



E'TEŞĀMĪ, PARVĪN

E'TEŞĀMĪ, PARVĪN, 20th-century female poet (b. 25 Esfand 1285 Š./16 March 1907 in Tabrīz, d. 16 Farvardīn 1320 Š./5 April 1941 in Tehran; [Figure 1](#)), daughter of the journalist and man of letters Yūsof E'teşāmī (q.v.). According to Dehḡodā (*Loġat-nāma*, s.v. "Parvīn"), her given name was Raḡşanda. Early in her life the family moved to Tehran, where, in addition to formal schooling, she received solid training in Arabic and classical Persian literature from her father. She also met a number of noted poets and literati of the time who held literary meetings in E'teşāmī's house (Šahrīār, pp. 708-10). After graduation in 1924 from the Iran Bethel, an American high school for girls, she taught for a while at that school. In 1926 she was invited to tutor the queen of the new Pahlavi court, but she declined (Sheean, p. 257; Moayyad, 1994, pp. 5-6). She accompanied her father on several trips in Persia and one to Iraq. In 1934 she married a cousin of her father and moved to Kermānšāh. However, after only ten weeks she returned home, and the marriage was dissolved. In 1936 the Ministry of Education honored her with a third class medal but she refused to accept it, probably because it was too low to appeal to her sense of dignity (Ḳal'atbarī, in E'teşāmī, ed., p. 4). In 1938-39 she worked for several months at the library of the Teacher Training College (Dāneş-sarā-ye 'ālī). Her father's death in 1938 bereft Parvīn of his loving support and virtually severed her contact with the outside world. Her sudden death only three years after her father shocked the country and was mourned in many elegies (E'teşāmī, ed., pp. 6-8, 28-48). She was buried near her father in Qom.

Parvīn was only seven or eight years old when her poetic talent revealed itself



(Dehḵodā, s.v. “Parvīn”). Encouraged by her father, she rendered into verse some literary pieces that her father had translated from Western sources. Her earliest known poems, eleven compositions printed in 1921-22 issues of her father’s monthly magazine, *Bahār*, display an astonishing maturity of thought and craft. The first edition of her *dīvān*, comprising 156 poems, appeared in 1314 Š./1935 with an introduction by Moḥammad-Taqī Bahār (q.v.). The second edition, edited by her brother Abu’l-Faḥ E’tešāmī and including Bahār’s introduction, appeared shortly after her death in 1320 Š./1941. It offered 209 compositions of different lengths in *matnawī*, *qaṣīda*, *ḡazal*, *qeṭ’a*, and stanzaic forms, totalling 5,606 distiches, as well as the original introduction by Bahār (8th repr. Tehran, 1363/1984). She is said to have burned some poems which did not satisfy her taste (Dehḵodā, s.v. “Parvīn”).

Parvīn’s poetry follows traditional patterns in both form and substance. In the protective seclusion of her family life she remained unaffected by, or was perhaps even unaware of, the ongoing reformistic trends in Persian poetry. In the arrangement of her *dīvān* there are 42 untitled *qaṣīdas*, and *qeṭ’as*, mostly didactic and philosophical reminiscent of the austere tone of Nāṣer-e Ḳosrow and Sanā’ī. There are several other *qaṣīdas* scattered throughout the collection, particularly in the description of nature, that lean heavily on Manūčehrī. Parvīn did not indulge in lyricism. Shy by nature and isolated by traditional norms of conduct, she never expressed inhibited feelings of love and longing. Her *dīvān* reserves little room for *ḡazals*. Nevertheless, several poems, including five entitled “Ārzūhā” (Longings; nos. 44-48), are perfect examples of lyrics. “Safar-e ašk” (Journey of a tear, no. 125) counts among the finest lyrics ever written in Persian.

Anecdotes and strife poems, “*monāzara*” (dialogue, debate), claim the largest portion of Parvīn’s *dīvān*. It is in this genre that her genius unfolds, creating a large number of its subtlest examples in Persian poetry. She composed approximately sixty-five *monāzaras* and seventy-five anecdotes, fables, and allegories. Parvīn wrote about men and women of different social backgrounds, a wide-ranging array of animals, birds, flowers, trees, cosmic and natural elements, objects of daily life, abstract concepts, all personified and symbolizing her wealth of ideas. Through these figures she holds up a mirror to others showing them the abuses of society and their failure in moral commitment. Likewise, in these debates she eloquently expresses her basic thoughts about life and death, social justice, ethics, education, and the supreme importance of knowledge.



Parvīn is remarkably silent about major changes and events taking place in Persia during the twenty years of her creativity (1921-41), the only exception being the unveiling of women in 1935, which she commemorates approvingly (no. 118). However, her *dīvān* is a faithful mirror of her inner sadness about the plight of the masses. Lack of social justice, poverty and the sufferings of the old, the orphaned and the sick provoke some of Parvīn's moving images.

Parvīn often used the animate and inanimate creatures who crowd her parables and strife poems to voice her feelings of dissatisfaction and social protest without arousing political suspicions. She occasionally loses her calm and gentle temperament and vents a sense of frustration in harsh tone and wrathful words (e.g., “Ay ranjbar” [O laborer], “Šā‘eqa-ye mā. . .” [Thunderbolt], and “Monāžera,” nos. 61, 135, 187). She does allow even kings to escape her criticism. For example, she declares that a wreath on the head of a playing child is more secure than the king's crown (no. 178, “Ganj-e ayman” [Safe treasure]); she makes an old woman watching the king's entourage say:

Mā-rā be raqt o čüb-e šabānī farīfta'st,

Īn gorg sālḥā'st ka bā galla āšnā'st.

Ān pārsā ka deh karad o melk rahzan ast,

Ān pādšā ka māl-e ra'iyat korad gadā'st.

Bar qaṭra-ye serešk-e yatīmān nazāra kon,

Tā bengarī ka rowšanī-e gowhar az kojā'st

“. . . there goes a wolf, for years well-acquainted with the herd. . . A king who steals from his subjects is a beggar ... Look at the orphan's tear and know where the jewel's glitter comes from” (no. 57, “Ašk-e yatīm” [An orphan's tear]). This poem, bearing the obvious influence of a poem by Anwarī, was written in 1921, and thus has no direct bearing on Reżā Shah, whereas, no. 196, “Nağma-ye šobḥ” (Song of the dawn), written in the early days of Reżā Shah's rise to power, does seem to relate to the reign of terror in that period. However, these atypical outbursts of reaction to the sad conditions of society



form only a minimal part of Parvīn’s poetic output. Her main concerns revolve around fundamental realities of existence with a depressing undertone of fatalism in human fate. Nevertheless, she remains a staunch advocate of devotion to work, which she praises as the only principle to which the entire universe is submitted (e.g., “Jūlāy-e Kōdā” [God’s Weaver], Raveš-e āfarīneš” [Divided Labor]; see H. Moayyad and M. A. Madelung, pp. 63-68, 105-6).

Parvīn’s knowledge of Persian poetry enriched her narrative poems with numerous borrowings from, among others, ‘Onşorī, Anwarī, Nežāmī, Rūmī, and Sa’dī. She was also inspired by the fables of Aesop and La Fontaine. Her father’s translations, for example from Horace Smith and Arthur Brisbane, provided her with yet another source to draw upon. However, the largest number of her anecdotes are her own creations. Even when borrowed, elements are infused with a spirit and mood completely of Parvīn’s own.

Some unfounded suspicion concerning the authorship of Parvīn’s poems has occasionally been voiced, lastly as the subject of a monogram by Fażl-Allāh Garakānī (see Moayyad, 1987, pp. 118-19).

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