



MOSHFEQ-E KAZEMI, SAYYED MORTAZA

MOSHFEQ-e KAZEMI, Sayyed Morteza (Sayyed Mortazā Mošfeq-e Kāzemi, b. Tehran, 1904; d. Paris 1978), author of Iran's first social novel.

i. Life

ii. Works

i. Life

Mortazā's father, Mirza Reżā, was a religious man who worked at the Ministry of Finance (Moshfeq-e Kazemi, 1971, I, p. 10). His grandfather, Mirza Sayyed Mehdi, was an accountant at the Qajar court. Initially taught by private tutors at home, Mortazā continued his education in several renowned schools in Tehran, including Dār-al-fonun (q.v.) and Alliance Française. While at Dār-al-fonun, he developed an interest in popular tales of adventure in Persian, such as *Ḥosayn-e kord* and *Amir Arsalān*, as well as in Persian translations of historical novelists such as Michel Zévaco (1860-1918) and Nicola Haddad (1878–1954), serialized in journals such as *Ra'd* and *'Aṣr -e jadid* (Moshfeq-e Kazemi, I, pp. 10, 52, 58). His close contacts with the writer and director Reżā Kamāl Šahrzād (1898- 1937), and Ḥasan Moqaddam (1898-1925), author of *Ja'far kān az farang āmada*, (Ja'far Khan has returned from Europe, 1922), a biting single-act comedy about the encounter of Ja'far Khan, a highly westernized youth returning from France with his strictly traditional family



and friends, introduced the young Mortazā to the works of prominent French novelists, such as Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset and Gustav Flaubert (Moshfeq-e Kazemi, 1971, I, p. 131).

Kazemi started his literary career by writing poetry, choosing “Moshfeq” as pen name, and was also drawn to writing and producing plays. In 1925, in an article in *Nāma-ye farangestān*, a pro-German journal published by a group of Persian modernists in both Germany and Iran, Kazemi took on what he considered to be the main obstacle to the growth of dramatic arts in Iran, namely the absence of women from the stage of Persian theater (Malakpur, III, p. 251). His translation of *Les Plaideurs* (The Litigants, 1668), a comedy in three acts by Jean Racine (1639-1699) was staged by Sayyed 'Ali Naṣr (1893–1965), who founded and headed the Komedi-e Iran, Iran's first modern theater in 1918. Kazemi also penned the Persian text of *Pesar-e mašhadi 'Ebād*, an operetta by the Armenian director, Symoniyān (Moshfeq-e Kazemi, 1971, I, p. 131).

Tehrān-e maḳuf (Horrible Tehran, 1922), his first novel, was serialized in *Setāra-ye Iran*, a journal published by Ḥassan Ṣabā from 1914 to 1924 in Tehran, and later as a book in two volumes in 1924. The early 1920s are regarded generally as a watershed in the history of modern Persian literature. They were marked not only by the publication of Iran's first social novel (Kazemi's *Tehrān-e maḳuf*), but also by the already mentioned *Ja'far khan az farang āmada*, as well as Nimā Yushij's groundbreaking collection of modern poems, *Afsāna*, and Mohammad-'Ali Jamālzāda's *yeki bud, yeki nabud* (Once upon a Time), the famous pioneering collection of short stories (Mir'ābedini, p. 78).

Soon after the publication of *Tehrān-e maḳuf* in *Setāra-ye Iran*, Kazemi left for Germany where he studied political economy for two years. In Berlin he joined the ranks of politically active Iranian journalists and intellectuals, most notably, Sayyed Ḥassan Taqizāda (q.v.), [Mohammad 'Ali Jamālzāda](#), and [Kāzemzāda Irānšahr](#) (Behnām, p. 109). When the Society of Iranian students in Berlin decided to publish *Nāma-ye farangestān*, a modernist Germanophile journal with unabashed admiration for Western civilization (Kubičková, P. 391), Kazemi was appointed as its managing editor. In *Nāma-ye farangestān*, Kazemi and his circle of likeminded friends advocated “authoritarian modernization” as a solution to Iran's ills (Entekābi, p. 84). An ideal ruler, in their view, capable of fostering centralized rule in Iran and safeguarding its sovereignty, was a man of law and order, a leader such as Mussolini, who



would oversee, with ‘iron fists’, the transformation of Iran into a modern and powerful nation-state (Entekābi, p. 183).

As director and editor of the journal, Kāzemi had an instrumental role in formulating its policies, and published several articles on the link between old traditions of marriage, political corruption and social decadence, on the one hand, and the spread of prostitution on the other. After three issues, however, and subsequent to expressions of dissatisfaction from religious authorities, *Nāma-ye farangestān* was banned in Iran. Six more issues were printed while Kazemi was still in Berlin; and another six after he traveled to Paris in 1924 to study economics and social sciences at the École des Sciences Politiques.

In 1926, Kazemi returned to Iran and joined *Anjoman-e Irān-e javān* (Young Iran Society), founded in January 1921 by a number of young intellectuals who had returned home after their studies in Europe, and some of whom had been earlier involved with *Nāma-ye farhangestān* in Berlin. The membership of the Society, which was soon turned into a political party under ‘Ali-Akbar Siāsi, was restricted to those who had studied in Europe or the United States (Siāsi, pp. 74-75; Moshfeq-e Kazemi, 1971, I, p. 119). Kazemi was also involved with the Society’s weekly magazine *Irān-e javān*, which lasted just under a year (25 February 1926-17 February 1927), and was discontinued when the Society disavowed political activities (Behnām, p. 170). Kazemi also published two issues of another magazine *Falāḥat va tejārat* (Agriculture and commerce) in 1926.

Kazemi joined the Ministry of Justice in 1927, and continued in public service at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1934, where he was appointed as the under-secretary for a short period of time and remained until his retirement. During his tenure In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kazemi served as Iranian ambassador to Egypt, Syria and a number of European countries. He died in a car accident in Paris in 1978.

ii. Works

The 1920s witnessed increasing state censorship in Iran. Particularly disallowed was the depiction of contemporary historical episodes and personages in works of fiction. Novelists subsequently turned their attention to decrying social injustice, with fallen women and grim satanic cities emerging as two especially popular themes (Meskub, p. 90).



Tehrān-e maḵuf, Kazemi's first and perhaps only acclaimed novel, is set in Tehran, the paradigmatically corrupt city of the period, and revolves around a failed love affair. It chronicles the life of Farrokh (Farroḵ), son of a Qajar courtier, who has lost his position and wealth during the Constitutional Revolution. Farrokh falls in love with Mahin, whose father exemplified the newly rich of the Iranian society, a manipulative and deceptive guileful class who sought to usurp the political prominence of the country's 'genuine aristocracy'. Through underhand dealings with influential individuals, Mahin's father tries to make his way to the Majles (parliament). To this end, he persuades his daughter to marry Siāvuš Mirzā – the novel's antagonist. Farroḵ kidnaps Mahin on the road from Tehran to Qom, and spends a night with her. The following day, her father comes with a police officer and takes Mahin with him, sending Farroḵ to jail.

The publication of *Tehrān-e maḵuf*, a somewhat rambling depiction of love, greed, and prostitution (Yavari, p. 582), caused a great stir, and earned Kazemi the Ministry of Culture and Education's medal of recognition in 1923 (Moshfeq-e Kazemi, p. 184). It "produced a romanticized, though not unrealistic, critique of the social ills resulting from the attitude and behavior of high society, and introduced the theme of prostitution, which had increasingly become an affront to the sensibilities and social aspirations of modern middle class Iranians." (Katouzian, p. 1) Kazemi's portrayal of Siāvuš, a frequent client of Tehran's opium dens and brothels, drew critical attention to the plight of prostitutes, and the injustices suffered by women in general. The subjection of women soon turned into a recurrent motif in social novels of the period, including those by Moḥammad Ḥejāzi, Moḥammad Mas'ud (q.v.), Jahāngir Jalili and others (Zarrinkub, p. 29). As commented by a critic, "In Kazemi's novels all the prototypes of the socially victimized woman exist, from the beautiful young girl in love with a noble and penniless young man, harassed by greedy, insensitive parents, to the duped and penitent 'fallen woman.' From then on we encounter images of women as social victims in a number of novels, which could be categorized under the dubious title of 'popular novel.' These women are either love-stricken, like the suffering young heroine in *Tehrān-e maḵuf*, or, like Ahu in Ali-Mohammad Afghani's *Shohar-e Ahu Khanom* (Ahu Khanom's husband, Tehran, 1961), are cheated by another favorite figure of popular novelists, the 'vamp' who steals the heroine's husband." (Nafisi.; See also, Ghazalsofli).

In the sequel to the novel, entitled *Yādgar-e yek šab*, "The memento of One



Night, 1923,” Farroḳ escapes jail, takes refuge in farming for a while, and travels to Ashkhabad (see ‘Ešqābād) and [Baku](#), where he joins a group of politically active Iranians who, influenced by the October Revolution in Russia, strove to spread the ‘flames of revolution’ to Iran. Disappointed, however, by political terror, extremism, and heightened tensions among the revolutionaries, Farroḳ soon joins the enemies of the revolutionaries, that is, the Cossacks (see [COSSACK BRIGADE](#)). He participates in the military coup organized by the Cossack Brigade that eventually led to the founding of the Pahlavi dynasty (see [COUP D’ETAT OF 1299/1921](#)), only to witness, once more, the betrayal of his dreams, and the failure of the new regime to confront corrupt politicians and decadent elites.

The second volume lacked the vigor of the first, and fared less well. Farroḳ, an ardent idealist in the first volume, bent on avenging the miseries suffered by ordinary people, was reduced in the sequel to a passive bystander awaiting salvation and the restoration of justice at the hands of real avenger, who could deliver the masses from misery and repression. Despite its prevailing ambience of despair and resignation, however, the second volume does offer a glimpse onto the impact of the Russian Revolution on the Iranian intellectuals at the threshold of the 1920-coup, and chronicles the tale of a city, as it painfully discards traditional cast to appear in modern attire (Kubičková, p. 391), with the status of women as a focal point and a touchstone.

Influenced by Alexander Dumas’ *Count of Mount Cristo*, and employing a traditional Iranian mode of narration in which stories are narrated within a frame story, Kāzemi often digressed from the main plot to sideline stories, to reveal the ‘truth’ around which the novel revolves. His language, a hybrid of journalistic prose with the highly stylized language of the Iranian bureaucracy as well as literary styles favored by Iranian intellectuals at the time, hardly matched the simple, flowing and celebrated prose of his contemporaneous peer, Moḥammad ‘Ali Jamālzāda.

Kazemi’s concern for the novel’s language, structure and character development is subsumed by his desire to highlight social problems within the context of a highly dramatized sensational plot. This pre-occupation with the social and urban conditions has led the critics of the next generation to depict him as the first Persian novelist to render a realistic picture of public spaces, roads, modes of transportation, attire, and lifestyles in his fiction (Balaḳ, p. 395), and also for capturing the ‘impatient cry of a generation’ who had to suffer through the burial of all hopes and ideals generated by the



Constitutional Revolution (Entekābi, p. 90).

The Russian translation of *Tehrān-e maḳuf* was published by the Academy of the Soviet Union in 1934. The book was also translated in Azeri Turkish, and published in Cyrillic alphabet in Tajikistan.

Kazemi' s two other novels, *Gol-e pažmorda* (the withered flower, 1929), and *Rašg-e porbahā* (Costly envy, 1930), failed to match *Tehrān-e maḳuf*'s popularity, and its critical acclaim. The 'half European/half Persian language' of the novels was described by a critic as a "degenerated Persian" (Kāsemi, p. 109). According to another commentator, these intellectually conservative and literarily lame novels are totally dissociated from socio-cultural realities, and bespeak of nothing but love and sensual pleasure (Āryanpur, II, p. 264).

Ruzgār va andiša-hā (Times and thoughts, 1971), Kazemi's two-volume memoir, was decried by Iraj Afšār as an insignificant autobiographical sketch (Afšār, p. 396).

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