



## ALIZADEH, GHAZALEH

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**ALIZADEH, Ghazaleh** (Ġazāla 'Alizāda, registered as Fāṭema 'Alizāda Harāti; b. Mashad, 17 February 1947; d. Javāherdeh, Rāmsar, 8 April 1996), noted novelist and short story writer ([FIGURE 1](#)).

Alizadeh was the only child of a wealthy and cultured family. Her father was a merchant, and her mother, Monir Sayyedi, a poet and fiction writer, was the author of *Payk-e Āseā* (The known messenger, 1998). Alizadeh's childhood, according to her mother, was spent "in a house with a pool and lawns, full of flowers, willow and cypress trees, and box-tree shrubs" (Sayyedi, p. 531-37). By her own account, however, her childhood was an unhappy one, beset by frequent quarrels and talk of divorce between her parents. The absence of home appears as a recurrent motif in her fictions. She talks of her childhood fears and anxieties, of her nightmares, and of her futile quest for a "home" in a number of interviews and articles ('Alizāda, 1999a, p. 301). "I dream of home when asleep." ('Alizāda, 1996b, p. 19)

According to her mother's biographical account, Alizadeh was a sensitive child, who often exhibited signs of depression and sought solace in her imagination. Upon witnessing the slaughter of a sacrificial sheep on a religious occasion when still a child, she became a staunch vegetarian. A bout with typhoid saw her head shaved, and at that point she christened herself as "Ḥosayn" (Sayyedi, pp. 141-50). As her fictive double, "Ḥosayn" stayed with her for the rest of her life. She habitually covered her eyes with a scarf, listened to this double's voice and then dictated her stories to her secretary. "Hosayn" was also a source of consolation when she battled with cancer. In her own



words, “Loneliness and anxiety in the real cruel world was so high, that in order to survive, I had to tell myself conciliating stories; a habit that has stayed with me since childhood.” (Alizāda, 1999b, p. 530)

After completing her secondary education in the Šāhdoḡt and Mahasti High Schools in Mashad, Ġazāla entered the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences of the Tehran University. She later left for Europe to continue her studies. She did not, however, finish her studies and returned home after her father's death. “I see nothing in here but moral decay. Everything is used and then thrown away. Humans more than anything else.” (Alizāda, 1999b, p. 518) From 1976-79 she worked in the Publications Department of Tehran's Free University.

Alizadeh had an early exposure to the intellectual and literary world. Twice a month, her mother hosted a literary circle in her home. The gatherings, attended by eminent literary figures and scholars, such as Sa'id Nafisi (1895-1966), and Mehdi Aḡavān Tāleṡ (1928-1990), had a lasting influence on Alizadeh's intellectual development. She read the works of great poets in every session or wrote an article about them, gradually developing a lasting interest in politics and literature. By 1967 her stories made their way to *Āraš*, one of the reputable literary journals of the period. Among her supporters at *Āraš* was Jalāl Āl-e Ahmad (1923-69), the prominent novelist and influential social critic, who encouraged Alizadeh's romantic rejection of urban life and industrialized society.

She admired, since childhood, Moḡammad Mošaddeḡ (1882-1967), Iran's popular prime minister. During the financial crisis of the early 1950s, caused by international sanctions orchestrated by Britain and the United States, Alizadeh used her allowance to buy national bonds (Sayyedi p. 140). While a student in Paris, she was in contact with leftist political groups. She was one of the first members of the Association of Iranian Writers (Kānun-e nevisandegān-e Iran), which was founded in 1968, and took the lead in dealing with the problems of censorship and promoting the professional interests of the writers (Karimi Hakkak, 1985, p. 189). She was also one of the signatories to the politically consequential declaration in defense of freedom of speech, issued by prominent members of Iran's intelligentsia in 1994, known as “We Are Writers.” Nevertheless, her writings were not explicitly political, and her primary engagement remained her artistic development. Alizadeh considered her own generation—from amongst whom she selected her protagonists—“a lost generation of dreamers,” and comparing it with the present generation, she



wrote, “We were an idealist generation; we believed in salvation; I have no regrets. I wonder about the empty gapes of teenagers who have neither a dream nor a nightmare...We had a sanctified vocabulary: freedom, homeland, justice, culture, beauty and expression.” (Alizāda, 1995, p. 30)

Formative influences on Alizadeh’s intellectual development and her hybrid literary canon derived from the Persian literature and mysticism, to which she had been exposed from an early age, on the one hand, and the French literary tradition, on the other (Mihandust, p. 545). Among her favorite French novelists was Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880), whom she believed to be influenced by Eastern mystical thought (Alizāda, 1993, p. 15), and whose extraordinary vigor and exactitude of expression she strove to emulate in her own work.

In *Ba’d az tābestān* (After summer, 1976), her first novella, she recounts the tale of men and women who have spent an entire lifetime in an imaginary world, only to be woken up by the harsh realities of life, and meet a tragic end. Her first collection of short stories, *Safar-e nāgoḏāštani* (The impassable journey), comprised of pieces she had written while in Paris, was published in Iran in 1977. The characters depicted in *Safar-e nāgoḏāštani* escape life’s incurable solitude by a fictive journey to the mystical realm.

City, home, and memories of childhood appear as recurrent motifs in Alizadeh’s stories. After the confiscation of her parental home, she took more than ever refuge in the shelter of words, and recreated the lost home in her novels. *Kāna-ye Edrisihā* (The Edrisis’ house, 2 vols., 1991-92), in which “love, dream, and mystical alchemy govern” (Sattāri, p 138), is set in ‘Ešqābād in 1910s, and is the tale of a house confiscated by revolutionary authorities, and handed over to new residents, who are caught in a metaphorical clash between a decadent revolutionary state and a defiant emerging culture. The novel consists of four sections, and is narrated from four perspectives. Critics have traced elements of a religion-inspired “sacred architecture” (Ānāhi pp. 17-18), as well as the interplay of geometrical forms, the circle and the square, and number four in the structure of the novel (Yavari, p. 589). Written in exquisite detail in the tradition of 19th century European realism, the novel combines a critique of totalitarianism with mythological overtones (Sattāri, p 142; Moktāri, 1993, p. 75). The publication of *The Edrisis’ House* earned Alizadeh high literary acclaim. It was the recipient of the “Twenty Years of Fiction Writing,” awarded by the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance in 1999.



“Melk-e āsiāb” (The mill estate, unpublished,) is yet another story by Alizadeh colored by a distinctly dramatized presence of the concept of home. It revolves around the tale of an educated small landowner family, who, unfamiliar with the new codes and rules of survival, experience confusion and hardship in the immediate years before and after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. We encounter the ostentatious aristocracy, and the city’s poorest dwellers through the lenses of dreamer socialists. The instability inherent in such a society riveted by huge gulfs between the various social classes, Alizadeh likens to “a fire in the oven or a monster in a cage.” (Alizāda, 1995, pp. 30-32)

In Alizadeh’s post-revolutionary works socio-political concerns acquire more visible presence. *Dow manẓara* (Two views, 1984), a novella, is a mystical homage to the revolution’s potentials as an opportunity to unify and mobilize people, while *Čahār-rāh* (The crossroad, 1994), a collection of four stories, is populated by disillusioned characters with failed dreams. The tragic plight of Moṣaddeq’s nationalist policies finds representation in “Dādrasi” (The trial), one of the noted short stories of the collection, which is set in Tehran in the autumn of 1953 (see [COUP D’ETAT OF 1332 Š./1953](#)). The story’s protagonist is a colonel who works in a military court, and whose primary duty is to try political prisoners. Instead of portraying the colonel as a malicious being whose sole purpose is to spill the blood of the vivacious revolutionaries, Alizadeh, by dissociating herself from the period’s politics of dissent with perception and wit, highlights his individual characteristics, and gives him a human face. The important point about “Dādrasi” and other stories of the collection is the process of decentralizing the story and increasing the possibility of constructing multiple narratives, which seems to be one of the most important tendencies of the literary works in recent decades (Korrami, pp. 74-75) An excerpt of the story has appeared in English translation in *Strange Times: O My Dear* (ed. Nahid Mozaffari, New York, 2005, pp. 325-32). “Jazira” (Island) from this collection was the recipient of the Golden Pen, awarded by the literary magazine *Gardun* in 1999.

In *Šabhā-ye Tehran* (Nights of Tehran, 1999), Alizadeh’s last published novel, a young man who is spending his summer holidays with his grandmother and sister in a hotel overlooking the sea, enters a larger circle of socialites whose behavior and characters are a reflection of life in Iran in the 1970s. Traces of Marcel Proust’s (1871-1922) most noted novel *In Search of the Lost Time* could be found in this novel.

Selective word choice and blending precise observations of nature and the



physical world with inner musings are among the main characteristics of Alizadeh's style of writing. The vigor and exactitude with which she challenges to adapt her expressions to her purpose causes her prose, at time to stall in explaining inconvenient details. Her devotion to style and aesthetic principles, which she felt as essential to prose as it had long been considered to poetry, tends to succumb to excessive musicality and rhythm, and at time to sentimentalism (Mahvizāni, pp. 249-50).

Alizadeh is among the second generation of Persian women novelists who started their literary careers in the 1970s and following in the footsteps of Simin Dānešvar (b. 1921), Mahšid Amiršāhi (b. 1939), and Goli Taraqqi (b. 1937), among others, coined a feminine language, crafted a feminine worldview, and played an important role in shaping prevalent currents in women's story writing in present day Iran.

Alizadeh's attraction to mysticism increased with the passage of time. In a strange manner she believed in mishap and might, in fate and destiny, and in "the luminous voice coming from God that pitter patters in the abbeys," (Alizāda, 1999, pp. 521-25). She looked as if, "she had just step out of an 18th century novel, dreamy and mystical." (Musavi, p 36) In most of her works a dark and macabre sense of death prevails. Following two unsuccessful suicide attempts, and while suffering from cancer for the last three years of her life, for which she had also traveled to France to receive chemotherapy treatment, she hung herself from a tree in a forest in Rāmsar on May 7, 1996. Her body was found three days later and was buried in the Emānzāda Ṭāher Cemetery in Karaj, north of Tehran.

Her death was widely reflected upon in the literary circles of the period. A lonely dreamer like Sadeq Hedayat, her fiction-like life and death, allegorizes, as lamented by a critic, the collective fate of a generation that came of age in an anxiety-ridden period and witnessed nothing but the betrayal of their political and social dreams (Moktāri, 1999, pp. 568-71). Alizadeh married twice and is survived by a daughter. She also adopted two girls from among the survivors of the Qazvin earthquake of 1961.



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