression and thoughts were waiting for spring of freedom and improvement the situation:

One of the most famous poets, Shamloo, believed winter failure was symbol of Shah's defeat.

Vartan (political prisoner) was a violet// blossomed and went giving good news: the winter was breaking. [2]

Akhavan, another famous poet, has written a verse called The Winter. It has two layers; it explicitly describes the freezing cold season and symbolically criticizes the government:

It's winter// the weather is upset, the doors are closed, the hands are hidden // the breathes are cloudy, hearts are tired and sad // the trees are crystalline icy skeletons // the earth is damp, the sky roof is short // Sun and Moon are misty // It is winter. [3]

Akhavan has a poetry called the garden without leaves which describes autumn. Fall in this poem symbolizes Iran in the era of Shah.

The garden without leaves// is always lonely// with its sad, pure silence//rain (tears) is its fife// wind (groan) is its song//It tells story of fallen fruits on the ground (people who are slain for freedom)// it moves with its yellow horse (army)// the king of seasons; autumn [4].

**Abstract:** In the Iranian ancient literature it was believed that t Night in political poetries symbolizes dark and despotic regime of Shah.

Nima Yooshij: It is night// with lots of darkness [5].

Akhavan: It is night// cruel and worriless// but close to dawn [4].

Shamloo: Night sang with its bloody throat. Night and river of stars// which moves coldly [6].

Farokhzad, another famous poet, which is rejected by traditional society, sees night, fall and winter as symbols of her personal cold lonely life without any light, love and warmth, full of pain and silence:

Autumn! The gloomy smile,

Autumn! The baleful melody [7].

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This is me// the only woman at the beginning of a cold season// and simple and sad despair of the sky// the wind blows//This is the beginning of destruction.

I'm talking from deep night// and deep darkness [8].

In lots of poetries, spring and rain symbolizes justice, welfare, safety and betterment in the society.

Nima Yooshij (father of modern poetry in Iran) sees his country like a dry farm that needs rain and asks Darvag about time of rain. (Darvag is a local word which means green frog. people in the north of Iran say it heralds the rain):

Darvag!(critic and aware of politic), The messenger of cloudy days!// When will it rain?[9]

If rain falls during the storm, symbolizes rebellion and causes fear.

It announces rain and storm and I am frightened [10].

Sepehry, the famous poet adopts another approach to rain, it is scraper of impurity:

We should take thought and memory under the rain [11].

Most poets have got independence in thought and style. They don't imitate. They create special and unique symbols because of their different views:

Morning (symbol of future and freedom), cold winds (resistances of Nima Yooshij's theories), birds (poets) , Qoqnoos, The legendary bird which burns itself and another little Qoqnoos comes through the ashes.( Nima Yooshij himself) are used in Nima Yooshij's poem [5].

Nima Yooshij uses plenty of local words in his poetry as symbols. This way is important to enriching the formal language and literature of every country. Maybe it's one of poet's duties.

In Nima Yooshij's poem, Kak ki( local word used in the north of Iran, means bull) symbolizes the ones who have left their origin or home and they are dissatisfied, so they wish to return there:

It is so long that Kak ki (bull) has been yelling in the silent brushwood/ he is lost // meadow seems to be a prison for him// he is restless// although he seems strong and healthy [12].

Akhavan wrote a verse called inscription. It tells a story of some captive people who saw a huge boulder, it was written a secret on it:

"The ones who turn me over will know my secret". People decided to turn it over, finally, they did it, but unexpectedly they saw the same sentence [4].

The inscription symbolizes all governments of all over the history. Always governments and their diplomacy and policy are changing but there is no good change in people's lives. The atmosphere of this tale seems disappointing and grim.

Sepehry's specific symbols are mostly spiritual and mystical. He has his particular view of theosophy. He loves nature and believes it's the best method and shortest way to God:

The copse (spirituality); Swallow (intrapersonal recognition); nowhere (this world); apple (life); jackdaw, vulture and worm (the negligible creatures that everyone must respect them, because all creatures are necessary for nature) and so on [11].

Farokhzad's specific symbols are mainly about her personal life. She hardly ever uses political words. The atmosphere of her poems is full of sadness, despair and dissatisfaction: Sparrow (simplicity, frank and friendship); the light (love, hope and happiness); bird (corporality); flying (art):

Remember flying// all birds will die [8].

In Some cases, poets use similar symbols; window symbolizes new point of view and better life:

Sepehry: the window, thought, air, love and earth belong me [11].

Farokhzad: one window to see// one window to hear// I take refuge beside the window// I have a relationship with sunshine [8].

Sometimes the poets look at natural phenomena differently but write dissimilar symbols;

Lily in Nima Yooshij's poem symbolizes a lover who needs his sweetheart to initiate spiritual development in his life.. Sepehry use lily for spiritual side of life:

Nima Yooshij: Just the same time when lily is trying to make cypress her lover// if you think about me or not// I can't stop thinking about you [5].

Sepehry: maybe it's our job to run toward the song of the truth // between lily and century [11].

Defamiliarization, is the most important point in symbolism. In this artistic technique, poet uses unfamiliar way to describe things and makes the audience to see objects from unusual perspective

Nima Yooshij says: my home is cloudy. Home symbolizes Iran and cloudy shows bad situation of society [5].

Farokhzad asks her guest to bring her a small opening (new sight) as a gift:

If you are coming to my place// bring me a lamp// and window// I want to see pleasure [8].

Sepehry says: my pillow is filled with sounds of swallow feather (an inward trip) [11].

Symbolism in Persian literature starts with epic and mystical literature in 11th century. In contemporary Persian literature, poets have used plenty of symbols to express their feelings and thoughts from new perspective. One more time Nature has been considered by poets not just for describing but for symbolizing.

Most symbols in poetries belong to Shah Era and they are mostly political words, so there is kind of intentional ambiguity in them. Personal motives or political and social reasons have given vague expression to poetries. Poems have got two layers and multiple possible meanings, so they can be read in divergent ways.

In contemporary literature, defamiliarization cause literary ambiguity and readers enjoy discovering meanings and construing them.

Although some symbols are similar and some are different, most of them are artistic and will stay on Iranian minds and tongues

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