



## SHEYBANI, MANUCHEHR

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**SHEYBANI, MANUCHEHR** (Manučehr Šeybāni, b. [Kashan](#), 1924; d. Tehran, 20 Ābān 1370 Š./9 November 1991; [Figure 1](#), [Figure 2](#)) poet, painter, filmmaker, and dramatist.

### LIFE

Manuchehr Sheybani was the grandson of the noted poet of the Qajar era Faṭḥ-Allāh Khan Šeybāni (1825-1890). He lost his father at the age of seven, and his maternal grandfather, Eqbāl-al-Solṭān, became his guardian following his mother's second marriage. He went through his primary education in different cities and at the age of fifteen enrolled in an industrial school in Qa'emšahr in Māzandarān, and he received his diploma in textile manufacturing (Šarifi, p. 925). Employment in a textile factory provided him a firsthand opportunity to experiment with textile designing and composition of dyes (Bābāčāhi, 2004, p. 8; Ḥosayni, p. 35). In 1943 he entered Honarestān-e Honarpišegi, Tehran's first official performing arts school affiliated with Edāra-ye Namāyeš, which was under Sāzemān-e Parvareš-e Afkār, founded by the government in 1939. Sheybani studied art and stage design under Rafi' Hālati (1899-1981) and came under the intellectual sway of such celebrated figures as 'Abd-al-Ḥosayn Nušin (1906-1971), a noted scholar and stage director, who encouraged him to study classical Persian literature (Bābāčāhi, 2004, p. 8). In 1945 he enrolled in the [University of Tehran's Faculty of Fine Arts](#) (Šobḥi, 2004, p. 47, Kāki, p. 64) and published his first poetry collection, with 36 poems, titled *Jaraqqa* (Scintillation), which earned critical appreciation (Nafisi, pp. 121-22).



Sheybani soon joined *Ķorus Jangi* (The fighting cock), an art and literary circle founded in 1949 by the painter Jalil *Žiā'pur* (b. 1920) with the principal goal of searching for a new language in art and literature (*Šams-e Langarudi*, I, pp. 452-59, 553). *Ķorus Jangi* also published a journal by the same title, with Sheybani as its first poetry editor.

Sheybani was the youngest modernist poet who participated in the First Iranian Writers Congress, sponsored by the Perso-Soviet Society of Cultural Relations (*Anjoman-e ravābeṭ-e farhangi-e Iran va Ettehād-e Jamāhir-e Šowravi*) in 1946 (Ricks, pp. 8-25). The poem he submitted to the Congress, in which several meters delimited each other, suffered from grammatical errors and unpolished language (Aminpur, p. 443).

Sheybani's association with the poet and painter [Sohrab Sepehri](#) in 1948, as later acknowledged by Sepehri himself, marked a turning point in Sepehri's artistic trajectory (Sepehri, p. 19; Sheybani, 2001, pp. 313-14). *Rahgodār* (The passerby), Sheybani's first play, was published in the journal *Jām-e jam* in 1949. He graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in 1951, and two years later he traveled to Italy to study interior design (*Bābāčāhi*, 2004, p. 9; *Šobḥi*, 2004, p. 47). He returned to Iran in 1955, and from 1956 to 1958, along with Jalil *Žiā'pur*, he traveled to the southern regions of Iran and studied traditional handicrafts popular in the tribal areas (*Žiā'pur*, pp. 34-36). His series of artworks on "Tribal women of Southern Iran" ([Figure 3](#)) is especially significant. *Ātaškada-ye kāmūš* (The silent fire temple; [Figure 5](#)). *Sarābhā-ye kaviri* (The desert mirages; *Abu'l-Qasem Lahuti*, the political activist and Marxist poet (Sheybani, 2004, p. 25). *Jarraqa*, his first poetry collection, is replete with socio-political overtones:

*Bekeš dar kārḳāna ranj o zaḥmat*  
*Ke arbābān be mehmān-ḳāna raqṣand>*  
*Agar ḳ'āhi šavi yek-bāra rāḥat>*  
*Gosal az dast-e ḳod yek-bāregi band>*  
*Tow rā ḡayr az tow nabvad madadkār >*  
(*Jarraqa*, pp. 80-82)

You hustle and sweat in the factories>  
As in the parlors the barons frolic>  
To have your labors eased>  
Shed your manacles at once>  
You are the sole support to yourself



The recurring use of words that belong to the modern world (e.g., *črāg-barq*, *piston*, *sigār*) in the collection and its division into three thematic sections of ‘Realist’ (15 poems), ‘Idealist’ (13 poems), and ‘Fantasy’ (6 poems), as held by a critic, is evident of Sheybani’s familiarity with Western literature and modern poetry (Šafi’i-Kadkani, p. 216). In addition to formats employed by the neo-traditionalists, such as *čhārpāra* (foursome) and its variations, and some innovative subspecies of the emerging canon of the modern poetry (see, e.g., “Hedia-ye mowjha” and “Kārgar-e pir”; *Jaraqqa*, 1945, pp. 102-4; and 30-32, respectively), Sheybani also experimented with broken meters in the collection. He employed two different meters in “Čādor” and at least four different meters in “Iran” (*Jaraqqa*, 1945, pp. 124-27; and 117-23, respectively). Sheybani’s proclivity to transcend Nima’s innovations is manifested in his incessant and calculated urge to manipulate established rhymes and rhythms; this, as held by critics, has often cost the work its poetical subtleties (Behbehāni, p. 76; Bābāčāhi, 1991, p. 14).

*Ātaškada-ye kāmūš*, Sheybani’s second collection of poetry, comprises two poems in *čhārpāra*, many more in Nimaic meters, and several in free verses. The first instance of such poems in the collection (“Ĥofra,” *Ātaškada-ye kāmūš*, 1964, pp. 109-11) dated back to 1946. In an unsubstantiated statement, Aḥmad Šāmlu ranked Sheybani as the very first practitioner of the genre of free verse in Iran (Šāmlu, p. 30). Most of the collection’s poems are charged with pre-Islamic mythological motifs (e.g., “Sorudi barā-ye Mitrā,” pp. 27-30), fear of death and loneliness (e.g., “Entezār,” pp. 35-38), and socio-cultural impediments (e.g., “Tafriḡgāh-e mā,” pp. 89-91).

The publication in 1976 of the third collection, *Sarābhā-ye kaviri*, after a long period of silence, reaffirmed free verse as Sheybani’s genre of choice in poetry. Love, bordering on the erotic, appears as a recurrent motif in most of the poems, with desert sceneries always lurking at the background rendering the poems as more or less identical. Some critics regarded this collection as Sheybani’s best literary oeuvre (Behbehāni, p. 77; Šāhroktāš, pp. 116-18). He is also considered one of the country’s earliest modern dramatist poets, whose compositions are more accommodating, often at the expense of poetic merits, to performance before an audience than to print distribution; this characteristic that not only displays his lifetime engagement with dramatic arts, but may also help the readers to better appreciate the unconventional language and structure by which his poetry is recognized (Nuri’lā’, pp. 394-99).

*Barāmad hami ṭalāya-ye u*>



*Bekubid, bekubid, gōlāmān!*  
*davāl bar dohol-hā*  
*Zanid pardahā rā, ze darhā, be bālā*  
*Barāmād, be eyvān, hami ṭalāya-ye u*  
*Kanizakān!*  
*Be pišgāh-e ḥosnaš, be kāk čehreh sā'id*  
*Nadīmān!*  
*Be gerd-e u darā'id ...*  
(“Bāzgašt,” *Ātaškada-ye kāmūš*, p. 46)

He has appeared on the horizon  
Beat, O, slave boys, beat  
With sticks on drums,  
Raise the door screens  
He has appeared on the veranda.  
O, slave girls,  
Bow to earth in awe of his beauty  
O, consorts  
Encircle him.

In addition to his published works, Sheybani wrote a number of unpublished poems, plays, and screenplays, produced a number of movies, and collaborated in the production of several ballets. His opera *Delāvar-e Sahand* was staged in the opera hall of Tālār-e Rudaki (Nuri'lā', p. 398).

*Painting and dramatic arts.* Sheybani was one of the pioneers of modern painting in Iran. Notwithstanding his familiarity with classical schools of painting, Sheybani's works reveal an artist with an incessant urge to explore new styles and forms of expression, remaining faithful to none for a long period of time. Although he experimented with an array of such distinct styles as expressionism, neo-realism, cubism and abstract painting, partly due to his long years of exposure to diverse schools of painting abroad, his works exhibit a visible gravitation toward figurative style. His artistic output includes numerous sketches and watercolor paintings from suburban landscapes of Paris and Prague. Characterized by spontaneous movement of lines, his work has been praised for mastery in color combination, drawing, and craftsmanship, showcasing his skill as an artist and a painter (Āḡdāšlu, pp. 6-7; Našir, p. 43-44).

Sheybani's coherent and technically developed drawings of the southern



regions of Iran are also characterized by his rendition of a sense of unity between the architectural elements and designs of the region (Ziā'pur, pp. 35-36). His dramatic depiction of the circumstances of women in Iran in *Gurestān* (The graveyard), one of his best received paintings, earned him the praise of Simin Dānešvar and Jalāl Ā-e Aḥmad, the high-profile literary figures of the time. They published the painting in *Nağš o negār* (No. 5, Bahār 1338 Š./Spring 1959, p. 29), a literary and art periodical they published (Mojābi, p. 2; Sāl-šomār-e zendegi-e Manučehr Šeybāni, p. 7). Gradually, however, more surreal elements were substituted in his paintings in place of the cohesion created by the unity of objects and colors, and these lessened the structural significance of his paintings (Našir, p. 44).

Sheybani has been praised for his mastery in color combination (Āğdāšlu, p. 6), and the craftsmanship he exhibits in his sketches, which are characterized by spontaneous movement of lines and which showcase his skills as an artist and a painter (Našir, pp. 43-44).

Sheybani was the recipient of the 1958 Fine Arts Award of the First Tehran Biennale, and the 1977 Screenplay Award at Tus Festival for *Sohrāb Tragedy*. In 2004, on the occasion of Sheybani's eightieth birthday, Manucmehr Sheybani Museum and Library was inaugurated at the historical House of Ehsān in Kāshān.

Poetry collections:

*Jaraqqa* (Scintillation, Tehran, 1945)

*Ātaškada-ye kāmūš* (The silent fire temple, Tehran, 1964)

*Sarābhā-ye kaviri* (The desert mirages, Tehran, 1976)

Solo exhibitions:

1958 Iran-Americia Society

1963 Italian Cultural Society

1965 Tālar-e Iran

1965 Gallery Borghese

1970 Negār Gallery



1989 Seyhoun Gallery

Group exhibitions:

1950 Venice Biennale

1950 Il Camino Gallery, Rome

1952 Frascati International Art Fair, Rome

1953 Sāzemān-e Javānān Tehran

1955 Ankara Conservatory

1955 Istanbul Academy of Fine Arts

1958 First Tehran Biennale

1958 Iranian Oil Company Traveling Art Exhibit

1964 Tālār-e Iran

1972 La Maison des Artistes, Paris

1983 La Maison des Artistes, Paris

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