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A Private Journey Under the Red Shadow of an Umbrella: A Reading of Tāhirah Saffār'zādah's Poems from the Perspective of Dominance Approach

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Introduction

Tāhirah Saffār'zādah's pen name (takhallus), Mardumak ("the pupil of the eye"), may be regarded as emblematic of her poetic persona. In one phase of her career, she wrote with a rebellious and independent spirit open to the possibilities of language and new worlds, while in another, despite preserving a justice-seeking stance, she was drawn into the constricted world of ideology and became the modern representative of the existing power structure. If one considers the relationship of light to the pupil of the eye as analogous to the relation of power to the poet's capacity for receptivity, one can deduce that in moving closer to power, her poetic world contracted and her linguistic capacities became more limited.¹ Her literary oeuvre exhibits distinct differences, particularly in poetic form, between periods before and after the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1357/1978). Although the dominant themes of her poetry, a combination of religious beliefs and a concern for social justice in the context of religion, remain a constant thread throughout her poetic career, this justice-oriented voice fell silent in response to many sociopolitical events following the revolution, thereby casting doubt on the integrity of the poet.

Nādir Nādir'pūr views Saffār'zādah's journey to the United States in 1345/1967 as marking the boundary between two dis-

tinct poetic phases.² However, most critics divide her career into three periods: before her journey to the United States, after her return to the United States, and after the Islamic Revolution. In the first period, she appears as an innovative and inquisitive poet seeking a poetic form unique to her own voice. Initially, like Furūgh Farrukhzād (1313–1345/1934–1967) and many of her contemporaries, Saffār'zādah was formally categorized among the conservatives and began her career within the *chār'pārah*-style tradition of interconnected quatrains, a current combining Romantic tendencies with emotional intensity, gathering passion and audacity within the shadow of profound melancholy. Her second poetic period begins with the discovery of a distinct personal language, influenced by modernists such as T. S. Eliot. This stage, formulated through her theory of “resonance” or “echo” (*tanīn*), introduced to Iran’s literary community as a poet audacious in form. The boldness of her experiments was such that even many modernist readers initially found her poetry difficult to interpret. Consequently, her work and personality provoked a number of strong critical reactions.³ During the final phase, Saffār'zādah’s poetry underwent a pronounced regression in form. In many instances, what she expressed overshadowed how she expressed it, to the extent that the resulting works at times became scarcely distinguishable from political manifestos and ideological proclamation.

Rah'guzar (Passerby): The Beginning

Tāhirah Saffār'zādah was born on Ābān 27, 1315/November 18, 1936, in Sirjan in the province of Kerman, Iran. Having lost her father and mother within a short period at the age of five and being raised by her grandmother, Bībī Murassa', who was skilled in medicine and poetry, Saffār'zādah developed a resilient personality marked by religious inclinations. Her poetic talent was first discovered and encouraged by Muhammad Bāstānī Pārīzī (1304–1393/1925–2014), her teacher at Bahman'yār High School in Kerman. At the age of thirteen, Saffār'zādah composed a poem titled “Bī'navā va zimistān” (The destitute and

¹In an interview published in the special issue “Hingām” of 'Asr-i mardum (People's age) newspaper, Saffār'zādah discussed her pen name (*takhallus*), *Mardumak*, derived from *mardum* (“people”) and the diminutive suffix *-ak*, stating: “*Mardumak*, or “the pupil of the eye,” whose opening and closing regulate the amount of light and act as the agent of sight; it introduces the poet as a part of the opening and closing of the “people,” inseparable from the society.”, *Khurdād* 26, 1384/June 16, 2005, 3–4.

²*Nādir Nādir'pūr*, *Tifl-i sad sālah-'i bih nām-i shi'r-i naw: Guftigū-yi Sadr al-Dīn Ilāhī bā Nādir Nādir'pūr* [A hundred-year-old child called modern poetry: Sadr al-Dīn Ilāhī's interview with Nādir Nādir'pūr] (Tehran: Bungāh-i Tarjumah va Nashr-i Kitāb-i Pārsah [Pārsah Foundation for the Translation and Publication of Books], 1397/2018), 332.

³See Muhammad Shams Lang'rūdī, *Tārikh-i tahlīfī-i shi'r-i naw* [An analytical history of modern poetry] (Tehran: Markaz, 1384/2005), 4:216–22.

⁴Siyid 'Alī Muhammad Rafī'ī, *Bīdārgarī dar 'ilm va hunar: Shinākht'nāmah-i Tāhirah Saffār'zādah* [Awakening in science and art: Understanding Tāhirah Saffār'zādah] (Tehran: Hunar-i Bīdārī, 1386/2007), 1:15–16. Tāhirah Saffār'zādah, "Shi'r-i pīsh'tāz" [Pioneering poetry], in *Bīdārgarī dar 'ilm va hunar*, 279–80, originally published as Tāhirah Saffār'zādah, "Khudā va shi'r," 'Asr-i mardum, *Khurdād* 26, 1384, 3–4.

⁵Sārah 'Askarī, "Saffār'zādah, Tāhirah," *Farhang'nāmah-i zanān-i Irān va jahān* [Encyclopedia of women of Iran and the world] (Tehran: Irtibāt-i Nawīn, 1394/2015), 873.

⁶Safar-i Tāhirah [Tāhirah's journey], directed by 'Alī 'Azīmī and Amīn Mukhtārī (Tehran: Mu'āvinat-i Riyāsat-i Jumhūrī dar Umūr-i Zanān va Khānivādah, 1399/2020).

⁷Tāhirah Saffār'zādah, *Rah'guzar-i mahtāb* [The passerby of the moonlight] (2nd repr. ed., Shiraz: Navīd Shīrāz, 1365/1986), 20.

⁸Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 159–60.

the winter) for her school's wall newspaper. This achievement motivated her to choose literature as her major in the second period of high school. After graduation, she selected English Language and Literature at Shiraz University in 1329/1950 from among three possible fields: law, Persian literature and English literature.⁴

Some sources make no mention of her first marriage.⁵ In the documentary *Safar-i Tāhirah* (Tāhirah's journey), her brother Jalāl Saffār'zādah reveals that her first husband, Muhammad Rizā Jabbār'pūr, was a physician from Shiraz from whom Saffār'zādah divorced following the birth of their only child, 'Alī Rizā, due to her husband's addiction. He explains that it was during her studies at Shiraz University that 'Abd al-Vahhāb Nūrānī Visāl (d. 1373/1984), a professor of Persian language and literature, who would later marry her in 1358/1979, expressed his affection for Saffār'zādah.⁶ However, she rejected his proposal by composing the following poem:

O man, you are never free like me.
Go toward those people
Whose bodies are burdened with jewels,
Whose faces are tinted by hypocrisies,
Whose lips are sealed against the clamor of humankind.
Go blindly, take the hand of a wife,
To tread once more in the worn steps of your ancestors.⁷

It appears that one of the reasons for rejecting this proposal was Nūrānī Visāl's belonging to a wealthy family. Farzaneh Milani observes that in this poem, Saffār'zādah sharply denounces the entrenched social structures placing men as the dominant element at the center of traditional social contracts.⁸

After the divorce, Saffār'zādah moved to Tehran. Alongside her work in journalism, she was employed by the National Oil Company as a translator of technical texts. Her first journey abroad took her to England on a three-month scholarship to



study journalism. However, this trip was cut short by the death of her only child, who was five years old at the time. Some sources do not mention this episode of her life, perhaps because the poet who, in “Kūdak-i qarn” (The child of the century), castigates mothers who neglect raising their children in favor of pleasure seeking or personal ambitions, was regarded by post-Revolution cultural authorities as closer to the idealized image of womanhood.⁹ Nevertheless, the death of her child had a profound effect on Saffār’zādah’s life. She refers to this loss in her long poem “Safar-i avval” (First journey), which centers on the cremation ceremony in India. In three interwoven temporal layers, Saffār’zādah contemplates the concept of death through associative imagery:

In the narrow alleys of Benares, if you see a thirteen-year-old
 Chasing the chariot of the Maharaja and the lady, throwing
 stones
 He is my son.
 When he was five, he was a thousand and five years old
 A thousand years of unending sunlight
 Later, I greeted a little girl
 Whose eyes bore the same color as his.¹⁰

Following her return to Iran, Saffār’zādah resumed her position at the National Oil Company. However, she was dismissed a short time later due to delivering an anti-discrimination speech at the North Camp among the children of the company’s workers. Consequently, she obtained a letter of introduction from Faraydūn Rah’namā (d. 1354/1976),¹¹ who served as the director (1345–1349/1966–1970) of the Research Department at National Iranian Television, enabling her to attend a screenwriting course at one of the institutes affiliated with BBC Television in London. While in London, at an international poetry festival, an American poet recommended that she apply to the Iowa Writers’ Workshop at the University of Iowa.¹²

Prior to undertaking these journeys, Saffār’zādah published

⁹See Rafī’ī, *Bīdār’garī dar ‘ilm va hunar*, 17; ‘Askarī, “Saffār’zādah, Tāhirah”, 873; Muhammad-Rizā ‘Abd al-Malikiyān, “Rāh-i dushvār, rāh-i rawshan” [Difficult road, bright road], in *Bīdār’garī dar ‘ilm va hunar*, 187.

¹⁰Tāhirah Saffār’zādah, *Tanīn dar diltā* [Echo in the delta] (2nd repr. ed., Shiraz: Navīd Shīrāz, 1365/1986), 23.

¹¹Faraydūn Rah’namā was a proponent of avant-garde poetry in Iran and an influential figure in introducing modern world poetry, especially French, to Iranian readers during the 1330s/1950s and 1340s/1960s.

¹²Rafī’ī, *Bīdār’garī dar ‘ilm va hunar*, 17; Saffār’zādah, “Shi’r-i pīsh’tāz”, 281.

¹³Saffār'zādah, Rah'guzar-i mahtāb, 12.

¹⁴Tarh was published in Āzar 1341/December 1962 and Rah'guzar-i mahtāb in Bahman 1341/February 1963.

¹⁵Shams Lang'rūdī, Tārīkh-i tahlīlī-i shī'r-i naw, 3:84–85.

her first collection of poems under the title Rah'guzar-i mahtāb (The passerby of the moonlight) in 1341/1962. From her text “A Word at the Beginning,” which serves as a preface to the collection, it is apparent that although she had accepted the format of chār'pārah and at times Nīmā'ī verse, she was troubled by the constraints she felt were imposed upon her thought:

The poet's need:
A burning desert
Her feeling:
A roaring flood
And the usual limitations:
An inefficient dam
...
This collection
Is a sign
Of my attempts
And the remainder
Of poems
That have taken life in my mind
And have died in my hands¹³

Apart from its content, the arrangement and segmentation of the lines in the above example reveal the poet's pronounced urge to experiment with new forms. The seemingly irregular line breaks may have been influenced by Ahmad Rizā Ahmadī's book Tarh (Sketch, 1341/1962) and the early emergence of New Wave poetry.¹⁴ As noted earlier, most of the poems in Rah'guzar-i mahtāb bear the influence of the chār'pārah-style of the late 1330s/1950s. Nevertheless, the collection also contains poems which, according to Shams Lang'rūdī, may be compared to Nīmā Yūshīj's shī'r-i naw (New Poetry). One of these, which attained considerable fame at the time, is “Kūdak-i qarn” (The child of the century). Lang'rūdī critiques it as weak, romantic, and sociologically themed.¹⁵ “Kūdak-i qarn” conveys the poet's evident indignation toward the women of a modernizing society who, as Saffār'zādah relates, are abandoning the stereotypes of



the traditional mother:

Your mother is here
In the colorful house of the pleasure-seekers
In the warm and fragrant air of a prison
The qāmat (frame) of that beautiful mother is dancing around
the frame of a stranger And her hands are around his neck
Their feet on the dancing floor, moving with a rapid tune
That room is filled with drunken cries and laughter!¹⁶

Interestingly, the poet uses the word qāmat (frame) instead of “body” (badan, tan, andām), a choice that indicates the operation of taboos in her consciousness. Some scholars of language and gender argue that women, influenced by the dominance of men over the intellectual sphere, subconsciously reveal certain signs of this influence in their speech and writing.¹⁷ One sign is the heightened observance of taboos. In fact, most women attempt to avoid provoking audience reactions by remaining within social boundaries and by expressing themselves in a less overt or provocative manner. Another technique often used by women to mitigate the intensity their language, which is also observable in this collection, is the indirect articulation of the self and the indirect disclosure of their desires:¹⁸

Look back and slowly open behind you
Your closed eyes
Accompanying you is the shadow of a woman who rises
From the bygone roofs
That woman who lived with you
That woman who slept with you
Through the long nights¹⁹

In this collection, Saffār'zādah repeatedly relinquishes her emotional attachments, as though in a continuous process of renunciation:

¹⁶Saffār'zādah, Rah'guzar-i mahtāb, 30.

¹⁷Deborah Cameron, *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* (2nd ed., London: Macmillan, 1992).

¹⁸For an example of the classification of the characteristics of feminine language, see Robin Tolmach Lakoff, *Talking power: The politics of language* (New York: Basic Books), 204.

¹⁹Saffār'zādah, Rah'guzar-i mahtāb, 27.

²⁰Saffār'zādah, Rah'guzar-i mahtāb, 25.

²¹Saffār'zādah, Rah'guzar-i mahtāb, 26.

The sea of my heart
Regretting the lost turbulence of hope
The hope of his love
Assumes the color of silence and before death
Suddenly surrenders the struggle of living²⁰

Saffār'zādah writes of affection and the yearning of love, but unlike Furūgh Farrukhzād, despite her own desire to establish a romantic relationship and to transcend restrictive boundaries, she abstains from experiential engagement. She resists direct experience:

O stranger!
I bid farewell to the embryo of your memory
Before our meetings
Grow a child of love²¹

This restraint may stem from the pervasive weight of moral stereotypes that envelop her poetry. In other words, the poet's reluctance to cross moral and ideological red lines, combined with her scrupulous observance of social taboos, prevents her from experiencing the sense of spiritual and emotional liberation achieved by some of her contemporaries. Having endured profound losses through the deaths of her mother, father, and child, as well as her separation from her husband, Saffār'zādah stands as a genuine disciple of the dark Romanticism that emerged in the late 1330s/1950s. However, her sorrow differs from that of poets such as Furūgh Farrukhzād or Nusrat Rahmānī (1308–1379/1929–2000), whose grief was inseparable from rebellion. For example, in the poem “Bāz'gasht” (Return), Saffār'zādah addresses God and speaks of sin, recalling Farrukhzād's 'Uṣyān (Rebellion, 1336/1957). Yet, unlike Farrukhzād, Saffār'zādah's tone is that of a devoted servant rather than a rebellious soul:

I came back toward You, O Creator of love
I came back to seek refuge in You from myself
Take from me the strength that is rebellious



Bestow upon me the ring of faith and the collar of religion²²

²²Saffār'zādah, *Rah'guzar-i mahtāb*, 32.

If one seeks traces of religion as a stylistic feature that would later become more prominent in Saffār'zādah's poetry, this collection offers few explicit examples beyond the present poem and a handful of other isolated hints. In other words, what is observable here of religion is limited to the residual the effects of religious upbringing in the life of a woman, revealed through self-refrain, pride, and a tinge of regret. In the poem "Bihisht-i gurīz" (The paradise of escape), the poet is in the act of leaving behind a life or a love, much like Farrukhzād in her poem "Gurīz" (Escape) from the collection *Asīr* (Captured, 1331/1952). The difference lies in the poets' attitudes toward expressing emotion while crying, which not only reflects their divergent worldviews but also reveals Saffār'zādah's adherence to the taboo of ābirū (honor) and, likely, her self-censorship. Saffār'zādah writes:

²³Saffār'zādah, *Rah'guzar-i mahtāb*, 72.

²⁴Furūgh Farrukh'zād, *Majmū'ih-'i ash'ār* (Collection of poems) (West Germany: Navīd, 1368/1989), 42.

²⁵The influence of Furūgh Farrukh'zād's first two collections on Saffār'zādah's debut volume extends beyond these examples and merits a comprehensive scholarly study.

The curtain was not drawn from my thoughts
Behind that curtain many imaginings died
If a warm tear dropped upon my lips
The cold hand of honor wiped it away²³

Farrukhzād, by contrast, writes:

I went to wash away the mark of your regretful kiss
With the tears of my eyes from my lips
I went to remain incomplete in this song
I went to regain honor for myself by silence²⁴

In Farrukhzād's case, the poet intends to remain silent about what occurred in order to reclaim the honor that she believes she has lost. In Saffār'zādah's case, she does not even allow a tear to fall and thus refrains from revealing anything about what happened.²⁵

Milani interprets the poems in this collection as resembling re-

²⁶Milani, *Veils and Words*, 159–60.

²⁷Muhammad Huqūqī, “Guft-igū bā Tāhirah Saffār’zādah” [Interview with Tāhirah Saffār’zādah], *Firdawsī* 1030, in *Harikat va dīrūz* [Movement and yesterday] (Shiraz: Navīd Shiraz, 1365/1986), 159.

²⁸Other Iranian writers who have participated in this program include Rizā Barāhani (1353/1974), Hūshang Gul’shūrī (1357/1978), Ismā’īl Khu’ī (1368/1989), ‘Izzat Gūshah’gīr (1369/1990), Shahr’nūsh Pārsī’pūr (1371/1992), Mīmī (Maryam) Khalvatī (1385/2006), Maryam ‘Alā Amjadī (1387/2008), Farangīs Sīyāh’pūr (1389/2010), Ya’qūb Yād’Alī (1391/2012), and Mahsā Muhib’Alī (1392/2013).

²⁹In sum, the program numbered seventeen participants, including Fernando Afable (Philippines), Zbigniew Bienkowski (Poland), Hans Christoph Buch (Germany), Elizabeth Azcona Cranwell (Argentina), Dai Shing Yee (Hong Kong), Shankha Ghosh (India), Eugene Nicole (France), Wilfrido D. Nollo (Philippines), U. Sam Oeur (Cambodia), Tamura Ryuichi (Japan), Wilton Sankawulo (Liberia), Hatsuyoshi Tauchi (Japan), Wang Ching-lin (Taiwan), May Wong (Singapore), Daniachew Worku (Ethiopia) and Ya Hsien (Ethiopia).

³⁰Tamura Ryuichi was a member of the modern poets’ circle at Meiji University. After the war, he founded the literary magazine *Arechi* (The waste land), which emerged

bellious cries from a woman who experiences profound limitations both in emotion and in lived experiences.²⁶ Confronted with these constraints, the poet confines herself to the passive act of withdrawal. Muhammad Huqūqī regards this withdrawal as a sign of contentment and mystical submission in the face of the sorrow of separation.²⁷

Tanīn (Echo): The Climax

Tāhirah Saffār’zādah’s journey to the United States and her several years of residence there marked a turning point in her professional life. Living in a society dissimilar to Iran, free from the customs and norms that historically governed a traditional Iranian nation in transition toward modernization, proved an invaluable opportunity for the maturation and expression of Saffār’zādah’s independent and rebellious spirit. It allowed her to think and write with greater intellectual and creative liberty.

The International Writing Program (IWP) at the University of Iowa (1967) was a course designed for writers and poets, combining theoretical and practical criticism.²⁸ Saffār’zādah joined the first cohort of this program alongside several prominent poets,²⁹ including Tamura Ryuichi (d. 1998)³⁰ from Japan, Shankha Ghosh (d. 2021) from India,³¹ Elizabeth Azcona Cranwell (d. 2004) from Argentina, and U. Sam Oeur from Cambodia.³² The works of participants of this group shared several distinguishing features: the influence of modern American poetry, particularly the poetry of T. S. Eliot (d. 1965); preoccupation with themes of injustice, poverty, and war; and opposition to imperialism.³³ According to Alishan, Saffār’zādah was influenced by Eliot more than any other poet. Nevertheless, she also exhibits traces of influence from writers such as Zbigniew Herbert (d. 1998), Archibald MacLeish (d. 1982) and Vladimir Mayakovsky (d. 1930).³⁴

In Ghosh’s account of the Iowa program in his book, we learn that Saffār’zādah was remembered by her peers as an assertive,



attractive, reserved, and temperamental woman. It is also stated that she warned Ghosh not to become overly close to other members of the group, emphasizing their shared experience of colonial oppression as a bond of solidarity.

³⁵Apparently, Saffār'zādah remained in Iowa after completing this course and eventually received her Master's degree in Fine Arts from the university.

³⁶For her final project in the program, Saffār'zādah composed a collection of poems titled *The Red Umbrella* (1969),³⁷ which was published by Windhover Press at the University of Iowa. This collection contains fifteen poems. Muhammad Huqūqī (d. 1388/2009), in the collaboration of Saffār'zādah herself, translated seven of these poems into Persian and published them with an introduction in the collection *Sad va bāzuvān* (The dam and the arms) (1350/1971).³⁸ The poems in *The Red Umbrella*, written originally in English, reveal a distinct poetic personality characterized by “an unprecedented expression of love, femininity and eroticism” and by the bold expression of personal emotions.³⁹ According to Alishan, *The Red Umbrella* and its translation mark the final phase of Saffār'zādah's work in which traces of earthly love remain, a motif that Milani interprets as explicit references to sensuality and romantic love.⁴⁰ Milani also argues that *The Red Umbrella* represents not only a change in poetic form but also a transformation in the poet's relationship with herself.⁴¹ Saffār'zādah herself regarded this collection as the beginning of a new stage in her poetic evolution and as the point at which concrete experiences into her verse. She believed that in these poems, she spoke with greater freedom and adopted a softer “addressing tone.”⁴² In this set of poems, she not only articulates her personal experiences and desires without constrain but also deliberately disregards the dominant moral and cultural expectations of her society.⁴³

as one of the most significant phenomena in modern postwar Japanese poetry.

³¹Shankha Ghosh combined poetry and prose. His verse often carries satirical undertones in its portrayal of social injustices in Indian society.

³²U. Sam Oeur wrote extensively about the Cambodian genocide. He acknowledged the influence of Walt Whitman and T. S. Eliot on his poetry and believed that the suffering of modern humanity could not be expressed through traditional forms.

³³See Saffār'zādah, “Marāhil-i dushvār-i shā'irī” [Difficult stages of being a poet], an interview with Tāhirah Saffār'zādah, in *Mardān-i munhanī* [Curved men] (Shiraz: Navid Shirāz, 1366/1987), 84.

³⁴Leonardo P. Alishan, “Tāherah Saffarzadeh: From the Wasteland to the Imam,” *Iranian Studies* 15, nos. 1–4 (1982), 186. Alishan discusses in detail the parallels between T.S. Eliot's “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and the poem “The Voice” from Saffār'zādah's *The Red Umbrella*.

³⁵Shankha Ghosh, *An Album Gone to Sleep*, trans. Srotaswini Bhowmik (Kolkata: Dey's Publishing, 2014), 45–46.

³⁶Based on her academic background, Saffār'zādah apparently completed several cinematic works, including a few student film projects. See Saffār'zādah, “Marāhil-i dushvār-i shā'irī”, 110.

³⁷The title of Saffār'zādah's master's thesis at the University of Iowa is recorded as *The Red Umbrella and After* (1970).

³⁸Except for three poems titled “Don’t Stop Me, Sir,” “The Voice”, and “A New Line,” the remaining poems were published in Persian, either fully or in part, in *Daftar-i duvum* (The second book) and *Tanīn dar diltā*.

³⁹Fatemeh Shams, *A Revolution in Rhyme* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 60.

⁴⁰Leonardo P. Alishan, “Tāhe-reh Saffār’zādah,” 188. Milani, *Veils and Words*, 162.

⁴¹Milani, *Veils and Words*, 162.

⁴²Tāhirah Saffār’zādah, *Harikat va dīrūz* [Movement and yesterday] (Shiraz: Navīd Shīrāz, 1365/1986), 140.

⁴³Milani, *Veils and Words*, 162.

⁴⁴Tāhirah Saffār’zādah, *The Red Umbrella* (Iowa: Windhover Press, 1969), 22.

⁴⁵Saffār’zādah, *The Red Umbrella*, 20.

⁴⁶Milani, *Veils and Words*, 162.

⁴⁷Saffār’zādah, *The Red Umbrella*, 10.

Yet the miracle is happening under our skin
Under your blue shirt
Which I always love to unbutton⁴⁴

It seems that the weight of social restriction no longer presses upon her. The woman who once, for the sake of preserving her ābirū (honor), hastily wiped away tears shed for her beloved from her lips now, beneath the red umbrella, takes the initiate in love:

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.⁴⁵

As Milani argues, the explicit eroticism of these poems may be attributed to several factors: Saffār’zādah’s physical distance from home, her interactions with companions from diverse cultural backgrounds, and her experience of creative freedom in a foreign language, which did not activate the deeply internalized taboos of her native tongue.⁴⁶ Both Milani and Alishan maintain that the poet’s ability to disregard such taboos in this collection derives from the fact that she composed the poems in a language other than her mother tongue. In her poem “Nostalgia,” the poet explicitly articulates her departure from the symbolic and affective boundaries of her native language within her romantic experiences:

It is hard to attract strangers
Without Aphrodite’s belt.
We might forget our mother tongue
The last time I was murdered by a man in my bed
We ran into linguistic problems.⁴⁷

This poem appears in *Harikat va dīrūz* (1357/1978) and *Ma-*



jmū‘ah-’i ash‘ār (Collection of poems) (1391/2012). In both cases, however, the phrase “in my bed” is censored, thereby erasing its erotic connotation in Persian. In *Harikat va dīrūz*, the line reads, “The last time I was murdered by a stranger,” and in *Majmū‘ah-’i ash‘ār*, “The last time a stranger murdered me.”⁴⁸

Interestingly, due to the political constraints of the time, the poem “*Diltangī*” (Longing) was also censored in *Sad va bāzuvān*.⁴⁹ Such modifications recur in the Persian reproductions of several other poems from this collection. It should be noted that the poems in *Sad va bāzuvān* were translated largely without censorship or omission and with only with some aesthetic adjustments. However, in *Majmū‘ah-’i ash‘ār*, compiled and published after the Islamic Revolution, and in *Harikat va dīrūz*, a collection of her poems from the same period, we observe the omission and the censorship of erotic sections. For example, the poem “Love Poem” appears in *Sad va bāzuvān* and translated in full under the title ‘*Āshiqānah* (Romantic):

We travel towards the enjoyment of salty waters
 In a boat with no compass, we travel from nowhere
 To somewhere from somewhere to nowhere
 Cruising in the song of our bodies
 My breasts trust every word that your hands
 —hands with suppleness of the gentle heart—whisper⁵⁰

In *Harikat va dīrūz*, however, this poem is omitted entirely, and in *Majmū‘ah-’i ash‘ār*, it is censored to read:

I trust every word that your hands
 —hands with suppleness of the gentle heart—whisper⁵¹

At times, the erotic tone in Persian is softened by altering particular words. For example, in the Persian translation of the poem “From Chicago” in *Sad va bāzuvān*, the imagery includes balconies adorned with “family flags, red bras, lemon underwear,” using the sexually-charged Persian word *pistān*

⁴⁸Saffār‘zādah, *Harikat va dīrūz*, 42. Tāhirah Saffār‘zādah, *Majmū‘ah-’i ash‘ār* [Collection of poems] (Tehran: Pārs Kitāb, 1391/2012), 182.

⁴⁹Alishan, “Tahereh Saf-farzadeh”, 189. Alishan believes that it is likely that this poem is among those in *The Red Umbrella* that were originally written in Persian. In an extended version of this poem, Tāhirah Saffār‘zādah is identified as both the poet and the translator. See Tāhirah Saffār‘zādah, “Love Poem,” *The Iowa Review* 7, no. 2/3 (Spring–Summer, 1976): 37–39.

⁵⁰Saffār‘zādah, *The Red Umbrella*, 12.

⁵¹Saffār‘zādah, *Majmū‘ah-’i ash‘ār*, 187.

⁵²Saffār'zādah, *Sad va bāzuvān*, 35; Saffār'zādah, *Majmū'ah-i ash'ār*, 188; Saffār'zādah, *The Red Umbrella*, 13.

⁵³"Sā'atam bih man khiyānat mī'kunad" [My watch is cheating on me], "Ma'rā bih sāndavīch-i 'ishq da'vat kun" [Invite me to a sandwich of love] and "Isti'fā" [Resignation].

⁵⁴The poems written during the years 1341/1962 to 1347/1968 were published as an appendix in *Tanīn dar diltā* (1349/1970).

⁵⁵'Abd al-Malikiyān, "Rāh-i dushvār, rāh-i rawshan," 191.

("breast"). Yet, in *Majmū'ah-i ash'ār*, the word is replaced with the more neutral word *sīnah* ("chest"), thereby diminishing the erotic charge.⁵² Three poems featured in *Sad va bāzuvān* are completely omitted from *Majmū'ah-i ash'ār*.⁵³ Among these, *Ma'rā bih sāndavīch-i 'ishq da'vat kun* (Invite me to a sandwich of love) stands out as one of Saffār'zādah's most daring works. Muhammad Rizā 'Abd al-Malikiyān, one of Saffār'zādah's like-minded poets in the post-Revolution period, offers a critical comment that sheds light on the poet's turn toward self-censorship and textual revisions. He writes with reference to *Sad va bāzuvān* and *Daftar-i duvvum*:⁵⁴

[These two collections] represent an effort to achieve an independent poetic language. The anti-imperialist thought is expressed more clearly and profoundly, particularly in *Sad va bāzuvān*. Moreover, within the content of these volumes, one can detect the influence of intellectualism and, at times, aspects of feminine boldness common to the poetry of that period. Consequently, we observe a noticeable attenuation in Saffār'zādah's relationship with the heavens.⁵⁵

'Abd al-Malikiyān later argues that the last poem in *Daftar-i duvvum*, titled "Fath kāmīl nīst" (The conquest is not complete), holds the promise that Saffār'zādah has not been entirely swept away in the vortex of intellectualist allure. Two aspects of this observation invite attention: first, the notion of recklessness; second, the prevalence of this recklessness in the poetry of women during that period. It is plausible that what 'Abd al-Malikiyān means by feminine daring in the poetry of the late 1340s/1960s was shaped by Furūgh Farrukhzād's poems and her tragic life in the middle of that decade. The second point lies in the semantic dimension of the term "daring" (*bī'parvā*). In its literal sense, "daring" denotes someone unafraid of anything. From 'Abd al-Malikiyān's perspective, it was considered improper for a woman to fear nothing. The "frightening thing," predominantly ignored by women poets of the era was shame or the sexual taboos imposed on their social lives.



Nevertheless, the central issue is not that the poet, in one phase of her life, engaged in experiences different from those of her middle and later years; this is, after all, a common occurrence. The question is why the poet interprets these changes in the following way: “I do not deny and hide any corner of my poetic life. Even if there are indecent experiences in them, they still reveal my attempts as a truth-seeking human being.”⁵⁶ This dual stance can be understood not only as a change in her perspective on sexuality but also as a product of her experience of freedom from linguistic taboos in English language.

From this discussion one may deduce that domination operates more effectively in the mother tongue. In order to disrupt the mechanisms of such domination, Iranian women poets incorporate foreign words into their poems. Some scholars attribute women’s use of foreign vocabulary in their work as an effort to undermine the authority or domination of the official language which is predominantly masculine in character. For example, ‘Abbās Muhammadī Asl argues that women, “by using more foreign words, exhibit both their dissent against the masculine national language and their pursuit of prestige from the international foreign language.”⁵⁷ The insertion of non-Persian vocabulary to counter the dominance of the mother tongue underscores the intimate connection between language and the societal, or more precisely, customary, restrictions imposed on women. Notably, the use of non-Persian words is significantly more frequent in Saffār’zādah’s works than in the those of her contemporaries, and she can be regarded as one of the earliest poets to use foreign words extensively in poetry.⁵⁸

Upon returning from the United States, Saffār’zādah’s approach shifted in two ways. Her religious inclinations became deliberately integrated with social-political criticism, adopting a justice-oriented and global perspective. Fatemeh Shams contends that no other poet has achieved such a transnational approach to Islam.⁵⁹ Milani places Saffār’zādah among those who regard Islam as a powerful ideology and a catalyst for change.⁶⁰

⁵⁶Saffār’zādah, “Marāhil-i dushvār-i shā’irī,” 107–8.

⁵⁷ ‘Abbās Muhammadī Asl, *Jinsīyat va zabān’shināsī-i ijtimā’ī* [Gender and social linguistics] (Tehran: Gul’āzīn, 1389/2010), 81–82.

⁵⁸Milani, *Veils and Words*, 158.

⁵⁹Shams, *A Revolution in Rhyme*, 61.

⁶⁰Milani, *Veils and Words*, 158.

⁶¹Saffār'zādah, "Marāhil-i dushvār-i shā'iri," 126. Shams, *A Revolution in Rhyme*, 89.

⁶²Shams, *A Revolution in Rhyme*, 66.

⁶³Alishan, "Tahereh Saffarza-deh," 197.

⁶⁴Milani, *Veils and Words*, 158, 167.

In the political atmosphere of the late 1340s/1960s, a number of avant-garde artists and writers were drawn to Islam as a favored political alternative. This group included figures such as Mīr Husayn Mūsavī, Zahrā (Zhālah) Rah'navard, and Murtazā (Kāmrān) Āvīnī (d. 1372/1993). Many of them, maintaining revolutionary-Islamic ideals in art and cinema, entered politics after the Islamic Revolution, attained governmental positions, and played active roles in shaping the state's orientation toward art and literature. For example, in a teacher retraining program called "Kānūn-i farhangī-i nihzat-i islāmī" (The Cultural Institute of the Islamic Movement), Saffār'zādah, along with her like-minded writers and poets, instructed students in theater, fiction writing, poetry, and cinema.⁶¹ This institute subsequently evolved into "Hawzah-'i andīshah va hunar-i islāmī" (The Islamic Institute of Thought and Art) and later into "Hawzah-'i hunarī-i sāzmān-i tablīghāt-i islāmī" (The Artistic Institute of the Islamic Republic).⁶²

Considering the cultural and political record of this group, it can be argued that their shared characteristic was a tendency toward excess. Alishan maintains that Persian contemporary poetry after Nīmā Yūshīj's "Barf" (Snow)—a poem whose distinct symbolic tone was a tribute to leftist inclinations—anticipated a Marxist revolution. However, Saffār'zādah and this group of avant-garde, pioneering and overtly daring artists had arrived at a different conclusion: that freedom would come beneath the banner of Islam.⁶³ It is in this atmosphere that significant Islamic symbols gradually emerged in Saffār'zādah's poetry. In other words, we observe the poet assembling a new set of moral codes for herself. Turning toward Islam, to borrow one critic's description, resulted in the transformation, reviving and reformulation of her worldview, in which both Eastern and Western symbols were drawn upon.⁶⁴ The more Saffār'zādah's poetry distances from her individual and emotional domain, the more the presence of sexuality fades, while traces of religiosity intensify. One of the earliest poems to capture this moral and spiritual shift is "Fath kāmil nīst," included in *Daftar-i duvzum*:



And I am coming toward a grand prayer (namāz)
 My ablution (vuzū) is from the air of the street
 And the dark routes of smoke
 And the prayer direction (qiblah) of incidents along with time
 Turn toward my response
 And my nail polish
 Is not a sign of distance
 For proclaiming the greatness of God takbīr (the magnificence
 of God)⁶⁵

⁶⁵Saffār'zādah, *Harikat va dīrūz*, 36.

In this poem, words such as azān (call to prayer), mu'min (the faithful), vuzū (ablution), namāz (prayer), qiblah (prayer direction), du'ā (supplication) and mu'jizah (miracle) signal the poet's heightened spiritual gravitation. From this point onward, these terms become defining stylistic markers of her writing. Equally important is the verse's reference to nail polish, believed in Islamic jurisprudence to invalidate ablution, which Saffār'zādah reclaims as a symbol of reconciliation between religious practice and modern womanhood. By asserting that nail polish does not hinder prayer, she articulates an attempt to harmonize contemporary female identity with faith, proposing a renewed reading of Islam for a younger generation. This synthesis becomes central to Saffār'zādah's later poetic identity. From *Daftar-i duvvum* onward, Saffār'zādah embarks on a path that, in conjunction with her religious convictions, transforms her into a "poet-prophet figure," one whose voice and demeanor emulate the didactic tone of revelation. She dedicates her verse to the propagation for religion and, with the authority of faith—later intertwined with political power—adopts a firm, declarative, and uncompromising linguistic style that departs from the hesitancy and flexibility associated with feminine expression.

That said, although *Daftar-i duvvum* marks the beginning of Saffār'zādah's consciously Islamic and socially committed poetry, she still does not entirely refrain from manifesting her femininity outside prescriptive norms of modesty:

⁶⁶Saffār'zādah, *Tanīn dar diltā*, 89.

⁶⁷Milani, *Veils and Words*, 164.

⁶⁸Saffār'zādah, *Harikat va dirūz*, 23–24.

Is the atmosphere of all this loneliness not enough
That I become naked some completely no mirror can tell
And become such a cry
That no window can hear?⁶⁶

During this period, Saffār'zādah's poetry also reveals a defiant response to the masculine-dominated structure that confined women to the margins of literary and social life.⁶⁷ For instance, in the poem "Zād'gāh" (Birthplace), from *Daftar-i duvvum*, she challenges the patriarchal devaluation of the birth of a girl compared to that of a boy:

I have not seen my birthplace
The place where my mother
Set down the heavy burden of her womb
Beneath a roof.
She is still alive,
The first ticking of my little heart
In the heater hole,
And the cracks of the old bricks,
And the trace of a shameful glance
Is visible upon the walls of the room
My mother's look
Toward my father
And my grandfather.
A stifled voice said,
"It's a girl!"
The midwife trembled,
Unsure whether to take the coin for cutting the cord,
And certain of the death
Of the sweets for circumcision feast.⁶⁸

In the same poem, Saffār'zādah states that, since she was not raised at the table of "male humans" (ādam'hā-yi nar) dominance, she does not contemplate seizing power at the cost of killing others, and that her bright hands have no desire to clench into fists and strike. Her use of the expression "male humans"



(ādam'hā-yi nar) rather than the word “men” (mardān) not only emphasizes her anger toward gender inequality but also demonstrates her skill in manipulating language. This choice can also be regarded a subtle indicator of her ideological extremism, a tendency hinted at through her reference to the complete seizure of power. Milani classifies the poems from this period as part of the poet's feminist corpus.⁶⁹

Tanīn dar diltā (1349/1970) was the literary product of Saffār'zādah brought back from her extended stay in the United States. She regarded this collection as carrying her message about the essence of poetry and presented it as a manifesto for a distinctive poetic approach, later known as the “theory of tanīn” (“echo”). According to Huqūqī (1350/1971), the following excerpt from her long poem “Safar-i avval” (The first journey) serves as Saffār'zādah's declaration introducing this theory:⁷⁰

Read a poem, Shārāt, read a poem,
 A poem without the anxiety of rhythm,
 A poem as clear as a metaphor,
 An intellectual whisper.
 Ears are travelers of tunes.
 Echo is the movement my words
 Commence in the reader's mind⁷¹

In an interview conducted by Muhammad 'Alī Isfahānī (1354/1975), Saffār'zādah explains the concept of tanīn:

The literal meaning of tanīn is the sound of a bell. The metaphorical meaning I apply refers to the broad reflection of meaning, or the multidimensionality of meaning, which, like the sound of a bell, spreads outward, strikes, and rouses the mind into movement and wakefulness. Tanīn emerges through the continuity and precise progression of perceptions from one stage to the next within a poem. When the poem is regarded as a whole and its entirety considered, even a colloquial line participates in this movement and semantic dimension.⁷²

⁶⁹Milani, *Veils and Words*, 163.

⁷⁰Huqūqī, “Guftigū bā Tāhirah Saffār'zādah”, 118–19.

⁷¹Saffār'zādah, *Tanīn dar diltā*, 18.

⁷²Tāhirah Saffār'zādah, interview by Muhammad 'Alī Isfahānī, in *Harikat va dīrūz*, 164. Alishan has noted the connection between the theory of tanīn and Eliot's ideas in Alishan, “Tahereh Saffar-zadeh,” 187–88.

⁷³Tāhirah Saffār'zādah, "Tanīn-i andīshah dar Haft safār" [The echo of thought in Seven journeys], in *Bīdār'garī dar 'ilm va hunar*, 227.

⁷⁴Alishan, "Tahereh Saffarza-deh," 195. Alishan points out the influence of Eliot's *The Waste Land* on two poems by Saffār'zādah, "Safar-i avval" and "Safar-i Zamzam."

⁷⁵Shams Lang'rūdī, *Tārīkh-i tahlīlī-i shī'r-i naw*, 4:217.

⁷⁶Tāhirah Saffār'zādah, *Sad va bāzuvān*, 54. The last three poems in this collection are prose-like without punctuation marks.

Saffār'zādah offered a similar explanation in her introduction to *Haft safar* (Seven journeys) (1384/2005):

When a person reflections upon a concept, other subjects—either concrete or elusive—pass through the mind. If the poet can, by means of deliberate design, establish connections among these "flights of mind" and bring the associations closer together, then through this effort the reader engages with authentic and vital perceptions. The echo of the speaker's thought in the listener's mind can produce a healthy and fascinating movement.⁷³

This collection also includes six concrete poems by Saffār'zādah. She is considered among the first poets to introduce the conceptual arrangement of words into Persian poetry. *Safar-i Zamzam* (The journey of Zamzam) continues the trend by expanding religious concepts in her poetry. According to Alishan, in *Safar-i Zamzam*, Saffār'zādah gradually regains her faith and begins to emerge from the "wasteland."⁷⁴

Sad va bāzuvān (1350/1971), published after *Tanīn dar diltā*, has been described by Shams Lang'rūdī as "distinct, very modern, exceptional, unexpected, and daring, but prose-like and weak in expression."⁷⁵ The poem "Kūtūlah'hā" (Dwarfs), a free adaptation of the children's tale of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, is Saffār'zādah's most distinctly feminist poem. In it, she portrays the patriarchal and spiritually stunted society of Iran, a society that forces women to conform to restrictive social norms and punishes them if they fail to do so:

The dwarfs say she was weaned too early
The dwarfs say she was seen in a café
Where she should not have been.
The dwarfs say blue looks good on her.
The dwarfs say short hair does not...⁷⁶

Muhammad Huqūqī, who had earlier written an article in de-



fense of Tanīn dar diltā in Āyandigān (1349/1970), wrote the introduction to this new collection as well. However, his support did little to quell the backlash from critics and certain poets, who harshly criticized Saffār'zādah's poetry.⁷⁷ Among them, Muhammad 'Alī Sipān'lū (d. 1394/2015), Mahmūd Mushrif Āzād Tihirānī (d. 1384/2005), Javād Mujābī, and Ismā'īl Nūrī 'Alā strongly disagreed with Huqūqī's claim that Sad va bāzuvān represented a significant new development in Persian poetry. For example, in his essay "A Poetess Who Writes in a Foreign Language," Sipān'lū claimed:

Ms. Saffār'zādah's language has no connection with our Persian language. Sad va bāzuvān is the translation of poems originally written in English, but even where the ones the poet wrote directly in Persian show no difference from their English translations.⁷⁸

The statement suggests that Sipān'lū excluded Saffār'zādah from the domain of the Persian language, effectively expelling her from it. Similarly, Ismā'īl Nūrī 'Alā compared Saffār'zādah with Ahmad Rizā Ahmadī, writing:

The problem that our intellectuals have with Ahmadī—and not Ahmadī's poetry—is simply that his name is not Furūgh or Tāhirah, or Laylī and he did not spend a few years in Europe.⁷⁹

Here Nūrī 'Alā implicitly attributes Huqūqī's defense of Saffār'zādah to her gender. In this climate, poet and sociologist Muhammad Rizā Fashāhī wrote an open letter to Saffār'zādah, arguing that the hostility directed at her stemmed from her lack of strong public relations skills.⁸⁰ He noted that these same critics refrained from criticizing Ahmad Shāmlū, reinforcing the suspicion of gender bias in their attitudes. Taken together, the critiques of Tanīn dar diltā reveal that these critics regarded Saffār'zādah as a "woman poet" who wrote "things" that did not qualify as poetry nor properly belonged to the Persian language. They implied that her poems would not have received

⁷⁷Muhammad Huqūqī, "Tanīn-i shī'r-i dīgarī", Āyandigān, Bahman 22, 1349/ February 11, 1971.

⁷⁸Muhammad 'Alī Sipān'lū, "Shā'irah-ī kih bih zabān-i khārijī chīz mī'navīsad" [A poetess who writes things in a foreign language], Firdawsī 1061, quoted in Shams Lang'rūdī, Tārīkh-i tahlīlī-i shī'r-i naw, 4:218.

⁷⁹Ismā'īl Nūrī 'Alā, "Insān, khudāyān-i mu'āsir: Pāsukhī bih Muhammad Huqūqī dar difā' az Ahmad Rizā Ahmadī va radd-i shī'r-i Tāhirah Saffār'zādah," Firdawsī 1064, quoted in Shams Lang'rūdī, Tārīkh-i tahlīlī-i shī'r-i naw, 4:219.

⁸⁰Muhammad Rizā Fashāhī, "Nāmah-'i sar'gushādah bih Tāhirah Saffār'zādah, dar difā' az majmū'ah-'i Sad va bāzuvān," Firdawsī 1065, quoted in Shams Lang'rūdī, Tārīkh-i tahlīlī-i shī'r-i naw, 4:220.

⁸¹Rizā Barāhanī explicitly calls her poems “poem-like” and remarks: “It is neither traditional nor modern; what it is not is poetry.” See Rizā Barāhanī, “Dar’bārah-’i shi’r-i Tāhirah Saffār’zādah,” *Firdawsī* 1068, quoted in Shams Lang’rūdī, *Tārikh-i tahlīlī-i shi’r-i naw*, 4:219.

⁸²Tāhirah Saffār’zādah, “Tanīn-i andīshah dar Haft safar,” 228.

⁸³Alī Muhammad Haqq’shinās, “Rāhī kih bā Safar-i panjum dar shi’r-i imrūz-i āghāz mī’shavad” [The path that opens in today’s poetry with The fifth journey], in *Bīdār’garī dar ‘ilm va hunar*, 93.

⁸⁴Milani, *Veils and Words*, 159.

any recognition had she not been a woman.⁸¹ The sexism in such judgments is palpable. It seems that Saffār’zādah’s identity as a woman, her refusal to revere the historical authority of Persian, and her issuance of a poetic manifesto under the title of *tanīn* were sufficient to provoke such adverse reactions.

In the introduction to *Haft safar*, Saffār’zādah recounts that after she introduced the concept of *tanīn* in *Safar-i avvaland* *Safar-i Zamzam*, a group of academic critics, fearful of the growing popularity of explicitly political poetry, took the *Tanīn dar diltā* to government authorities and denounced it as destructive to the Persian language, under the pretext of protecting cultural identity.⁸² Examining these reactions reveals the degree of linguistic liberation Saffār’zādah must have experienced when she consciously departed from the constraints of standard Persian.

One plausible reason for Saffār’zādah’s subsequent turn to more radical religiously themed poetry was her exclusion from the literary community of her time. As Haqq’shinās argues, in her later collection *Safar-i panjum* (*The fifth journey*) (1356/1977), Saffār’zādah drew upon the spiritual sphere to explore new poetic innovations, leaving behind what little connection she still had with the contemporary literary scene.⁸³ According to Haqq’shinās, in Saffār’zādah’s new poetic world, no trace of sensual imagery or reference to sexual organs remains; on the contrary, it is filled with religious allusions, invocations, and symbols.” Whereas *Tanīn dar diltā* displays the poet’s mastery of form, *Safar-i panjum* demonstrates her complete integration of form and content. According to publication statistics, the book went through three printings within two months and sold 30,000 copies, making *Safar-i panjum* not only Saffār’zādah’s most widely read work but also has the highest-selling poetry book of its time.⁸⁴

Haqq’shinās argues that *Safar-i panjum* possesses the stylistic qualities of divine scriptures, an attribute he deems favorable for a poet transitioning away from intensely personal verse



and, in her thought, replacing *ummat* (the Muslim community) with *millat* (the nation). In essence, Saffār'zādah's justice-driven sensibilities, shaped initially by her journey to the United States, were first directed toward anti-imperialism, presenting an image of a poet who rises in protest against oppression and injustice anywhere in the world. Subsequently, after returning to Iran, and by her own account in response to the closed and repressive political atmosphere, she was drawn toward religion as her window to freedom: "It is the cruel situation of the time that motivates the justice-seeking humans toward rebellion or the amplification of the manifestations of their faith and beliefs."⁸⁵

The poem "Safar-i 'āshiqānah" (Romantic journey), from *Safar-i panjum*, is charged with social protests, employing religious motifs as the poet's proposed alternative for a committed life. Saffār'zādah read this poem during the eighth night of *Shab'hā-yi shi'r-i Goethe* (Goethe poetry nights) in 1356/1978, alongside other religious poets such as Mūsavī Garmārūdī. The audience received it warmly. The opening lines testify that, despite the intensified presence of religious themes in *Safar-i panjum*, Saffār'zādah remains a woman who can begin a poem by speaking of her hair:

The sweeper of the morning saw me
 Bringing my disheveled and wet hair
 From the staircase of the river
 The dawn was not visible.⁸⁶

Midway through the poem, Saffār'zādah bids good night to "the observing soul of her mother," "a woman whose clothes had happy colors," and turns to address the "ladies" (*bānūvān*) of the city:

O ladies of the city,
 Your throats have never been fertilized with love.
 Otherwise, you would mix your blusher with your tears.⁸⁷

⁸⁵Tāhirah Saffār'zādah, interview by Muhammad 'Alī Isfahānī, 172.

⁸⁶Saffār'zādah, *Harikat va dīrūz*, 93.

⁸⁷Saffār'zādah, *Harikat va dīrūz*, 96, 98.

⁸⁸Robin Tolmach Lakoff, *Language and Woman's Place: Text and Commentaries*, ed. Mary Bucholtz (London: Routledge, 2004), 52–55. For example, the society uses the word *bānū* to address women engaged in low-income or physically demanding jobs, such as domestic workers, yet it rarely applies the term very rarely applies the term to professionals like lawyers or physicians. In terms of reduction, expressions such as “athlete *bānū*” and “head of the family *bānū*” are telling examples.

The distinction Saffār'zādah makes between her mother as a woman and the other women of the city whom she calls “ladies” is significant. Robin Lakoff has observed that patriarchal societies often use the term “lady” as a means of labeling and diminishing women. In practice, when individuals' social status is deemed low by societal standards, they may be addressed with ostensibly respectful titles such as “lady” (*bānū*). Conversely, when a woman appears in a role outside her dominant sexual identity, society uses “lady” (*bānū*) to brand and mark her as an object of scrutiny.⁸⁸ In light of Saffār'zādah's chastisement of the “ladies of the city” in this poem, and her conceptual distinction between “woman” and “lady,” it appears she deploys the word *bānū* deliberately for derogatory effect. This signals a subtle return of the poetic persona evident “Kūdak-i qarn,” who habitually divided women into “good” and “bad” categories, considering “bad” women to be pretentious and lacking insight.

Bay'at (Oath of Allegiance): The Fall

The beginning of Saffār'zādah's poetic career differs sharply from its end. Her Islamic-oriented committed poetry demonstrates the usual characteristics of verse influenced by ideology—that is, its submission to the realm of sloganeering. Across her poetic oeuvre, one observes a steep decline in aesthetic quality. Her revolutionary fervor and her devotion to the political movement that came to dominate the cultural sphere, like those of other committed poets, ultimately stripped her poetry of its beauty. In *Bay'at bā bīdārī* (Allegiance with wakefulness, 1358/1979) and *Dīdār-i subh* (Meeting with the morning, 1366/1987), Saffār'zādah bears almost no resemblance to the poet who once reflected deeply on form and was regarded as one of the earliest practitioners of word arrangement as a poetic technique. She appears so indifferent to the craft of poetry that her poems can scarcely be considered literary texts:

A truth-seeking and free human resembles the sky,
Which, with all its longings,



In step with the earth,
Deems its journey permissible
And in the total darkness,
Moves onward, indifferent to the season.⁸⁹

⁸⁹Tāhirah Saffār'zādah, *Dīdār-i subh* [Meeting with the morning] (Shiraz: Navīd Shīrāz, 1366/1987), 20.

In *Dīdār-i subh*, beyond excessive sloganeering, we encounter a poet who appears not to even contemplate what she writes:

⁹⁰Saffār'zādah, *Dīdār-i subh*, 74.

Cooling of warmth,
With a circular shape,
Or rectangular,
Which takes the form
Of frozen fragrance and ice,
Is drawn upon my chest.⁹⁰

⁹¹Saffār'zādah, *Dīdār-i subh*, 88.

It is unclear how the “cooling of warmth” is drawn upon the chest. Likewise, in the following poem, the reference to the “tired organs of the eyes” remains perplexing:

The kind caressing air
Separates
The tired organs of my eyes
From the curtain of the book.⁹¹

Such examples abound in *Dīdār-i subh*. Unless we consider the fate of Saffār'zādah's subsequent collection *Mardān-i munhanī* (*Curved men*, 1366/1987), this drastic deterioration of her poetry remains puzzling and unjustified. *Mardān-i munhanī* is a collection of poems written between 1349/1970 to 1356/1977, which were excluded from *Tanīn dar diltāand Safar-i panjum*. In the preface to *Mardān-i munhanī*, Saffār'zādah states that these poems were either prohibited from publication or deemed incompatible with the other poems. If this collection is placed correctly within the chronology of her oeuvre, the sharp decline observed in *Bay'at bā bīdārī* and *Dīdār-i subh* would become less surprising. One might argue that *Mardān-i munhanī* marks the beginning of her increasing laxity in poetic craftsmanship.

⁹²Tāhirah Saffār'zādah,
“Marāhil-i dushvār-i shā'irī,”
96.

However, it is not only the artistic quality of her poetry that undergoes change; the principal theme of her earlier works—resisting oppression and defending the oppressed—also begins to lose relevance and lags behind the social and political realities of her time.

In a lengthy 1359/1980 interview printed at the end of *Mardān-i munhanī*, Saffār'zādah makes certain claims that appear inconsistent with her described experiences. Although during her political activities against the previous regime she had never spent even a single day in prison, she declares:

In addition to these kinds of cultural harassments, of which I have given a brief account, my place of residence, telephone, workplace, and all my daily movements were under strict surveillance. They even had a key and, in my absence, would enter and leave my house.... How can all this harassment be compared to spending only a few days in prison?⁹²

Saffār'zādah's remarks gain added resonance when compared with the story of Ghulām Husayn Sā'idī (d. 1364/1985) and his repeated arrests and instance of psychological and physical torture. At the time of this interview, numerous poets and writers were incarcerated; exactly one year later, Sa'īd Sultān'pūr (d. 1360/1981) was executed after enduring severe torture. In the political climate of the 1360s/1980s—when a large number of poets and writers had incurred the wrath of the ruling system, many, including Qudsī Qāzī'nūr and Shahr'nūsh Pārsī'pūr, were imprisoned, poetry collections were subject to censorship, and the publication of works by poets such as Furūgh Farrukhzād faced obstacles—Saffār'zādah continued to publish her works both within and outside the university. At a time when secular university professors were being dismissed, Saffār'zādah, who, after returning from the United States in 1349/1970, had been employed at the National University prior to the revolution and then dismissed in 1355/1976, was reappointed in 1359/1980, first as dean and then as vice-dean of the Faculty of Human-



ities.⁹³ She even entered the parliamentary elections during this period, though she was not elected.⁹⁴ The government promoted her poetry as modern Islamic verse in opposition to secular modernists. Cultural institutions, in particular, sought to spotlight her poetry as an alternative to the influential image of Furūgh Farrukhzād. This, however, dealt a serious blow to her literary stature, for although the government sought, through the “*Inqilāb-i farhangī*” (Cultural Revolution) and the establishment of dependent bodies such as *Hawzah-’i Hunarī*, to bring art and literature under its control, poetry, unlike cinema and music, was never fully subsumed under government authority. As a result, poets such as Saffār’zādah, isolated from contemporary developments and persisting in repeating their anti-oppression and anti-dictatorship poetry in pursuit of an ideal society, could no longer meet the expectations of an audience that was finding its voice in the work of figures such as Ahmad Shāmlū, Hūshang Ibtihāj and Mahdī Akhavān Sālis.

From the perspective of feminine language, Saffār’zādah’s third poetic period may be described as desexualized. Milani argues that in *Bay’at bā bīdārī*, the feminine voice present in her earlier poetry is repressed; the angry voice of a woman speaking against imposed sexual restrictions is no longer audible. The hands once outstretched embrace a beloved are now raised to clasp the hands of martyrs.⁹⁵ Religion, which in her earlier poems was an intimate and personal concern, gradually becomes a weapon of struggle. As religion assumes a more public and generalized presence in her poems, her individuality and sexuality become correspondingly less discernible. In her poetry of this period, there is no trace of empathetic tone, of linguistic markers of doubt, of vocabulary drawn from women’s lived experience, of indirect speech, of unfinished utterance, or of the disclosure of sexuality. In her last three collections, Saffār’zādah poses questions only twice, and not for the purpose of inviting audience participation in the poem’s process. This reflects an absence of perceived need for either audience acceptance or rejection. It is well understood that one reason for the prevalence of hesitant and gentle expression in women’s writing is the fear of audience reaction and societal judgement. Saffār’zādah disre-

⁹³Shams, *A Revolution in Rhyme*, 66.

⁹⁴Milani, *Veils and Words*, 159. Alishan, “*Tahereh Saffarzadeh*,” 203.

⁹⁵Milani, *Veils and Words*, 171—72.

⁹⁶Saffār'zādah, "Marāhil-i dushvār-i shā'irī," 64.

⁹⁷Lakoff, *Talking Power*, 30.

garded such concerns; even when informed that contemporary critics opposed her stances, she declared: "I defended what I considered to be my rights like a man."⁹⁶ These features illustrate that in the third phase, shaped by the power derived from her social and academic standing, her proximity to the ruling government, and her role as custodian of modern poetry after the revolution, she adopted a decisive and admonitory mode of expression: a language designed to guide, to reproach, and to warn. Her language during this period substantiates the proposition that power determines the manner of performing the speech act,⁹⁷ rather than gender.

Tāhirah Saffār'zādah died on 4 Ābān 1387/October 25, 2008, of complications following a brain surgery in Irān'mihr Hospital in Tehran. She was buried in Imām'zādah Sālih.

