



Shams Jahān [Shamsī] Kasmāyī Yazdī

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Introduction

Shams-i Kasmāyī is a prominent figure in contemporary Persian poetry; however, her poetic language and thought have not received considerable attention, for various reasons. Although her ancestry can be traced back to Gilan and the Kasmā region, she was born in Yazd. Due to her husband's profession, she moved to Eshqabad, and lived for a time in Turkestan under Tsarist Russian rule, where she learned Russian and engaged in cultural and literary activities. The significance of her cultural activities brought her recognition and appreciation from the Iranian government. However, her husband's financial bankruptcy forced them to relocate to Tabriz, where her literary talent flourished further. She became one of the literary elites of Tabriz, contributing works to the local press and aligning herself with political and intellectual companions, including the famous poet of the Constitutional era, Taqī Raf'at. Nevertheless, after the assassination of Taqī Raf'at and the death of her husband, she returned to Yazd and eventually spent the last years of her life in Tehran, continuing her intellectual and literary activities. However, despite her prolific literary career, she left relatively few documents.

Shams-i Kasmāyī was influenced by modernity and receptivity to the evolving literature of the contemporary world. Her most important innovation in contemporary Persian poetry was breaking away from the traditional forms of ancient poetry, in-

cluding rhyme and meter, as did her successor Nīmā Yūshīj. This initiative was a result of the years she spent abroad and her familiarity with literature beyond Iran. The poems she composed during her stay in Tabriz, especially those published in the journal *Āzādīstān*, are among the earliest expressions of modernism in Persian poetry. However, her remaining poems indicate that she was still at the beginning of her artistic journey, and her poetry lacks the technical and prosodic characteristics of Nīmāic modern poetry, a style of poetry innovated by the modernist Iranian poet Nīmā Yūshīj.

¹Muhammad Mahdī Zamānī and Kūrūsh Safavī, “Sabk-shināsī-yi intiqādī-yi shī‘r-i Shams-i Kasmāyī [Critical stylistics of Shams-i Kasmāyī’s poetry], *Matn-pazhūhī-yi adabī* 22, no. 77 (Fall 1397/2018): 7–31.

²Yahyā Āriyanpūr, *Az Sabā tā Nīmā* [From Sabā to Nīmā], vol. 2 (Tehran: Zavvār, 1387/2008): 456, 458.



Figure 1- From left: Portrait of Shams-i Kasmāyī Kasmāyī with her husband.

Research Agenda

Although Shams-i Kasmāyī’s life and activities have not yet been the subject of an independent book, several articles have examined her character and her poems. Among those are Muhammad Mahdī Zamānī and Kūrūsh Safavī’s article “Sabk-shināsī-yi intiqādī-yi shī‘r-i Shams-i Kasmāyī” [Critical stylistics of Shams-i Kasmāyī’s poetry],¹ and Yahyā Āriyanpūr’s book *From Sabā to Nīmā* [From Sabā to Nīmā].² Sīrūs Shukūhī Barādarān’s article “Shams Kasmāyī: Nahādgār-i khisht-i nakhustīn-i shī‘r-i naw va nidāgar-i andīshah’hā-yi islāhī-yi dawrān-i Qājār” [Shams Kasmāyī: Founder of the first brick of mod-

³Širūs Barādarān Shukūhī,
“Shams Kasmāyī: Nahādgar-i
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yi islāhī-yi dawrān-i Qājār”
[Shams Kasmāyī: Founder of
the first brick of modern poetry
and advocate of reformist ideas
in the Qājār era], *Rahāvard-i
Gīl*, no. 6 (Spring and Summer
1385/2006): 75-91.

ern poetry and advocate of reformist ideas in the Qājār era], also sheds some light on her work. the works of this Persian poet.³

Nevertheless, due to a lack of access to primary sources about this pioneer of modern Persian poetry, these studies have only examined certain aspects of her personal and intellectual character. One of the major challenges in studying Shams-i Kasmāyī is the difficulty of locating her work. Some of her poems can be found in contemporary collections or in journals such as *Āzādīstān* (Khurdād 31/June 21, Murdād 2/July 24, and Tīr 23/July 14, 1299/1920), *Jahān-i Zanān*, *Rūznāmah-yi Tajaddud*, *Īrān-i Naw*, *Shukūfah*, and others to which she submitted her work during her lifetime.

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Most existing works about Shams-i Kasmāyī are extrapolations from the few pages that Yahyā Āriyanpūr wrote in *Az Sabā tā Nīmā*. Despite numerous efforts, archival documents that reflect Shams-i Kasmāyī’s poems have not been found. The few poems that were published in the contemporary press are also difficult to access given the limitations of Iranian media archives.

Shams-i Kasmāyī’s Era

During Shams-i Kasmāyī’s lifetime, Iran was undergoing significant historical changes. Iranian society was influenced by the political atmosphere of the post-Constitutional Revolution,



the occupation of Iran by Russia and England, the failure of Constitutionalism due to foreign intervention, internal tensions, and other events resulting from World War I and its aftermath. This political context had a profound impact on the thoughts and ideas of intellectuals in Iran.

⁴Muhammad Rizā Turābī, *Shams Kasmāyī: Shā'irah-'ī bī-daftar va dīvān* [Shams Kasmāyī: A poetess without a collection or divan] (Tabriz: Qālānbūrd, 1398/2019): 15.

It can be argued that during this era, intellectuals devoted a considerable portion of their works to the political atmosphere, concepts of modernity, and the new ideas shaping Iran after the Constitutional Revolution. In his book *Shams Kasmāyī: Shā'irah-'ī bī-daftar va dīvān* [Shams Kasmāyī: A poetess without a collection or divan], Muhammad Rizā Turābī discusses the influence of the literature of the Constitutional period on the political context: "Literature, in general, is primarily a reflection of political revolutions, and literary movements always follow political movements. Secondly, each period has its specific characteristics."⁴ Therefore, understanding Shams's era and the major political events of that period is essential for identifying her poems and analyzing the content and style of her works.

Shams-i Kasmāyī (1262/1883 – Mihr 12, 1340/October 4, 1961) witnessed the rule of several Qājār kings and two Pahlavī monarchs. She lived through the final decade of Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh's reign, the entire reigns of Muzaffar al-Dīn Shāh, Muhammad 'Alī Shāh, Ahmad Shāh Qājār, and Reza Shah Pahlavī, and nearly two decades of the rule of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavī. This 80-year span of contemporary Iranian history encompassed significant and influential events such as the Constitutional Revolution and its aftermath, the coup d'état of Reza Khān in 1299/1921, various uprisings such as the street riots and Āzādīstān, Junbish-i Jangal (the Jungle Movement), the fall of the Qājār dynasty, the emergence of the Pahlavī era, and other political and social transformations in Iran, each of which profoundly influenced the thoughts, ideas, and literature of the period.

Iranian literature also witnessed significant changes during this

⁵Shams-i Kasmāyī, “Maktūb-i yik khānūm-i musalmān az ‘Ishq’ābād-i Rūsiyah” [An epistle from a Muslim woman in Ishqabad in Russian], Iran-i Naw; as quoted in Rahīm Ra’īsniyā, “Shams-i Kasmāyī”, Chīstā, no. 246 (Isfānd-Farvardīn 1386-1387/ March-April 2007-2008): 450–451.

era. Following a decline in Persian poetry during the Safavīd period, a fresh spirit emerged in Persian literature during the Qājār era, and narrative literature, poetry, colloquial literature, memoir writing, and other literary genres experienced a resurgence in the Nāsirī period. The trajectory of progress in modern literature and Persian poetry during the Qājār era, especially in its later stages, continued to be influenced by European literature. Each political and social event, especially the Constitutional Revolution, contributed to the creation of new content in the discourse of Iranian writers. The interaction with Europeans in Iran and the infiltration of their ideas into the minds of the intellectual and literary class also played a role. Dialogical expression remained a primary characteristic of Persian poetry and literature of this time, with many Iranian poets expressing their political and social goals in a colloquial tone.

The majority of Shams-i Kasmāyī’s activities occurred during the Constitutional era and its aftermath, and the influence of this period can be seen in her poems. Additionally, she lived in Eshqabad, Tabriz, Yazd, and Tehran, and became acquainted with the different cultures and literary schools of these regions. Her innovative deconstruction of the poetry of the Constitutional era resulted from her intellectual interactions with modern European literature, primarily Russian literature. During her time in Eshqabad, she was involved in social activities and consistently focused on her main concern of women’s issues. Her note in the Irān-i Naw newspaper, titled “An Epistle from a Muslim Woman in Ishqabad” in Russian, is one such instance. Her satisfaction with the opening of girls’ schools and attention to women’s education reflects her commitment to women’s rights.⁵ One of the most significant events that had a profound impact on Shams’ poems was her presence in Tabriz, which coincided with the final years of Ahmad Shāh Qājār’s reign. The Muhammad Khān Khiyābānī uprising, the political activities of people in Tabriz, the literary works of Taqī Raf’at, and the literary and scientific gatherings in Tabriz not only influenced the social and political situation of the people in this region but also



contributed to the emergence of a new poetic form called Shi‘r-i naw [new poetry].

In addition to addressing the sociopolitical themes and issues of that era, Shams’ poetry also included some of the earliest works in Iranian literature that addressed life and the challenges faced by women.⁶ During a period when Iranian women had minimal rights, Shams openly addressed these challenges in her poems. Although women fought for their basic social rights during the Constitutional Revolution, they were overlooked by society as a whole after the movement succeeded. This reality is well reflected in the legislation passed by the Constitutional Parliament of Iran.⁷

The Life of Shams-i Kasmāyī

Shams-i Kasmāyī, also known as Shamsī, was a contemporary Iranian poet born in 1262/1883. According to Āriyanpūr in *Az Sabā tā Nīmā*, Kasmāyī’s family migrated from Georgia to Iran during the rule of Āghā Muhammad Khān Qājār and dispersed across various parts of Iran, settling in cities such as Qazvin, Yazd, and Tabriz.⁸ Sardārīniyā notes that the roots of Shams’ family can be traced back to the village of Kasmā in Gilan, and her father Khalīl, the son of Hāj Muhammad Sādiq Kasmāyī, moved from this village to Yazd.⁹ Khalīl and Humāyūn, Shams’ mother,¹⁰ were married in Yazd, and Shams was born in 1262/1883. Shams lived in several cities and acquainted herself with different cultures and languages, such as Russian and Turkish. This exposure influenced her poetry and intellectual thoughts significantly. She had two children from her marriage to Husayn Arbābzādah: a daughter named Safā and a son named Akbar. After several years, the family migrated from Yazd to Eshqabad, in Russian territory. During this time, Shams developed a deep understanding of Russian culture, literature, and language. However, Arbābzādah, who was engaged in trade, went bankrupt after the 1269/1917 Revolution in Russia,¹¹ and after ten years in Eshqabad, the family

⁶Shams-i Kasmāyī, “Ā’in-i bartarī” [The doctrine of superiority]; “Jahān-i zanān” [Women’s world]; “Ālam-i nisvān” [The world of women], *Āzādīstān Journal* (Tabriz), 1299/1920.

⁷Sumayyah Balbāsī and ‘Alī Rizā Khazā’īlī, “Nīmah-yi duvvum: Haq-i ra’y va namāyandigi” [The second half: Suffrage and representation], *Zamānah* 5, no. 48 (1385/2006): 42–45.

⁸Āriyanpūr, *Az Sabā tā Nīmā*, vol. 2, 457; Muhammad Rizā Turābī (Rizā Hamrāz), *Sayrī dar tārikh-i inqilāb-i mashrūtāh: Ta’sīr-i qiyām-i mardum-i Tabrīz va Āzarbāyijān dar pīrūzi’hā-yi inqilāb-i mashrūtiyat* [A survey of the history of the Constitutional Revolution: The impact of the uprising of the people of Tabriz and Azerbaijan on the victories of the Constitutional Revolution] (Tabriz: Yārān, 1389/2010), 77.

⁹Samad Sardārīniyā, *Tabriz: Shahr-i avvalīn’hā* [Tabriz: The city of the firsts] (Tabriz: Kānūn-i farhang va hunar-i Āzarbāyijān, 1381/2002), 243. Sardārīniyā sees no connection between the migration of the Kasmāyī family from Georgia to Iran and other regions. See Barādarān Shukūhī, *Shams-i Kasmāyī*, 75–77.

¹⁰Turābī, *Shams-i Kasmāyī*, 10.

¹¹Ra 'tsniyā, "Shams-i Kasmāyi," 454.

¹²Āriyanpūr, *Az Sabā tā Nīmā*, 457; Barādarān Shukūhī, "Shams-i Kasmāyi," 77; Turābī, *Shams-i Kasmāyi*, 10.

¹³Shukūhī Barādarān, "Shams-i Kasmāyi," 77; quoted in *Tārikh-i farhang-i Arūnaq va Anzāb, sharh-i mu' assisāt-i farhangī-yi ān* [History of the culture of Arūnaq and Anzāb, description of its cultural institutions] (Tabriz: Shafaq Printing House, 1338/1960). In his book, Turābī records the death of Husayn Arbābzādah as occurring in 1307/1928. See Turābī, *Shams-i Kasmāyi*, 10.

¹⁴Bashīr Sirājī and 'Abd al-Rahīm Qanawāt, "Vākāvi-yi guzārish'hā-yi vāqi' ah-yi Mullāsarā va qatl-i Haydar 'Amū'ughlī dar nihzat-i jangal bā tikiyah bar ravish-i mihvar'hā-yi ma' nā dihi-yi Stanford [Analysis of reports on the Mullāsarā incident and the murder of Haydar 'Amū'ughlī in the jungle movement with an emphasis on Stanford meaning-making methods], *Fasl'nāmah-yi 'ilmī-yi mutālī'āt-i tārikhī-yi jang* [Scientific journal of studying the history of war] 3, no. 3 (Ābān 1398/November 2019): 42–43.

¹⁵Jalīl Amjadī, "Shams-i Kasmāyi: Zan-i pīshgām-i shī'r-i naw" [Shams-i Kasmāyi: The pioneer woman of modern poetry], *Gīlah'vā* 6, no. 45 (Ābān-Āzar 1376 / November-December 1997): 7–8; Abū al-Qāsim Lāhūtī, *Dīvān* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publications Directorate, 1946), 451.

moved to Azerbaijan.¹² In Tabriz, Shams composed and published some of her poems and also participated in various activities. Her acquaintance with Taqī Raf' at and the activists of the Street Movement and Āzādīstān took place during this time. Shams experienced many bitter events in her life, including the loss of her husband and their young son, Akbar, during their years in Tabriz. In 1299/1920, Husayn Arbābzādah assumed an honorary representation role in Ma'ārif-i Shabistar, serving until the end of 1305/1926 and resigning from his position in 1306/1927. Shukūhī Barādarān considers this year to be the probable date of his death.¹³ Shams' son Akbar, a painter and poet who was fluent in French, also lost his life due to his political activities. After the onset of the Junbish-i Jangal in Iran (1300/1921), Haydar Khān, an important figure in the Constitutional Movement, entered into negotiations with Mīrzā Kūchak Khān. Their meetings took place at the residence of Muhammad Reza Khān Rafī'ī, the master of Mullāsarā village. However, their collaboration turned into conflict, leading to challenges for both groups, and the residence was attacked.¹⁴ Haydar Khān was believed to have been killed on the Ābān 5, 1300/ October 27, 1921, and Akbar also became a victim of internal conflicts among the members of Junbish-i Jangal. Unfortunately, historical records and documents regarding military participation, political activities, and even the death of Akbar Arbābzādah are not available.

Abū al-Qāsim Lāhūtī, one of the revolutionaries and prominent poets of that era and a companion of Shams, composed the poem 'Umr-i gul (The life of a flower) in Tabriz in Ābān 1300/ November 1921, mourning the loss of Akbar:¹⁵

Oh, nightingale, in parting from your rose,

Do not raise a cry nor mourn

Exercise patience and remain steadfast,

Do not let your hair become tangled like hyacinths



You, who with the light of celestial knowledge,
Are the highest form of humanity,
The pride of the Iranian people,
You know better than anyone else,
For two days has lived the flower.

There are two narratives about the activities and death of Akbar. Shukūhī Barādarān believes he was a member of the Committee of Haydar ‘Amū Ughlī, while Turābī refers to Akbar as a young comrade of Mīrzā Kūchak Khān Jangālī.¹⁶ The impact of her son’s death was profound on Shamsī, leading her to become reclusive. Along with her daughter Safā Khānūm, she relocated to Yazd; after five years, she migrated to Tehran, where she passed away in 1338/1959.¹⁷ There are different accounts regarding the time of Shams Jahān Kasmāyī’s death. As Barādarān Shukūhī has noted, Pūrān Farrukhzād gave her age at the time of death as 87, while Samad Sardari-Nia marked her age as 78 in 1341/1962 when she died in 1962,¹⁸ a date Āriyanpūr also confirms. On her tombstone, the date of her demise is engraved as the year 1341/1962.

¹⁶Turābī, *Shams-i Kasmāyī*, 12.

¹⁷Barādarān Shukūhī, “Shams-i Kasmāyī,” 77.

¹⁸Sardārīniyā obtained his information from Shams-i Kasmāyī’s daughter Safā Khānūm. See Barādarān Shukūhī, *Shams-i Kasmāyī*, 76; Sardārīniyā, *Tabriz*, 253.

¹⁹Rūh Angīz Karāchī,
 “Mashrūtah va zanān-i shā’ir”
 [The Constitutional Revolution
 and women poets], Rūdakī, no.
 9 (Day 1386/January 2007),
 46–52.



Figure 2- Shams-i Kasmāyī 's letter to Iran-e No, 1327 AH (1909 CE) From Ashgabat, Russia, discussing girls' schools and women's employment.

Works of Kasmāyī

Shams composed a significant portion of her works in the turbulent and revolutionary era of Qājār. She was inspired by and learned much from Taqī Raf'at, and one of the strongest features of her poetry is its vibrant spirit. In contrast to their contemporaries, Shams' and Raf'at's poetry concentrated on their current sociopolitical situation and introduced innovations in the poetic form. This is why many scholars of Persian literature trace the origin of modern poetry not to Nīmā's poems, but to those of Shams-i Kasmāyī and Taqī Raf'at.

In Persian literature, women were traditionally and historically defined and described based on men's perspectives, and the literary activities of women, though more extensive than other subjects, were shaped by such viewpoints. During the Constitutional Revolution, changes in political thinking and relative modernization in society led to an increase in women's activities,¹⁹ which, in turn, caused a transformation in literary content. Shams' literature is a product of this period and follows the same literary system. By this time, the existing social and political situations had a significant impact on literary works.



Shams' verses reflect the chaotic conditions before the Constitutional Revolution, foreign interventions, the interference and plundering of foreigners, the relative backwardness of Iranian women compared to women in the West, the neglect of women's status, and the inequality of women's rights compared to men in society.

²⁰Barādarān Shukūhī, "Shams-i Kasmāyī," 80.

The influence of the Tabriz intellectuals is also clearly visible in Shams' poetry. Taqī Raf'at, one of the most important social and political figures of the Constitutional Revolution, engaged in extensive cultural, political, and social activities during the Constitutional Movement in Iran, which inspired the publication of the journals *Tajaddud* and *Āzādīstān*. In addition, he pioneered modern Persian poetry and composed verses with different content and forms than predecessors had left behind. Shams-i Kasmāyī was a companion and disciple of the same school.

The most important feature of this period was modernism. During this time, Persian poetry was divided into two categories: new and old.²⁰ Shams and Raf'at were pioneers of modern poetry, and their works show significant differences from traditional poetry. Although there is no complete collection of poems, many of her verses have been collected from various historical/literary texts. Some of her poems were published in issues of *Āzādīstān* and other newspapers of that period, which are accessible today; for example, "Falsafah-yi umīd" (Philosophy of hope), "Madār-i iftikhār" (Orbit of honour), and "Parvarish-i tabī'at" (Cultivating the nature) were published in *Āzādīstān* in 1920. These poems demonstrate her ground-breaking role in the field of modern poetry, both in terms of content and poetic style, and many1299/1920. A significant portion of these were composed in the post-Constitutional revolution era and during the uprising in Tabriz. Shams' poetry reflects the vibrancy and energy of her youth, at the height of her social and political activities. However, personal life challenges, hardships, and the grief of losing her husband and young son deeply

²¹Abū al-Qāsim Lāhūfī, *Dīvān* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publications Directorate, 1946), 451.

²²Māshā Allāh Ājūdānī, “Darūnmāyah’hā-yi shī’r-i mashrūtah” [Themes in the poetry of the Constitutional Revolution], *Īrān nāmāh*, 11, no. 4 (Fall 1993): 621–646.

²³Ājūdānī, “Darūnmāyah’hā-yi shī’r-i mashrūtah,” 622.

affected Shams’ spirit and led to her period of seclusion during the Pahlavī era. Her son Karīm Arbābzādah joined the guerrilla struggles towards the end of the Junbish-i jangal and was killed in one of the battles in 1299/1920. As a sign of his admiration and affection for Shams, composed a poem mourning her son.²¹

Kasmāyī’s Status in Contemporary Persian Poetry

The poems of Shams and her contemporaries brought about a transformation in the theme of Persian poetry. Although the subjects of Persian literary works can be examined as a unified category that has changed little over time, the themes of these works have changed in different periods. In explaining the difference between the theme and the subject, Māshā Allāh Ājūdānī notes:

In terminology, theme differs fundamentally from the concept of topic or subject. This is because the themes of various artistic works may involve different thoughts or perspectives on a single topic... In other words, we use the term “theme” in a developmental sense that encompasses both the conceptual sense and the subject.²²

Ājūdānī suggests that although the themes of Persian literary works have changed, the subject matter has not changed significantly and has mostly been structured around elements such as homeland, love, mysticism, and similar concepts. The themes of Constitutional Revolution poetry can be divided into several categories: homeland and national identity, political and cultural freedom, Western modernity, and social and political criticism.²³ Social and political conditions have been influential factors in contemporary Iranian literature, including Kasmāyī’s poetry, setting these works apart from earlier and classical Persian poetry and literature.

Persian poetry encompasses various styles that can be analyzed according to geographical regions, human characteristics, and



the cultural nuances of each area. One of these is the Āzarbaiyijānī style, whose distinctive features Muzaffariyīn identifies as complex discourse and rational, philosophical, and social themes, in contrast to the Iraqi style, which is characterized by emotional expression and a softer, more refined discourse.²⁴ Despite its significant developments in the field of Persian literature, Shams' poetry is mainly in the Āzarbaiyijānī style. Her poetic style, compared to the modern poetry of Nīmā, exhibits a certain complexity in its discourse. Structurally and thematically, Shams' poetry differs significantly from past works, but does not share the same stylistic fluidity as Nīmā's poetry. One reason for the limited attention to Shams' works, despite her formative role in modern Persian poetry, stems from the challenging tone and rational-philosophical content of her poetry. These aspects place her work at what may seem like a lower level in the eyes of the general audience, especially when contrasted with Nīmā's emotionally driven and rational verses. Nevertheless, Kasmāyī holds a prominent position among contemporary Iranian female poets, and her poetry demonstrates a strong dedication to the spirit of her time.

Shams-i Kasmāyī's Iconoclastic Role in Social Norms and New Persian Poems

With the change in the Iranian government and the establishment of the Constitutional Revolution came similar changes in the demands and needs of society. Similarly, the intellectuals and writers in Iran who were responsible for articulating these demands recognized the need for change and evolution. Following the Constitutional Revolution, new themes were introduced into Persian poetry. The previously dominant themes of love and mysticism were no longer as prevalent; instead, freedom, prosperity, social and political rights, and, most importantly, critiques of existing political, economic, and social conditions became the central themes in Persian poems and other literary works. During the Constitutional era, poets were divided into two main categories. The first consisted of followers of tra-

²⁴ Ali Rizā Muzaffariyān, *Vīzhigī'hā-yi bunyādīn-i sabk'hā-yi shi'r-i Fārsī* [Fundamental features of Persian poetry styles], *Tārīkh-i Adabiyāt (Pazhūhish'nāmah-yi 'ulūm-i insānī)* [The history of literature (A journal of humanities)] 4, no. 3/71 (Fall and Winter 1391/2012): 270–273.

²⁵Amjadī, “Shams-i Kasmāyī,” 6.

²⁶Amjadī, “Shams-i Kasmāyī,” 6.

²⁷Amjadī, “Shams-i Kasmāyī,” 7.

²⁸Amjadī, “Shams-i Kasmāyī,” 7.

²⁹Muhammad Rizā Shafī Kadmānī, *Advār-i shī'r-i Fārsī az mashrūfiyat tā suqūt-i saltanat* [The eras of Persian poetry from the Constitutional Revolution to the fall of the monarchy] (Tehran: Tūs, 1359/1980), 145.

³⁰Firishtah Pīshqadam, “Barisi-yi furmālism dar ash'ār-i Shams-i Kasmāyī: mādar-i shī'r-i naw” [A formalist study of Shams-i Kasmāyī's poems: The mother of modern poetry], *Rahāvard-i Gil* 15, no. 111 (Khurdād-Tīr 1399/June-July 2020): 50.

ditional and old Persian poetry, characterized by its complex structure, with their main audience being the educated class, the king, and government officials. The second group, on the other hand, consisted of poets advocating for a departure from the old style, aiming to write poetry for the general public.²⁵

The creation of a style that could convey more effectively the new themes of the Constitutional era required a transformation in the cumbersome poetic forms of the past. The second aforementioned group of poets, known as the modernist and revolutionary literati, also sought to establish such a style. During this time, a confrontation emerged between the two styles of old and new poetry. Representatives of the old style published their works in the journal *Dānishkadāh* (Literary means faculty), managed by Malek al-Shoara Bahar, while Tajaddud and *Āzādīstān*, under the management of Taqī Raf'at, represented the new style.²⁶

Shams-i Kasmāyī was one of the pioneering poets and progressive thinkers who was associated with Taqī Raf'at. She, in introducing new content to Persian poetry, saw the solution in changing the structure and adopting the format of Taqī Raf'at's poems. Raf'at, Ja'far Khāminah'i, and Shams-i Kasmāyī were three leading figures in the formation of modern poetry,²⁷ who believed that the needs of contemporary society could not be expressed adequately through the poetic style of Sa'adī and Hāfiz. Additionally, they believed that with the introduction of new and relevant subjects into Persian literature came a need for a revolution in the poetic style and structure.²⁸

These three poets were the founders of the structural transformation in modern Iranian poetry and literature and laid the groundwork for change in traditional literature with their works. Seventeen years before Nīmā Yūshīj's revolutionary poem *Quqnūs* (The Phoenix),²⁹ Shams-i Kasmāyī wrote “*Parvarish-i tabī'at*,” published in the fourth issue of the *Āzādīstān* journal in 1920.³⁰ The style of this poem was influenced by the



European modernist poems that she read while living in Eshqabad. Kasmāyī introduced new concepts, such as women’s rights and gender equality, into Persian poetry, and used asymmetric and unequal verses in her works to convey these themes. Given the novelty of this style in Persian poetry and the conflict between advocates of traditional and modern poetry, Shams’ poetry struggled to reach its full potential in terms of tone; therefore, her poetry received less attention from audiences and critics of modern poetry than Nīmā’s, which was seen as more effectively expressing depth and emotion.

Concepts and Themes in Shams-i Kasmāyī’s Poetry

In addition to addressing contemporary issues and the sociopolitical conditions of Iran, the central themes in Shams-i Kasmāyī’s poetry include independence and freedom for women, gender equality, nationalism and national identity, anti-alienation, and hopes for a better future. Her works draw inspiration from ancient times to highlight women’s essential roles and ideals in society and address the social regression of Iran. In terms of thematic classification, her works can be categorized into four different subjects:

- Women’s Rights: “Ālam-i nisvān” (World of women), “Āyīn-i bartarī” (The doctrine of superiority), “Jahān-i zanān” (Women’s world)
- National Identity: “Ashraf-i Makhlūqāt”(The noblest of creatures), “Madār-i iftikhār” (Orbit of honour), “Falsafah-yi umīd” (Philosophy of hope)
- Political and Social Conditions: “Falsafah-yi umīd” (Philosophy of hope), “Parvarish-i tabī‘at” (Cultivating nature) “Iqtizā-yi Zamān” (The demands of the times)
- Critical Poetry: “Ashraf-i Makhlūqāt”(The nobles of creatures), “Madār-i iftikhār” (Orbit of honour), “Amal” (Action) “Jahān-i zanān” (Women’s world)

In “Ashraf-i Makhlūqāt,” Shams upholds patriotism and crit-

icizes foreign influence. She praises her homeland and its resources, and condemns the plundering of those resources by and for foreign interests:

My homeland is on the Earth, not within the moon's cavity.

Beneath my feet, all is gold; I won't go begging from my neighbours.

In the world, the Iranian nation is known for its authenticity.

My thoughts, hopes, and perspectives revolve around this point.

In another section of this poem, Kasmāyī also highlights Iranians' indifference towards foreign occupation of the country:

The difference between me and His Excellency, the Human, is this:

He is perceptive and attentive, while I am mere dust and dirt.

“Falsafah-yi umīd” is a praise of Shams' predecessors and their work for the liberation and freedom of the Iranian people. In this poem, Shams metaphorically refers to a past that brought tranquillity and prosperity to the Iranian nation, using the Constitutional Revolution as a symbol and depicting the subsequent ruin during the rule of Muhammad 'Alī Shāh Qājār, as well as the corruption that intruded the Constitutional Movement. She explicitly states that reconstructing this ruin is her duty and that of her contemporaries. In the following passage, she alludes to street protests and the movement of freedom-seekers:

Fortunately, we gathered clusters

That people seeded with their souls before us



We were the farmers of the past

Now it's our turn to cultivate the future

Another important concept highlighted in “Falsafah-yi umīd” is the companionship and solidarity of the Iranian people in times of crisis, even alongside various critiques of the contemporary situation in Iran and of various problems in the nation and the government:

If we are together or scattered,

In nature, we are steadfast.

If for a moment we fade, we are still present!

“Madār-i iftikhār” similarly revolves around the theme of national identity and pride for Iranianness while criticizing the decisions of kings and authorities. In this poem, as in “Ashraf-i makhlūqāt,” she declares her pride in, and defends, her Iranian identity:

Far be it for our voice to be at the mercy of supplication,

Our dignity shall always be our reliance.

An Iranian is proud of their own race!

In another section, she alludes to the danger posed by the Shah and the authorities' desires for wealth, riches, and positions, which threaten the Iranians. With these references, she aims to raise awareness among the Iranian nation, especially the people of Azerbaijan:

Until humanity's support was silver and gold,

Never expect the brotherhood to rely on pledges!

As long as justice lacks power, equality is in vain!

Negligence is a danger for the nation in the East!

Another important theme in “Madār-i iftikhār” is a warning against the real intentions of foreigners towards the Iranian nation. The actions of foreign powers, although seemingly benevolent and in favour of the Iranian people, are inherently detrimental to the nation and the country. They act as obstacles to the Iranian people achieving their inherent rights:

Those who have cast an eye beneath our feet,

Hidden the blade of greed beneath our cloak,

They intend to seize the sun and moon.

In addition, “Madār-i iftikhār” can also be read as a defence of the Āzādīstān journal, which was accused of separatism during that time, and its intellectual atmosphere. However, the publication of this poem, and other instances of emphasis on the homeland, was seen as a sign of support from intellectuals in that region, particularly the Āzādīstān journal, for nationalism.

In “Amal,” Shams compares Asia and Eastern countries to Europe and developed countries, calling the former negligent and backward when set beside the latter. She attributes this to the indifference of the people in these regions, despite their long history and high capabilities, who, instead of taking positive steps towards independence and prosperity, remain stagnant, while Europe continues to progress every day. Shams’ statements in this poem are influenced by her life in the Russian domain and his encounter with European thought:

The West excels in effort and the invention of airplanes,

While we [= Eastern countries] are cornered or neglected



due to a lack of action.

Asians, satisfied with humility, are anonymous and belittled,

Unaware that Europe has triumphed in competition.

The majority of Shams' attention was devoted to women's rights, freedom, and liberation from outdated thoughts. Three of her poems, "Ālam-i nisvān" (World of women), "Āyīn-i bartarī" (The doctrine of superiority), and "Jahān-i zanān" (Women's world), address these concerns amidst the revolutionary atmosphere in the contemporary poems of Iranian women. All three poems focus on awareness of women's rights, criticism of traditional ideas and thoughts within families, comparison of the social status of Iranian women with that of women in the Western world, and concerns about childhood, education, and the spirituality of women.

"Ālam-i nisvān" marked a significant transformation in the content of Shams' poetry. She drew inspiration from ancient times and attempted to reconstruct the position of women in contemporary society by connecting it with that era. She also expresses concern that men have defined the identity of women according to their own desires. This work reflects Shams' efforts toward the recognition and promotion of women's rights and their liberation from cultural and traditional constraints.

In "Ālam-i nisvān", Shams calls upon women to strive to obtain their freedom and rights, as well as engage in any activity solely based on their desires:

Until when is this solicitation for love?

Under command and obedience, until when?

Subject to reproach and blame, until when?

The imposition of obligations, until when?

“Āyīn-i bartarī” similarly denounces the lack of gender equality in Iran, a groundbreaking subject area in the period following the Constitutional Revolution. In a critical tone, Kasmāyī addresses this theme:

Hundreds of thousands of men, soldiers of an army,

Where have the women of the country gone?

Perhaps in the sophisticated world,

The grand tradition and the superior ritual are being woven.

“Jahān-i zanān” supports and raises awareness of women’s rights by criticizing traditional views, promoting the liberation of young girls, and creating a new definition of success for women. At that time, the success of a girl was limited to marriage in early adolescence and competing to secure a better husband. Shams criticizes this mindset and condemns Iranian families’ insistence on marrying off their teenage girls and preventing them from achieving scientific and professional successes:

How long the desire for adornment and being occupied with
makeup

How long the pursuit of customers and the thought of buyers

This dress is worn out, be proud of your dignity

The poem also compares Iranian women unfavourably to those in more developed countries:

The Iranian maiden lags behind the caravan of knowledge,



In front of you, a desert without water and full of thorns.

In the new century, your same-sex counterpart soars like a bird,

While you, like a beast, have given your head to the snare.

Equality of rights between women and men is a common theme among “‘Ālam-i nisvān,” “Āyīn-i bartarī,” and “Jahān-i zanān.” “Jahān-i zanān” reminds readers that the world is moving towards establishing political, social, cultural, and economic equality for all humans. The poem emphasizes the significance of collaboration and companionship between women and men to advance national goals. However, it questions why, in Iran, instead of uniting and cooperating, individuals often confront one another and engage in internal conflicts, in a misguided tendency to prioritize infighting over collectively opposing a common adversary:

It is the era of freedom and the day of liberation,

Why are we, women and men, at odds with each other?

What benefit does tearing the garment of negligence bring?

It is time for this turmoil and tumult to come to an end.

Shams-i Kasmāyī always had concern for the people of Iran, particularly girls, revolution, freedom, and escaping the snares of foreigners and tyrannical rule. The poem “Parvarish-i tabī‘at,” one of her best-known works, reflects her inner sentiments and the unfavourable state of her times, marked by war, internal conflicts, the trampling of women’s social rights, despair, and disillusionment during the turbulent era after the Constitutional Revolution, and numerous other social ills:

From the intense fire of love, coquetry, and caresses,
From this intensity of warmth, brightness, and radiance,

The garden of my thoughts

Became ruined and distraught, alas!

No ally of goodness,

No power of shame,

Neither arrow nor sword was mine, nor a sharp tooth,

No power to escape,

Pressed by the pressure of my kind.

I am beside myself from the world and the path of world-worshippers.

Shams-i Kasmāyī composed numerous poems throughout her life, and it is reported that she had a notebook containing more than 500 couplets. However, only a limited number of her poems are accessible. The novel themes and transformations present in the works that are available to us eloquently express the importance of Shams' poetry and her innovative perspective. After mourning the loss of her husband and child, Shams became reclusive and limited her presence in literary circles; after a brief return to Yazd, none of her works were published in journals.

Literary Analysis of Shams-i Kasmāyī's Poetry

Use of New Vocabulary and Concepts

Shams-i Kasmāyī was a progressive poet who incorporated the vocabulary of her era into her work. Her focus on modern



themes and innovations made her a poet of her era. Words such as Europe, airplane, civilization, freedom, and fashion reflect her attention to contemporary issues. In her writing she focused on both East and West, the contrast and equality of women's and men's rights, the concept of honour, the wellbeing of the oppressed, the ignorance and negligence of Iranians, and the importance of education.

Use of Ancient Vocabulary

In some of her poems, Shams-i Kasmāyī, influenced by the *dīvāns* (collection of poetry) and the works of classical Persian poets, used classical literary forms derived from poems that frequently appeared in traditional collections. Some of the words she uses are Arabic, such as *muttahid al-hal* (unified state), *sīm u zar* (silver and gold), *shams o qamar* (sun and moon), *bahā'im* (livestock), and sometimes Persian, like *az chi rūy* (why), *bar ānam* (I intend), *bādīyah* (desert), *ahl-i yaqīn* (people of certainty), *tīgh* (sword), and so on. She particularly emphasized concepts related to Iranian heritage, such as *mul-i jam* (King Jamshid's territory), *tāj-i kiyānī* (Royal crown) and *dukht-i Parsī* (Persian girl), and these references reflect her admiration for past glories and her patriotism.

Breaking the Chain of Language in Couplet Structure

The rhyme, rhythm, and structure of couplets are key elements in constructing a poem. Shams-i Kasmāyī was not an exception to this rule; however, at times, these interventions resulted in syntactic errors for her. For instance, one couplet appearing in "Āyīn bartarī" is "Where did the country's women have gone?" The use of two interrogative markers together is grammatically incorrect in Persian. Another poem, "Madār-i iftikhār," includes the line *Irānī az nizhād-i khudash muftakhar būd* (Iranians were proud from their race), using the word *az* (from) rather than the more grammatically correct *bih* (with).

Use of Simile

The most effective literary device in Shams' poetry is metaphor, especially the *balīgh* (explicit). Her metaphors often present entirely new and constructed images, such as *dūshīzah-yi Īrānī* (Iranian maiden), *qāfilah-yi 'ilm* (caravan of knowledge), *jāddah-yi ghiflat* (the path of ignorance), *gulistān-i fikr* (the garden of thought), *ātash-i mihr va nāz u navāzish* (fire of affection and charming coquetry), *tīgh-i tama'* (the sword of greed). One particularly striking example appears in "Parvarish-i tabī'at":

Like withered flowers,

My fresh thoughts

Have become hopeless, spilled from my palm.

Use of Irony

Shams-i Kasmāyī's poetry often features literary irony, enhancing the appeal of its language. Some examples include the phrases *pāy dar dāman u sar dar zānū nishīnam* (I sit with my feet tucked in my skirt and my head on my knees), *mā zan u mard az chih rūy sar dar garībān* (why do we, men and women, surrender our heads in despair?), and *jāmah-yi ghiflat chih sūd chāk nimūdan* (what is the use of tearing apart the garment of negligence?).

Use of Contrast

Contrast is also featured in Shams' poems, such as that between Asia and Europe in "Amal". The interplay of opposing elements enriches the layers of meaning in her poetry:

An Asian being content with humility and anonymity,

Unaware that Europe is defeated in competition.



Other examples of contrasts include the following passages:

I am neither a helper of goodness,

Nor a cause of badness.

Sometimes a receiver, sometimes a giver,

At times oppressive, at times shining bright.

Though we are united, or scattered.

Use of Repetition

One particular example of Shams' use of repetition in her poetry is the repetition of the verb *shud* (became) in the poem "Jashn-i Īrān" (Iran's celebration):

The Iranian's zeal at the cost of life became,

Whatever became, became according to the need of the time.

Breaking the Traditional Poetic Forms

Shams-i Kasmāyī's remaining poems include three ghazals, a poetic form that originated in Arabic literature and was later popularized in Persian, Turkish, and Urdu traditions, that adhere to all the principles governing the construction of a ghazal, such as rhyme, attention to the vertical axis of the poem, and the number of verses. These ghazals demonstrate her study and understanding of this form. However, many of her other poems do not conform to the conventional frameworks of Persian poetry. Shams, indifferent to the rigid traditional rules of rhyme, seeks to bring about a transformation in Persian poetry by introducing changes in the use of rhymes. Her innovation and attention to the needs of her time in shaping this thinking have not been without influence.

For example, in “Falsafah-yi umīd,” verses 1 and 4 rhyme with each other, and 2 and 3 rhyme, violating the rules of any traditional poetic form. Additionally, verses 6, 7, 8, and 9 also rhyme with each other, as do verses 5 and 11, which is an unusual use of rhyme in Persian poetry. In “Mud va muhabbat” (Fashion and affection), verses 1 and 2, 3 and 4, and 5 and 6 rhyme, a scheme that also appears in “Madār-i iftikhār” and “Parvarish-i tabī‘at”.

Shams’ use of rhymes in each verse of her poems was a technical skill that Nīmā Youshij later employed in his works, marking a new path for Persian poetry. Examining Shams-i Kasmāyī’s poetry suggests that she felt the need to change the basic structure of Persian poetry, an endeavour to which she devoted much attention; in so doing, she laid the groundwork for Nīmāic poetry and modern Persian poetry.

Breaking the Rule of Prosodic Elements

Shams uses various forms and meters typically associated with classical Persian poetry, such as such as ramal musammin makbūn muzmar in poems like “Ashraf-i Makhlūqāt” and “‘Amal”; munsarah musamin mujawwad manhūr in “Jahān-i zanān” and “Jashn-i Īrān”; ikhrib mukhaffaf muhazzaf muzmar in “Mud va muhabbat” and “Madār-i iftikhār”; and mujannūn muhazzaf muzmar in “Falsafah-yi umīd” and “Parvarish-i tabī‘at.”

This poem, written in the meter mutighārib musmin sahīh, consists of four metrical feet, and according to the rules of classical poetry, these four feet should be repeated in each hemistich. However, Shams instead uses four feet in some hemistichs and two feet in others, which was unprecedented in Persian poetry:

Neither arrows nor my sword, no sharp teeth,

Nor do I have fleeing legs.



This practice was also considered a fundamental rule in Nīmāic poetry after Shams, and poets were free to adjust metrical feet based on the content of the poem. Shams-i Kasmāyī should be regarded as an innovator or a source of inspiration for Persian modernist poets in this regard.

³¹Shams-i Kasmāyī, "Falsafah-yi umīd" [Philosophy of hope], *Āzādīstān* (Tabriz), no. 2, Tīr 15, 1299/July 6, 1920.

A Selection of Shams' Poems

Falsafah-yi umīd (Philosophy of hope)

In these five-day cycles of our destiny,

How many cultivated fields have we witnessed?

Fortunately, we've harvested clusters

Sown by people with life's aspirations.

We were the farmers of the past,

Now, we're cultivating the future.

At times a receiver, at times a giver,

Sometimes oppressed, occasionally shining.

Though we are scattered or gathered,

In nature's course, we endure.

If for a moment we fade away, we reappear. ³¹

Madār-i iftikhār (Orbit of honour)

Until the foundation of human nature was gold and silver,

Never expect a pact of brotherhood!

³²Shams-i Kasmāyī, "Madār-i ifūkhār" [Orbit of honour], Āzādīstān (Tabriz), no. 3, Isfand 20, 1299/March 11, 1920.

Until the right is powerless against equality!
Negligence was a danger for the Eastern nation!
They, who had woven their eyes under our feet,
Concealed the dagger of greed in our sleeves.
Their purpose was to dominate the sun and moon.
May our voice never come to a plea,
The Iranian was proud from his own race! ³²
Ashraf-i Makhluqāt (The noblest of creatures)
If I am the noblest of creatures, of the human race,
Then why, like a beast, am I burdened with oppression?
If I am truly Adam, created by fate,
In front of strangers, I am ashamed and without skill.
The difference between me and the Lord of mankind is this:
He is all-seeing and all-hearing, while I am mere dust.
My homeland is on the Earth, not within the moon,
Beneath my feet, all is gold; I bear no weakness to my neighbour.
In the world, the Iranian nation is known for its authenticity,
At this very point, my thoughts, hopes, and views reside.



Mud va muhabbat (Fashion and affection)

A woman needs less to attract love,

Forced into fashion and occupied with make-up.

How long will this pursuit of love continue?

Under command and obedience, how long?

Subjected to reproach and blame, how long?

When will these imposed obligations last?

Oh, daughter of Persia, remember the past times.

Shameful is captivity, break free from the chain of disgrace,

Soar to the heights of bliss, like an angel!

Tabriz, Tīr 2 1299 (23 June 1920)

‘Amal (Action)

We, born in the East, from the fountainhead of light,

Why are we distant from civilization, lost in ignorance’s night?

The West, with effort and inventive action, took to the skies,

While we, lacking action, remain neglected, idle, and shy.

Oh, radiant light, why have you made me so

Silent, veiled, and hidden, why this status quo?

Having been enriched by nature's bounty, I stand free,
No need for possessions, no lack of wealth do I see.
A mill, hidden in humility and disdain,
Unaware that Europe is defeated in the competition, in pain.
Āyīn-i bartarī (The doctrine of superiority)
In the ancient realm of Jam, a pleasant sight is seen,
Hundreds of thousands of men, men of the army keen.
Where have the women of this land gone?
Those who, for centuries, were the leaders and the dawn.
Perhaps they are hidden in the world,
The grand tradition and the ceremony of superiority.
For without wisdom, we are unaware,
Of the kindness of a sister, the grace of a brother.
Jahān-i zanān (Women's world)
In the presence of the wise and conscientious,
The discourse becomes delightful, an epic of women.
An era of freedom, a day of liberation,
Why are we, men and women, at odds and in confrontation?
What use is the garment of ignorance torn open?



The time has come to end the tumult and commotion.

Muslim women, like a mural on the wall,

Unaware, indifferent, and idle due to the time's call.

The Iranian maiden lags behind in the caravan of knowledge,

In front of you, a wilderness without water, full of thorns.

In the modern century, like a bird in flight,

You, like animals, have given yourself to the snare.

When our mother is not proud and biased,

It is not a disgrace to sell one's child.

How long is the desire for adornment and preoccupation
with vanity?

How long is the pursuit of buyers and the thought of the
buyer?

Discard this sleeping garment, express your pride,

The Kianian crown is what you truly deserve.

Beware, if a particular nation adheres to the truth,

Islamophobia is not the lowliness of thoughts.

Parvarish-i tabī'at (Cultivating nature)

From the intensity of love, coquetry, and caress,

My thoughts, like withered flowers, became a mess.

The garden of my mind has become ruined and distressed,
Like withered flowers, thoughts become wild.
Freshness and purity have become hopeless,
Indeed, foot on the hem, and head bowed low,
Like a half-savage trapped in a land,
No good fortune for me, no power of shame.
No arrow, no sword, no sharp teeth,
No legs for escape.
Thus, I am under the pressure of my like-minded,
I have turned away from the world and those who worship it.
From the world, away from worldliness, I am indifferent,
A mill, hidden in humility and disdain.
Unaware that Europe is defeated in the competition.
Jashn-i Īrān (Iran's celebration)
In the young days of May,
A time of joy and revelry, the world on display.
The night's darkness disappeared, the sun revealed,
Unified, the East and the West, the world was healed.



The time of comfort for the suffering arrived,

The pride of Iranians, for the price of life, survived.

All that happened, happened as per the time's need.