



## HAIKU

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**HAIKU**, a Japanese poetic form adopted and employed by Iranian poets since the second half of the 20th century.

Combining form, content, and language in a meaningful yet compact form, the haiku existed as an independent poetic form in Japan since the 19th century. It has impacted poets the world over, although it has only been a few decades since its influence on Iranian poets and writers has become significant. The traditional Japanese haiku poem's form is defined as consisting of three non-rhymed lines based upon the syllable pattern 5-7-5, a total of 17 syllables, called *on* or *onji*. A haiku usually employs at least one element from nature by name; e.g. cherry blossom, cloud, mountain, and often a *kigo*, 'season word,' as well. It also often conveys an ephemeral feeling or a mood, reminiscent of a journey that only lasts an instant.

The first translations of Japanese poetry into Persian appeared in literary magazines in the 1950s. Of these, perhaps most noteworthy were the translations from French by Sohrab Sepehri (1928-1980; q.v.) of seven *tankas* (*Sokan*, 6:8, 1955, pp. 703-04), a Japanese poetic form from which the *haiku* emerged as an independent verse. These were later followed by the publication of other translations of *haiku* (*Sokan*, 6:9, 1955, pp. 761, translator unknown). Although Sepehri's own poetry cannot be described as renderings of *haiku* or *tanka*, the language in some of his poems, in particular in the collection *Šarq-e anduh* (East of sorrow, 1952), frequently recalls the minimalist simplicity of *haiku* (Sarshar; 'Ābedi, p. 34). Among the most extensive Persian translations of this Japanese form is *Hāiku: šer-e žāponi az*



*āgāz tā emruz* (*Haiku*: Japanese poetry from the beginning to the present, 1982), by Aḥmad Šāmlu and ‘Askar Pāšā’i. Although several *haiku* collections have appeared in Persian translation since that time, it is only since the 1990s that *haiku* has been indigenized and used as a poetic form by Iranian poets.

In 2002, Kāva Gowharin (b. 1955) published his *Hāiku-hā-ye Irāni* (Persian *haiku*). It was followed by the publication of *Ḳodāy-nāmak* (The Lord’s book), his second *haiku* collection, in 2006. *Qomri-e ḡamḳvār dar šāmgāh-e ḳazāni: hezār o yek hāiku-ye Pārsi* (The sad dove in the autumn eve: One thousand and one Persian *haiku*), by Sayyed ‘Ali Šāleḫi (b. 1955) was published in 2008. More ambitiously preoccupied by *haiku* than many of its other practitioners in Iran, these two poets have interpreted the role and purposes of *haiku* in different ways, and their compositions are dissimilar in form as well as content. Gowharin has stayed true to the three-line structure of the traditional Japanese *haiku*, but has not always followed either the 5-7-5 syllabic pattern or the thematic conventions of this migrated genre. Of particular note are some of his latest *haiku*, in which elements of nature are substituted by urban imagery, and a sardonic tone clouds over the poet’s vision:

<i>Jamā’at-e rowšanfekr!</i>	(Assembly of intellectuals!
<i>miyān-e dud-e kāfa nešasta-and</i>	Sitting in the midst of smoke in a cafe
<i>ziyārat-e ahl-e qobur āmada-im.</i>	We have come to visit the people of the graves.)

(Gowharin, 2006, p. 46)

By juxtaposing the bipartite structure of the *haiku*, and displaying the hidden similarities between oppositional images, Gowharin conveys the undifferentiated unity of nature, and the organic rules governing the cosmic order.

<i>Karkasān-e osteḳvān-ḳvār</i>	(The bone eating vultures
<i>ranghā rā mifahmand</i>	Understand the colours.
<i>ranginkamāni dārand bar sina ḥamāyel</i>	There hangs a rainbow from their chests.)

(Gowharin, 2002, no. 45)

His poetry, which draws out the beauty of nature even in hideous places and objects, resonates strikingly with some of Sepehri’s most popular poems:

*Man nemidānam ke čerā miguyand asb ḥayvān-e najibist / kabutar zibāst / Va čerā dar qafas-e hič kasi karkas nist*

(I don't know why they say that the horse is a noble animal, the pigeon is beautiful / And why nobody keeps a vulture in his cage; *Šedā-ye pā-ye āb*, 2000, p. 291)

Šāleḥi, like Gowharin and many others, discards the syllabic limits of the genre. Unlike Gowharin, however, he often maintains the sensations of nature, as well as the imagery and intensity of the moment as essential attributes of his *haiku*:

<i>Rāh-e šabnam-puš-e kuhestāni</i>	(The dew covered mountain road
<i>rama-i zir-e baluṭ-e bozorg</i>	A herd has gone to sleep
<i>be k̄vāb rafta ast.</i>	Under the big oak tree.)

(Šāleḥi, p. 2)

Many of his *haiku* reveal a Persian ambience through the skillful deployment of imagery:

<i>Ba'd az bārān</i>	(After the rain
<i>'aṭr-e berenj o hizom-e nim-suz</i>	The scent of rice and half burnt wood
<i>yek piyāla čāy, yek piyāla čāy.</i>	A cup of tea, a cup of tea.)

(Šāleḥi, p. 1)

*Hamrāh bā bād* (*Walking with the Wind*, tr., Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak and Michael Beard, Cambridge, 2002), and *Gorg-i dar kamin* (*A Wolf Lying in Wait*, tr., Karim Emami and Michael Beard, Tehran, 2005) are two bilingual *haikuesque* collections of poetry by 'Abbas Kiarostami ('Abbās Kiārostami, b. 1940), the internationally noted film director, photographer and poet. Although Kiarostami has discovered in Japanese *haiku* a form that matches the immediacy of his cinematic images (Khazeni, <http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/37/BOOKSKiarostami.htm>), he disregards in most of his poems the traditional three-line limits of the genre:

<i>In jādda</i>	<i>This road</i>
<i>sālhāst</i>	<i>Has been abandoned</i>
<i>matruk ast</i>	<i>For many years</i>



<i>hanuz nemidānand</i>	<i>Though the wild flowers</i>
<i>golhā-ye vahši-e k'odru</i>	<i>Do not seem to know</i>

(Kiārostami, 2005, p. 167, no. 289)

<i>Taht-e ta'qibam</i>	<i>I am being pursued</i>
<i>ba sāya-i ke dar kudaki</i>	<i>by a shadow that was my playmate</i>
<i>hambāzi-e man bud</i>	<i>in childhood;</i>
<i>bā man bozorg šod</i>	<i>it grew up with me,</i>
<i>bā man kamida šod</i>	<i>it grew old with me,</i>
<i>ma-rā ta'qib mikonad</i>	<i>it will continue</i>
<i>hamčonān</i>	<i>to pursue me</i>
<i>tā gur</i>	<i>to the grave.</i>

(Kiarostami, 2005, p. 172, no. 298).

However, most of his poems, like the traditional Japanese *haiku*, distill and deliver the immensity of a particular moment. Their photographic overtone often loads the last line of the poem with a surprising effect or a punch line:

<i>Do māhi-e qezelālā</i>	<i>A pair of trout</i>
<i>kofta dar kenār-e ham</i>	<i>lying side by side</i>
<i>dar bastar-e sefid-e bošqāb</i>	<i>on the white bed of a serving dish.</i>

(Kiarostami, 2005, p. 158, no. 273)

The impact of Japanese *haiku* on Persian poetry, perhaps initially part of a more expansive fascination with Japanese culture and aesthetics, soon evolved into a stylistic challenge to modernist Persian poets who welcomed the brevity and compact formulation of the form, as well as its usually simple, plain language. With the shifting focus of Persian literature from the socio-political concerns of the 1950s and 1960s to subtler, more individual, and more romanticised means of expression through the 1980s and 1990s, *haiku* has finally established itself as a veritable form in Persian poetry. Several Persian poets have greeted *haiku* as a nexus, linking Japanese Buddhism and Persian mysticism or neo-Sufism.

Persian *haiku* poems, diversified as they are in content and form, share distinct qualities, which distinguish them from *še'r-e now* or *še'r-e kutāh*, signaling a break with the formal features of Persian poetry. Although they discard the traditional 5-7-5 syllabic pattern of Japanese *haiku*,

characteristically attributed to the distinct compactness of the Japanese language, they generally follow the three-line pattern of their Japanese progenitor. They convey either the emotion or mood of a moment, or a moralistic, philosophical or religious message, and rarely welcome colloquial language or slang terms.

Persian *haiku* has already attracted many followers in Iran and elsewhere. Apart from numerous collections of Persian *haiku* and translations into Persian of *haiku* poems from other languages (see below), several websites are dedicated to Persian *haiku* and function as forums for discussing and exchanging *haiku* poems (see below).

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