



BĀZGAŠT-E ADABĪ

BĀZGAŠT-E ADABĪ, “literary return,” a movement for a return to writing poetry in the *Ḳorāsānī* and ‘*Erāqī* styles, which began in the middle of the 12th/18th century and continued until the time of the Constitutional Revolution and after. The term was probably first used by Moḥammad-Taqī Bahār. The origins of this movement should be traced to the changes that took place in the style of poetry beginning in the Timurid period, part of the continuous evolution of court poetry from the earliest times. The broad period-styles called *Ḳorāsānī* and ‘*Erāqī* are usually delimited in time by important social and political changes in Iran. The coming to power of the Safavids produced far-reaching sectarian and political changes. At the same time, the courts of “greater Iran” in Central Asia and more particularly in Mughal India began to experience increasing prosperity. The abundant patronage of these courts attracted poets from Iran, some of whom made their careers outside their native country. This was the period of Indian style (*sabk-e hendī*) poetry, which was written throughout the Iranian cultural area and against which the poets of the *bāzgašt-e adabī* reacted in Iran proper.

Iran entered on a period of political turmoil and fragmentation that began in 1722 when Safavid rule was overthrown by Afghan invaders, and ended in the latter part of that century when Karīm Khan Zand and afterwards the Qajars established their rule. During this time there was essentially no patronage of poetry in the courts of the Afghans, Nāder Shah or Karīm Khan Zand. A great deal of Indian style poetry continued to be written in Central Asia and India, however. Patronage revived strongly under Faṭḥ-‘Alī Shah, who was a poet



himself, and who supported an active literary entourage in his court.

Opinions of the esthetic merit of the Indian style vary, but it is generally agreed that the *bāzgašt-e adabī* began as a reaction to it. Iranian scholars and critics from Loṭf-‘Alī Beg Āḍar (Āzar; d. 1195/1781) and ‘Abd-al-Razzāq Beg Donbolī (1176-1243/1762-1827) to Reżāqolī Khan Hedāyat in the 13th/19th century and Moḥammad-Taqī Bahār in the present century have generally deplored the Indian style. Āḍar says, for example, “after he [i.e., Moštāq] had broken the chain of verse that for years had been in the unworthy grip of poets of the past, with great effort and indescribable exertions he repaired it. Having destroyed for contemporary poets the foundation of versifying, he renewed the edifice of poetry built by the eloquent ancients.” (*Ātaškada*, Bombay, 1277/1860, p. 399 of unnumbered pages). Hedāyat says that Persian poetry had long been on the decline and by the end of the Zand period had become completely decadent (*Majma‘ al-foṣaḥā’* I, pp. nine-eleven). Bahār says that “by and large it was a style that began with weakness of words and poverty of meaning, and gained strength from an excess of images, figurative language and fanciful visions lacking in eloquence and true beauty. Its complications and weakness increased daily. . . . All in all, the Indian style was a mediocre poetic craft which through its clever supporters replaced all the Persian rhetorical devices and the concepts of expression, grammar and syntax.” (“Bāzgašt-e adabī,” in *Bahār wa adab-e fārsī*, 2 vols., Tehran, 1351 Š./1972, I, pp. 53-54. For an appraisal of Indian style poetry and the critical controversies surrounding it, see E. Yar-Shater, “Safavid Literature: Progress or Decline,” *Iranian Studies* 7, 1974, pp. 217-70, reprinted with revisions as “Indian Style: Progress or Decline,” in *Persian Literature*, Albany, New York, 1988, pp. 249-88).

Few critics have attempted to account for the change in style that began in the middle of the 12th/18th century, other than to say that poets in Iran became fed up with the current state of poetry and decided to begin writing in the Ḳorāsānī and ‘Erāqī styles. Bahār believes that knowledge of the earlier styles was spread by the market in books from royal collections in Isfahan and Delhi that had been broken up by the Afghans and Nāder Shah (“Bāzgašt,” pp. 48-49). Some critics more favorable to the Indian style take a different view. Šablī No‘mānī says “Poetry and the art of versifying in Iran began with Rūdakī and ended with Mīrzā Šā‘eb [d. 1088/1677-78]. There were poets before Rūdakī and after Šā‘eb, but these two periods count for nothing. No doubt in recent times a person such as Qā‘ānī has appeared who all at once changed the art of



poetry, but his art is not a new art. He has, rather, remembered a forgotten dream of seven centuries and . . . has chosen the style of Farroḳī and Manūčehri.” (*Še’r al-‘ajam*, translated by Moḥammad-Taḳī Faḳr Dā’ī Gīlānī, 5 vols., Tehran, 1314-36 Š./1935-57, III, p. 158). Alessandro Bausani views the *bāzgašt-e adabī* in broader terms and tries to relate the shift in style to political and religious changes in Iran. He believes that in the Safavid period Persian poetry was seriously seeking new ways and that this was an age that produced a number of new literary directions. In the subsequent period, instead of following the leads begun in the Safavid era and grasping the possibilities of the new poetic directions, Iran renounced this opportunity and turned to a neoclassicism or neo-archaism that imitated the poetry of Sa’dī and Ḥāfez, but even more so that of Farroḳī, ‘Onṣorī, Ferdowsī, and Manūčehri. Why should it have done this? He believes that the return to earlier models resulted from certain contradictory tendencies in Persian intellectual life of the Safavid period. On the one hand Shi’ism produced new energies in the populace, but on the other hand it led to the isolation of Persia and a sort of nationalism. “Greater” (i.e., Sunni) Iran and its culture (Ottoman Turkey, Central Asia, and India) were cut off from Shi’ite Iran. Within Persia religious fervor eventually declined and led, in poetry, to a new classicism rather than to a religious poetry that developed in the classical style. Literature in Persia became a “local” literature of the larger tradition, and a poet like Šā’eb, who was read from Turkey to Bengal, was worth more than Qā’ānī, who became famous only in his own country. Šā’eb was widely imitated and contributed a great deal to the future direction of poetry, while Qā’ānī failed to do so (*Storia della letteratura persiana*, Milan, 1960, pp. 507-11).

There is clearly some truth in this, and in recent years critical opinion of Šā’eb and of the Indian style in general has been moderating in Iran. At a major conference on Šā’eb held in Tehran in 1354 Š./1975, the first speaker deplored the fact that until recently the professors of literature in the University of Tehran had “submitted to the tyrannical and self-interested judgement of Āḍar Bigdelī and his followers, and considered the poetry of [Šā’eb], and, in fact, the literature of two centuries of [our] country unworthy of attention and research.” (Karīm Amīrī Fīrūzkūhī, “Dar ḥaqq-e Šā’eb,” in *Šā’eb wa sabk-e hendī*, Tehran, 2535 = 1355 Š./1976, p. 5).

While there had been poets from the beginning of the Safavid period on who wrote in simpler styles, they were fewer in number and less well known than those writing in the Indian style (see, for example, Aḥmad Goļčīn-e Ma’ānī,



Maktab-e woqū' dar šer-e fārsī, Tehran, 1348 Š./1969). By all accounts, the effort to reject the Indian style and return to writing in older styles was initiated by Mīr Sayyed 'Alī "Moštāq" of Isfahan (ca. 1101-71/1689-1757). Little is known of his life except that he had as close friends the poets Hātef, Ādar, 'Ašeq, Šabāhī, and Šahbā, all from Isfahan. It is said by the editor of his *dīvān* that Moštāq founded a literary society referred to as the Anjoman-e Adabī-e Moštāq, and this claim is repeated by other modern critics although there is no early evidence for it (*Ġazalīyāt o qaṣā'ed o robā'īyāt-e Moštāq*, ed. Ḥosayn Makkī, Tehran, 1320 Š./1941, repr. 1363 Š./1984, p. forty-three).

Moštāq wrote in the 'Erāqī style, often in response to particular *ġazals* of Ḥāfez and Sa'dī. The pattern that Moštāq and his circle established was followed for more than a century by poets who turned their backs on the Indian style. An investigation of their techniques reveals in general an increased use of literary emulation (*esteqbāl*, which generally consists in adopting the meter and rhyme of the original poem) and of the rhetorical figure *taẓmīn*, the direct quotation of a line or half-line from another poet. These rhetorical devices, along with characteristic diction, syntax, and imagery, would be the principal means used by poets who were trying to imitate the practice of their predecessors. The creative use of the past was common among poets from Rūdakī onward. The effects created by the poets of the *bāzgašt* were quite different, however, from those produced by earlier poets, and it is precisely because of this difference that opinions differ widely on the general quality of the poetry of this period.

A conscious effort to revert to an older style must be firmly anchored by references, direct and indirect, to specific poems of the past. Indirect reference, or literary allusion, can be one such anchor. In an evolving tradition, *esteqbāl* and *taẓmīn* bring about an interaction between two texts, producing intertextual patterns that can lead toward a richer interpretation of both texts. When an element or a pattern is evoked from an earlier text, the emulating text is enriched by providing a new context for the shared elements of both texts. An instructive example is given by Šebli when he compares the use of the same themes, and sometimes the same phrases, by Sa'dī, Salmān Sāvajī, Kāvājū Kermānī, and Ḥāfez (*Šer* III, pp. 188-211). Examples of this abound from the 19th century: Sayyed Ḥosayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī Ardestānī "Mejmar" (d. 1225/1810), a member of Našāṭ's *anjoman* in Isfahan who was given the title *mojtahed al-šo'arā'*, by Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah in 1222/1807, wrote a response to Mo'ezzī's *qaṣīda* beginning: "*az dawrhā-ye gardūn v'az ṣoḥ'hā-ye yazdān . . .*" (*Dīvān*, ed. 'Abbās Eqbāl, Tehran, 1318 Š./1939, pp. 527-28). Mīrzā 'Abd-al-



Wahhāb “Našāt” (1175-1244/1761-62-1828-29), an influential figure in the early part of the *bāzgašt*, wrote mainly *ġazals*, and tended to follow Ḥāfez. A typical example of allusion is his *ġazal* beginning: “*Dūš āmad be-bar-am mey-zada kʷābālūda . . .*,” (*Dīvān*, ed. Ḥosayn Naḵāʿī, Tehran, 1337 Š./1958, pp. 160-61), after Ḥāfez’s: *Dūš raftam be-dar-e mey-zada kʷāb-ālūda . . .*” Fath-ʿAlī Khan Kāšānī “Šabā” (1179(?)-1238/1765-1822) wrote his *Šāhanšāh-nāma*, a lengthy work about the military exploits of Fath-ʿAlī Shah, in imitation of Ferdowsī’s *Šāh-nāma*. Mīrzā Šafī Šīrāzī “Wešāl” (ca. 1192 or 93-1262/1778 or 79-1846) wrote *ġazals* after Sa’dī and *qašīdas* after Manūčehrī, Anwarī, and Kāqānī (*Majmaʿ al-foṣaḥāʿ* III, pp. 1091-1131). Mīrzā Ḥabīb-Allāh Šīrāzī “Qāʿānī” (1223-70/1808-54) followed many earlier poets, but primarily Sa’dī (see V. Kubičková, *Qāʿānī, le poète persan du XIX^e siècle*, Prague, 1954).

The device *tazmīn*, the use of a direct quotation from another poet’s work, is a more explicit appropriation of the past than is *esteqbāl*. As used by poets before the Zand period, it served as a means to tie the literary tradition together as it evolved. The resulting web of intertextual patterns kept the past alive in the present and allowed the tradition to look simultaneously backward and forward at any one time. With the poets of the *bāzgašt*, however, the conscious effort was to emulate the masters of the past and to recreate individual and period styles of writing. Thus the Zand and Qajar periods were a time of intense imitation and rather less evolution.

While the term *bāzgašt-e adabī* refers normally to the writing of poetry, the general effort on the part of the literati to revert to earlier poetic styles had its effect on prose writing as well. Simple and unadorned prose had continued to be written since the earliest times, and in greater quantities than was the case with poetry. Nevertheless, by the time of Nāder Shah, some genres of courtly prose had become excessively complicated and bombastic, with a multitude of synonyms, repetitions, and obscure words being used to express what could be said more concisely and elegantly.

Unlike poetry, only one model was held up by nineteenth-century prose writers as the ideal of eloquent writing, and this was Sa’dī’s *Golestān*. The mixed genre of *maqāma*, with its short anecdotes and verses, is characterized by concise expression and an aphoristic style. This was closer to the ideal of poetry than were the extended and slow-moving narratives of the historians, and the *Golestān* had long been a model of eloquent prose for Persian speakers. A second factor for a change in prose style may have been the need for more rapid and efficient bureaucratic communication in the early



nineteenth century when the country was at war with Russia. A third element was no doubt the influence of European writing introduced by students who had been sent abroad for their higher education. Whatever the case, a precursor of the movement to simplify prose writing was ‘Abd-al-Razzāq Donbolī, whose book *Ḥadā’eq al-janān* was described by Bahār as being in a style “somewhere between that of *Tārīk-e Waṣṣāf* and the *Golestān* . . . and one can say that it is one of the works that were part of the literary resurrection and return to an old style” (*Sabk-šenāsī* III, p. 320). Dense and verbose as his style is, it does represent a modest retreat from the overblown prose of the eighteenth-century historian Mīrzā Mahdī Khan Astarābādī in his *Dorra-ye nādera*. The first major step toward the simplification of prose was taken by Mīrzā Abu’l-Qāsem Qā’em-maqām Farāhānī (1193-1251/1779-1835). His correspondence written for Fath-‘Alī Shah, for example, although flowery by modern standards, is much less complicated in syntax and vocabulary than most writing of his time. Moḥammad ‘Abbāsī, editor of his *Monša’āt* (Tehran, 2536-1356 Š./1977) relates the style of Qā’em-maqām directly to that of Sa’dī and Kāvājā ‘Abd-Allāh Anṣārī of Herat (p. fifteen). The power of the *Golestān* as a norm for prose style was so great that it itself was widely imitated in the 19th century. In addition to the well-known *Ketāb-e parišān* of Qā’ānī, at least six others were produced before 1900. The effort to simplify prose was continued by Fāzel Khan Garrūsī, Mīrzā Āqā Khan Kermānī, Mīrzā Taqī Khan Amīr(-e) Kabīr and numerous other Qajar officials.

The poetry of the *bāzgašt* was produced by poets who tended to look backwards rather than ahead. While some of their poetry can scarcely be distinguished from the original, much of it was flat and had a closed quality, which was only relieved when the forces in Persian society that led to the Constitutional Revolution began to be reflected in verse. The stress on imitating past models, while helping to improve prose style, prevented the natural evolution that poetry, in other circumstances, would have undergone. Mahdī Aḳawān(-e) Tālet’s view typifies present-day opinion of this period: “The movement of the *bāzgašt* was like a coup d’état to throw over the monopolistic rule of the *sabk-e hendī* dynasty, which everyone was fed up with, and to create a group of provincial rulers in poetry and letters, with this difference that no stars brighter than the early ones appeared. Actually, it brought forth a handful of false men: a false Sa’dī, a false Sanā’ī, a false Manūčehrī, and many others” (Āryanpūr, *Az Šabā tā Nīmā*, I, p. 19).

See also [‘āṣeq](#); [hātef](#); [moštāq](#); and other poets involved in the movement.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text.