



NASIM-E ŠEMĀL

NASIM-e ŠEMĀL (in popular parlance, *Nasim-e šomāl*; Breeze of the North), one of the best-known and most popular periodicals in the history of Iranian journalism.

Nasim-e šemāl was published with lengthy interruptions from 2 Šaʿbān 1325/10 September 1907 to 1312 Š./1933 by its founder, the poet and journalist Sayyed Ašraf-al-Din Ḥosayni Qazvini, also known as [Ašraf Gilāni](#) (1870-1934), and again from 10 Ḳordād 1313 Š./29 May 1934 to Āḍar 1329 Š./November 1940 by other journalists. Other dates have been mentioned in various sources as the date of the journal's inception due to inaccurate information provided by its publisher about the first issue (Parvin, 2001a, II, p. 553). During the first year of its publication, the journal was published as a rather irregular weekly periodical, and after that, its publication became even more haphazard. At one point it ceased publication for a few years; and when it started to be published again in 1911, it officially declared on its front page that for the time being it would be published "as often as possible" ("*Ejālatan har qadr momken šod ba ṭabʿ mirasad*").

In its first period of publication, which began on 10 September 1907, *Nasim-e šemāl* was published in the city of Rašt, in the north of Iran. In its first two issues, more or less like other provincial newspapers, it covered current news and contained articles and some poetry, all in a serious tone and with formal contents. Subsequently the journal began to publish a large number of very sensational poems composed by Ašraf-al-Din Qazvini, which dealt with the political and social events of the time in a very blunt and occasionally



colloquial language, with pointed satirical undertones.

While it was published in Rašt, *Nasim-e šemāl* was a firm defender of the cause of the impoverished, a staunch advocate of social and political reforms and modernization, and a vocal admirer of Islam, particularly Shi'ism; it was also very patriotic, and a zealous supporter of the [Constitutional Movement](#) and the constitutional revolutionaries. It has been characterized as “one of the best literary papers” of the period (Browne, no. 354) and its publisher as “the most popular and best-known nationalist poet of the revolutionary period” (Ārianpur, II, p. 62). Lucien Bouvat referred to it as a revolutionary journal and the official organ and voice of the Sattār Association (Bouvat, p. 364). Regarding the journal's influence on the public, according to Moḥammad Ṣadr Hašemi, “People used to recite its poetry and sing them as songs in their festive gatherings” (Ṣadr Hašemi, IV, p. 297). In its final years of publication, the paper adopted an increasingly religious tone (Ḥālat, p. 24).

As far as the style of writing and the content of its poetry are concerned, some scholars such as [Moḥammad-Taḳī Bahār](#) (pp. 255-256) and Yaḥyā Ārianpur (pp. 64-72) considered the poetry of Ašraf-al-Din, as printed in the *Nasim-e šemāl*, an emulation of those of [‘Ali-Akbar Ṣāber](#) (1862-1911), the Turkish poet and publisher of the satirical paper *Molla Nasreddin*, which was published in Tbilisi. It is true that it was Ṣāber's satirical poems that inspired Ašraf-al-Din, but, as noted by Ārianpur (p. 72), Ašraf-al-Din's poetry is marked by an originality of style and a mode of expression of its own in conveying ideas borrowed from [Mollā Naṣr-al-Din](#) to the people of Iran in their ongoing struggle for freedom. He also wrote other poetry with the contents of his own choosing, dealing with the current events and the existing state of affairs of the Iranian society at that time. Moreover, like a number of other writers of his era, Ašraf-al-Din responded to some of the unfounded interpretations and impressions published in *Molla Nasreddin* with regard to the social and political developments in Iran (see, e.g., the issues of the months Ṣafar and Ša'bān 1327/March and September-November 1909; Faḳrā'i, 1977, pp. 273-75).

During the period that it was published in Rašt, *Nasim-e šemāl* became involved in a contentious dispute with *Ḳayr al-kalām*, another newspaper of the city. Its adversaries also published a paper called *Mehdi-e ḥammāl dar javāb-e Nasim-e šemāl* (Mehdi the menial porter in response to *Nasim-e šemāl*) with a certain Akbarzāda as the editor, but it did not last beyond the first issue. During the Russian occupation of the northern part of Iran, the publication of *Nasim-e šemāl* was suspended like that of many other Iranian



journals. Its last issue, number 16 of the third year, is dated 18 Du'l-qa'da 1329/10 November 1911.

After a three and a half year interval, the journal resumed publication in 1915 under the supervision of its original founder, Ašraf-al-Din, in Tehran and it continued publication until the 1 Farvardin 1313 Š./21 March 1934. During this period, a number of sources, from Sa'id Nafisi onwards (Nafisi, pp. 50-55), have talked of rumors as to the insanity of Ašraf-al-Din and the conspiracy of the government to assassinate him in order to stop the publication of his journal. All such rumors, however, are totally false (Parvin, 2001b, pp 383-84). During the last few years of the journal's publication, Moḥsen Ḥarirčiān Sā'i closely cooperated with Ašraf-al-Din, and after the latter's death in 1934, he assumed total control of the journal as its sole publisher-editor. The content of the journal, however, changed in this period, and, although it continued to deal with literary questions, its tone became increasingly more formal and political, and shortly afterwards it aligned itself with the supporters of the regime in power. In Šahrivar 1320 Š./August-September 1941, Ḥarirčiān had a new license issued in his own name, thus becoming the official owner of *Nasim-e šemāl*. He then thoroughly involved the newspaper in political affairs, and until the last issue on 3 Āḍar 1329 Š./ 24 November 1940, it remained a supporter of conservative factions.

Nasim-e šemāl's real significance as a journal was mostly limited to the period when it was published in Rašt and during the first few years of its publication in Tehran, that is, up to 1920. After this period, the chaos that became predominant in the ideas championed by this journal, the drab style of writing, and the poor quality of the poetry presented in its columns, which might have been caused by the mental depression overcoming Ašraf-al-Din himself, impaired the quality of the journal considerably (Moḥiṭ Ṭabāṭabā'i, pp. 253, 260). The Rašt issues of *Nasim-e šemāl* were printed in four pages of two-column format measuring 22 x 35 cm. and carried no illustrations. It was printed at the 'Orwat-al-Woṭqā printing house. The Tehran issues were published in the same format but measured 26 x 36 cm, and were printed first at the Kalimiān printing house and later at the printing house of the Bāqerzāda Brothers and then again at the Kalimiān printing house. These issues occasionally carried illustrations and increased their length by a few pages on occasion. Some of the later issues were lithographed with the lettering of Sayyed Ašraf-al-Din himself.

The first issue of the Rašt edition was sold for 4 *šāhis* per copy, but the price



was reduced to 3 *šāhis*. In Tehran, it was first offered for 3 *šāhis*, but the price was increased to 5 *šāhis* and later to 6 and then to 8 *šāhis* per copy. The retail sale of the newspaper was carried out solely by young newspaper-boys. According to Ebrāhim Faḵrā'i (1974, p. 29), *Nasim-e šemāl* had a "high" print run in Rašt while in Tehran its circulation is said to have been around 3 to 4 thousand (Faḵrā'i, 1974, pp. 30, 31). No complete collection of *Nasim-e šemāl* is known to be held anywhere. Major libraries of Iran possess either merely a few copies of the journal or incomplete sets of it.

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