



# RA'DI AZARAKHSHI, GHOLAM-'ALI

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**RA'DI AZARAKHSHI, Gholam-'Ali** (Ġolām-'Ali Ra'di Ādarakaši, b. Tabriz, 20 September 1909; d. Tehran, 6 August 1999), prominent poet of the 20th century.

Ra'di Azarakhshi was born in Tabriz where his father, Moḥammad 'Ali Efteḳār Laškar, was an accountant (mostowfi). His paternal roots can be traced back to the mostowfis of Āštiān. His maternal ancestors were among the landowners of Tafreš who migrated to Tabriz with the crown prince, 'Abbas Mirzā (Ra'di Azarakhshi, 1991, p. 237). Ra'di nevertheless considered himself a native of [Azarbaijan](#) and Tabriz (Ra'di Azarakhshi, 1979, pp. 155-157). At the age of nine, he lost his mother to typhoid (Ra'di, 1991, pp. 513-21).

He attended Ḥekmat Elementary School in Tabriz, and continued his studies at Moḥammadiya (later Ferdowsi) High School. Several of his contemporaries later gained high prominence, including Sayyed Moḥammad Ḥosayn Behjat Tabirzi (Šahriār, 1906-1988; q.v.), [Reżā Ganja'i](#) (Bābā Šamal, 1918-1995), and [Kalil Maleki](#) (1903-1969; Eḥtešami, p. 134, Āryanpur, p. 552).

Ra'di's passion and adeptness for poetry were recognized at an early age. Encouraged by [Esmā'il Amirḳizi](#) (1877-1965), his high school principal and an important political activist and literary figure in his own right, Ra'di achieved a certain literary prominence in his youth (Āryanpur, p. 522).



In 1927, he moved to Tehran to attend the School of Political Sciences (Madrassa-ye 'olūm-e siāsi). There he studied under [Moṣṭafā 'Adl](#) (Maṣṣūr-al-Salṭana, 1882-1950), [Badi'-al-Zamān Foruzānfar](#) (1903-1970), and Moḥammad 'Abdoh Borujerdi. He also assisted the school's director, 'Ali-Akbar Dehḳodā (1879-1956; q. v.), in the compilation and publication of *Amṭāl o ḥekam* (see [DEHḲODĀ, MIRZĀ 'ALI-AKBAR QAZVINI](#)), a collection of aphorisms (Ra'di, 1979, pp. 96-97; Dehḳodā, p. three).

In 1923, Ra'di was briefly employed by the Ministry of Roads and Transportation in Tehran, and subsequently assumed duties as a teacher in his old high school in Tabriz, since renamed Ferdowsi. After completing his military conscription, he oversaw the Office of Publishing for the Ministry of Education in Tehran (Nurizāda, p. 56). In 1936 he left Iran to continue his studies in France and Switzerland in International Law and Comparative Literature.

Returning to Iran in 1941, Ra'di began teaching comparative literature in Tehran University and was appointed the head of the University's Secretariat Office.

In December 1942 he was elected a permanent member of Farhangestān-zabān-e Iran (see [FARHANGESTĀN](#)), an organization that was established by the government in 1935 for the promotion of Persian culture and the replacement of foreign loan words by those of Persian derivation. In 1945 he was appointed Iran's representative to UNESCO's preliminary commission in London. With the establishment of UNESCO in Paris the following year, he was designated Iran's permanent representative to the organization, where he also chaired the Committee for East-West Dialogue (Eḥtešami, p. 136).

In 1963 he was summoned to Iran and 'appointed' senator for Tehran by Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, a position he held for one term. Shortly thereafter he established the Faculty of Literature and Social Sciences in the newly founded National University (Dānešgāh-e melli), and served as the Dean of the Faculty (A'rābi & Bāqeri, p. 182-83). He remained in that position from 1968 through the beginning of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, and continued to teach courses in literature and law at the National University, as well as Tehran University. In the spring of 1979, with the advent of the Revolution, he was relieved of his duties for his association with the Pahlavi court ('Ābedi, 40-43).

Ra'di began his literary career composing qaṣidas (see ['ARŪZ](#)). However, he



soon proceeded to maṭnavi and rendered a portion of his memoirs in rhyming couplets (see *Panj āyena*, Tehran, 1979). While these memoirs have been critiqued for their “lack of organization and lumbering style” (Elāhi, p. 163), they shed light on the history and development of Persian contemporary literature. Many of the period’s dominant issues, especially those encountered between the First and Second World Wars, found expression in his poetry (Ra’di Azarakhshi, 1979 p. 23; Idem, 1985, pp. 56-61). His poem “kārgāh o kārgar” (The workplace and the worker, *Negāh*, P. 7) is a powerful rendition in Ḳorāsāni style of the adverse working conditions of carpet-weavers in his birthplace, Tabriz:

*“Zi kārgah-e farš kon goḍar  
Dar kārgar-e farš kon naẓar  
Ān daḳma ke ḵvānamš kārgāh  
Vān morda ke guyamaš kārgar”*

(The workplace, should you pass,  
toward the carpet weavers cast a glance.  
At the abyss called a workplace  
and the corpses called workers, perchance)

Ra’di’s most famous poem, “Negāh” (Gaze, 1935), consisting of 49 bayts (see ‘ARŪŽ) and six sections, is dedicated to his “mute brother.” The dedicatory note has inspired some critics (Zarrinkub pp. 243-44; Golčīn Ma’āni, p. 300) and many readers to consider the poem Ra’di’s rendition of the sufferings of his mute brother Loṭf-‘Ali Ra’di, the first student of Jabbār Bāgčabān, the founder of education for the deaf and the mute in Iran. Ra’di later objected to this interpretation, arguing that the major part of the forty nine line poem has little to do with his mute brother, who appears only in the last segment. It is, rather, his impressions of the eyes of the girl he was in love with, and that he later married (Ra’di Azarakhshi, 1982, pp. 739- 40). The poem earned Ra’di both popular recognition and critical eminence. It was praised for its richness of expression, and the studied choice of the poem’s rhythm with its emotionally laden content (Yusofi, pp. 664-65). It was also commended as “one of the masterpieces of Persian poetry in the 20th century” (Yarshater, p. 36).

*“Man nadānam be negāh tow če rāzist nahān  
Ke mar ān rāz tavān didan o goftan natvān”*

(I know not the mystery hidden in your gaze



A mystery I can see, but cannot phrase)  
(*Negāh*, p. 13)

As indicated in his introductory note to the verse (*Negāh*, p. 13), Ra'di employed only one Arabic word (*bonyān*) in this long poem. Although he refrained from using words of Arabic origin in several of his other poems, he never joined the ranks of the ardent advocates of language purification. The occasional excesses of purification, he argued, had caused confusion among recipients who often did not know what the neologisms meant (Ra'di *Ādaraḵši* in *Dehḵodā*, I, p. 98; Ra'di, 1985, p.34).

Ra'di's critical stand on the cultural influence of the west and the submission of Persian poetry to modernization is well reflected in his noted poem "Morḡ-e tufān" (The storm bird, *Negāh*, pp. 158-66), in which he takes on Nimā Yušij (1896-1959), the founder and most ardent advocate of Še'r-e in Iran, who took revolutionary measures to establish new perspectives in Persian poetry:

*"Farr-e honar čon āftāb-e nimruzast,  
Inaš honar kaz sāya-ye Nimā gorizad"*

(The glory of art is akin to the mid-day sun  
bright enough to escape Nima's shadow).

In a speech on the history and development of modern poetry, delivered to the Congress of Poetry organized by the Ministry of Culture and Art in 1968, Ra'di deprecated Nimā Yūšij's literary knowledge (or lack thereof), and criticized the simplistic flights of his imagination (Ra'di Azarakhshi, 1991, p. 89). His remarks were not lost on the period's advocates of modern poetry. He was harshly criticized for advocating a reactionary movement that would impede the advancement of modern Persian poetry (Barāhani, pp. 731- 63; Āyati, p. 222).

It is interesting to note, however, that on the occasion of his entry into the Farhangestān, in a speech entitled "Persian Literary Renaissance," Ra'di had suggested that Persian poetry should expand its capacity to incorporate images belonging to the modern world, while maintaining imperative and discernible connections with the classical tradition (Ra'di Azarakhshi, 1991, p. 23).

Despite Ra'di's knowledge of European languages and literature and a quarter century residence abroad, the influence can barely be felt in his poetry.



Nevertheless, as noted by Ra'di himself, some of his verses were influenced by Russian folk tales, including "Māhi o ƙarčang o qu" (The fish, the crab and the swan, *Negāh*, p. 505) and "Kudak o sāya-aš" (The child and his shadow, *Negāh*, p. 508; Ra'di, 1985, pp. 505-08). Similarity in title and theme to one of Ra'di's poems ("Čeguna bāyad budan", *Negāh*, pp. 591-92), with Shakespeare's famous line "to be or not to be," has been also noted by a literary critic (Rowšan-Zamir, p. 400). Ra'di, in response, emphasized that he was not yet familiar with Shakespeare's verses at the time those verses were composed (Ra'di Azarakhshi, 1985, pp. 591-92).

Ra'di also experimented, although without much critical acclaim, with the genre of qeṭ'a, as well as the modern genre of čahār-pāra. As indicated in his footnote to "Marg-e kudak" (Death of a child, *Negāh*, pp. 607-14), he composed the verse under the influence of the poet and political activist Taqi Rafat (1889-1920) in his high school years (Ra'di, 1985, p. 586). Though he did not shy away from innovation early in his literary career, and was in favour of a studied change in Persian poetry, with the passage of time, Ra'di, became increasingly involved with classic lyrical poetry, and turned to the ghazal (see [ĠAZAL](#)) as his favourite genre. Ra'di's ghazals enjoyed critical acclaim and were praised for being "easily confused with the fluid and melodious ghazals of Hafez" (Dašti, p. 494).

It seems, however, that Ra'di's qašidas are the source of greater approbation. He is praised as "one of the first rate contemporary poets" (Afšār, pp. 119-22), who bestowed upon the genre a "new lustre" by which his verses would be recognized (Ƙaṭibi, p. 15). 'Abd-al-Ḥosayn Zarrinkub, however, while recognizing "the poet's power and talent" and acknowledging his success in "following the imperatives of the ƙorāsāni style," finds the genre of qašida "stagnant and hopelessly loyal" to literary traditions, with little hope of surviving the further test of time (Zarrinkub, pp. 243-44).

Ra'di died at the age of ninety and spent the last twenty years of his life compiling his oeuvre. They were published in three collections:

*Goftārḥā-ye adabi va ejtema'i* (Essays on literature and society), Tehran, 1991.

*Negāh* (Gaze), Tehran, 1985.

*Panj āyena* (Five mirrors), Tehran, 1979.

Ra'di's curriculum vitae in his own hand, submitted to the Ministry of Culture



and Art, was published in Tehran in 1973 as *Zendegināma-ye R'adi be kaṭṭ-e u barā-ye Vezārat-e farhang o honar: parvande-ye šoqli-e R'adi*.

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