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## The Rise of Modern Persian Literature through Translation in Iran

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### Abstract

Translation is an indispensable tool for communication between the diverse linguistic groups. It opens new horizons for the people living in a country so that it makes changes and improvements in their society, especially in the literature. Through the translation process, some literary principles and elements are introduced into the home literature which did not exist before. These features emerge not only as new models of reality to function as a substitute for old and established literary conventions that are no longer effective, but as a whole range of other features as well, such as compositional patterns and techniques or literary genres and forms (Even-Zohar, 1990). During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, translation from European languages caused that the Persian literature began experiencing new trends in poetry and prose, leading to the rise of modern Persian literature. This study aims to scrutinize the significant role of the translated western literature in the rise of the modern Persian literature, for this purpose, new literary genres introduced into the Persian literary polysystem through the translation of the western works have been studied. It employs Even-Zohar's polysystem theory to investigate the conditions which gave rise to the literary interference in Iran and to illuminate the main reasons which resulted in the canonization of the translated works in the Persian literary polysystem. It shows that the translations transferred new models and themes with themselves, which were decisive in shaping modern Persian literature.

**Keywords:** Canonization, Literary interference, Literary polysystem, Modern Persian literature, Translation.

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### INTRODUCTION

Translation as a means of bridging the gap between languages, cultures, and literatures can fill the vacuum existing in a target language. By its means, cultural goods migrate between systems (Hermans, 1999). It brings about in a target culture new local elements, new linguistic structures, and new literary genres and styles that have never been there. Through conveying such

elements, the target culture may willy-nilly be influenced in such a way that makes those elements as its own (Even-Zohar, 1990).

Translation into Persian has a long and eventual history; it has played an important part in the evolution of Iranian and Iranate civilizations throughout Western Asia and beyond. Typically, Persian translations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were considered the best way to inform Iranians about the west. Whether literary, philosophical or historical, translations

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were envisaged as a vehicle for social or cultural change. In translators' hands, translation was used primarily as a means of education, and a tool for nation building and cultural integration. Almost all the major translators of the time were concerned essentially with serving the Iranian culture through introducing European cultural achievements to Iranian readers. In doing so, they helped to bring about new writing style, new means and methods of communication, and eventually a new literary tradition (Karimi-Hakkak, 2013).

Notable scholars see the translations of western literature as one of the key reasons that led to the rise of the modern Persian literature during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Due to the enormous wave of translations of western literature, later called "the translation movement", Persian literature began experiencing new trends in poetry and prose, leading to transformation of Persian literature over a short period of time. This rapid transformation, being referred to as 'renaissance', 'revolution', 'reformation', 'reshape', influenced both form and content of the literature: a number of new literary genres, such as drama, short story, modern poetry, novel and modern literary criticism came into existence; while modern literature embraced new ideas and themes were interwoven with the sociopolitical issues of the time.

In spite of the broad recognition among the culture historians of the major role played by translation in the rise of modern literature in Iran, relatively little attention has been paid to its vital role in the introduction of new literary genres into the Persian literature and various factors which led to the occurrence of literary interference in Iran and the centrality of translated literature in the Persian literary polysystem. Accordingly, this study aims to explore the significant role of the translated western literature in the rise of the modern Persian literature. For this purpose, it explores new literary genres introduced into the Persian literature through the translation. The translators or authors who introduced new genres into the Persian language

and the first Persian works which were written in an imitation of the translated works or under the influence of European works have been studied briefly. In addition, the study employs the polysystem theory of Even - Zohar to discuss the conditions which gave rise to the literary interference in Iran and the main reasons of the canonization of translations in the Persian literary polysystem.

It is worth noting that the study can be used to illustrate how translations can maintain a central position in a literary polysystem, and thereby can participate actively in the formation or reformation of the given literary polysystem. By this study, it can be demonstrated that translated literature doesn't permanently occupy a peripheral position in the literary polysystem, and depending on the specific constellation of the polysystem under study and various cultural, socio-political factors, it may maintain a central position and as such likely to be identified with major events in literary history while these are taking place.

## **2. Review of the Related Literature**

So far, seminal studies have been done on the prominent role of translation in the rise of the modern languages and literatures of some countries such as Iran, Turkey, China and etc. Gholam (2001) has studied the role of the translation in the rise of the historical novel in Iran. In this study, he has also explored the role and function of initial translations in the formation and evolution of various modern literary and cultural flows, the reasons of Iranians' tendency toward French literature and culture during the 19th century and the translators' criteria in the selection of works for translation in that period of time. He has found that the emergence of historical novel was influenced by the translation of western works. In another study, Alavi (2000) has studied the contribution of French literature in the emergence of the modern novel in Iran. This study has also focused on the expansion of novel among the works of some writers during 1961-1971. It has been noted that

most of Iranian intellectuals got familiar with new literary genres through French and Russian literature. In this study, Alavi has concluded that the works of most novel writers in Iran was an imitation of western writers.

The influence of translation on the works of Iranian playwrights has been studied by Ahmadi (2013). He has explored the works of the great playwrights of Persia and the influence of translation on them. Ahmadi also has explained that the emergence of modern Persian drama was impossible without translation and Iranian drama is a kind of western theater, which has been introduced into Persian literature through the cultural and social process of translation. In other research, Safari (2013) describes the role of translation in the introduction of drama into Persian literature. In the light of polysystem theory, he explores the situation of post constitutional literature and some other influential factors to prove the central position of the translation in the introduction of drama and evolution of Persian literature.

The role of translation of French poetry in the emergence of modern poetic themes and forms in Persian literature has been investigated by Bahrami (2013). Given the extent of the influence, this study has focused only on few outstanding samples such as Nima, Shamlou, Yadollah Royaei's poets. Bahrami has found that the translators of French literary works introduced new socio-political and especially literary movements and ideas to Iranians. According to this study, new themes and forms introduced into Persian poet through translation of western works, and it can be claimed that the emergence of modern Persian poetry debts to the translation of French works.

The process of the translation of foreign fictions and its role in the renovation of fiction in Afghanistan has been studied by Bezhan (2005). In this study, it has been explained that the translation of foreign fictions has been one of the most significant cultural developments in Afghanistan since the early 20th century, it is considered as one of the main factors which led

to the emergence and development of modern fiction and its various genres, such as the novel, the short story, and drama in Afghanistan. Bezhan has concluded that the translations provided new approaches towards literature. They helped Afghan authors learn more about the nature of their own literary activity and explore new structures and themes, besides they had special effects on Dari language.

Fazelian (2011) has explored the translation of western literature and its role in reforming Persian literary canon. The study has identified and analyzed the salient features of three significant sets of texts: the final period of classical Persian literary canon (1800–1850); early translations (texts and models) from the Western literature (1850–1906); the emergence of modern Persian literary canon (1906–1940). Contrasting these three corpora, it has aimed to show what discursive elements and ideas of Western literature were introduced into and then reshaped the Persian literary system. Fazelian has also attempted to illuminate the position of translated Western literature within the Persian literary system and show that despite an adoption of domestication strategy, translations transferred new models and ideas with themselves, which were decisive in shaping the modern literary canon.

In other research, Berk (2006) has studied the position of translated western literature within the Turkish literary polysystem. By describing the history of translation in Turkey from the mid-nineteenth to the late twentieth century, with the aim of seeking out patterns which can shed light on the meanings and implications of translation policies and contribute to a fuller depiction of the sociocultural context of translation, he has illuminated that translations played an important role in the transformation of Turkish culture, it is generally accepted that (literary) translations from the Western languages played an important role and function in the Turkish modernization process, as manifested in the form of Westernization starting in the mid-nineteenth century.

Kunt Akbaş (2007) has studied the enrichment of national literature through translation in Turkey, she has concerned especially with the significance of the translation bureau in the Turkish Republic's social and cultural life, as well as Turkish translation history. She has evaluated the Bureau translations within their historical, political, social and cultural context with a view to identify their effects on Turkish culture, society and literature and to describe the norms that manifested themselves in these translations. In this study, Kunt Akbaş has found that Translation Bureau translations not only introduced a new, humanistic and civilized world view to the Turkish society, but also laid the foundations of a national literature. They provided the Turkish intellectuals, writers and critiques with new literary and artistic models.

Yifeng (2008) had a similar research on Chinese literature. By investigating the assimilation of translations into the Chinese literary canon, he has focused on a hybridized political and cultural discourse that marks a radical shift in aesthetic and cultural sensibilities in modern Chinese literature. Yifeng has made clear that the translations have introduced new cultural paradigms and literary traditions in Chinese literature and have enabled it to develop from romanticism to realism. Canonical modern Chinese writers were often influenced by Western or Russian literature and in many cases were themselves its translators.

As it can be seen in the above mentioned studies, the significant role of translation in the transformation and enrichment of different nations' literature and language has been studied relatively. It implies that there is a lot of interest in the subject and the investigation of the issue in greater depth can bring a new look into the subject.

### **3. Methodology**

The present study is a descriptive and qualitative research. It has used data from the library research. No computer software was used for collection or analysis of data and they have been extracted manually. To collect data, the research-

er has done a historical review of the works related to the history of modern Persian literature to recognize certain periods of time in which various socio-political conditions of the society led to the significant role of translations and translators in the introduction of new literary genres and thereby the rise of modern Persian literature.

The evolution of a nation's literature as a result of continuous competition between genres, and acceptance of new genres by the reading circles of that nation is very closely connected with and can effectively be explicated through Polysystem theory. In fact, the polysystem of a given national literature is viewed as one element making up the larger socio-cultural polysystem, which itself compromises other polysystems besides the literary, such as the artistic, the religious or the political. So, literature is considered not just as a collection of texts, but more broadly as a set of factors governing the production, promotion, and reception of these texts (Shuttleworth, 2001).

Even-Zohar (1990) attributes a special role to literary translations in the evolution of literary polysystems. In "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem" he complains from the fact that translations have not been dealt with consistently and thoroughly in histories of literatures and states that "there is no awareness of the possible existence of translated literature as a particular literary system" (Even-Zohar, 1990, p.45). He defines the literary interference as a relationship between literatures, whereby a source literature may be become a source of direct or indirect loans for a target literature and elaborates the conditions for the emergence and occurrence of literary interference in a target literary polysystem which can be summarized as follows: "(1) Contacts will sooner or later generate interference if no resisting conditions arise, (2) a source literature is selected by prestige, (3) a source literature is selected by dominance, and (4) interference occurs when a system is in need of items unavailable within itself "(p.63).

Generally, Even-Zohar (1990) considers “translated literature not only as an integral system within any literary polysystem, but a more active system within it. He identifies three conditions under which translated literature may assume such a role: "(a) When a polysystem has not yet been crystallized, that is to say, when a literature is ‘young,’ in the process of being established; (b) when a literature is either ‘peripheral’ (within a large group of correlated literatures) or ‘weak,’ or both; and (c) when there are turning points, crisis or literary vacuums in a literature" (p.46).

Under such conditions, the translated literature maintains a central position in the target literary polysystem and hence takes an active part in shaping the center of the polysystem. Translations of foreign works introduce new models and features into the target polysystem and become one of the means of elaborating the new repertoire (Even-Zohar, 1990, p.46).

Considering the above explanations, Even-Zohar's polysystem theory has been used as the theoretical framework in the current study to explore the main causes of literary interference in Iran and the factors which caused translated works maintained a central position in the Persian literary polysystem.

## 4. Discussion and Results

### 4.1. New Literary Genres Introduced into the Persian Literature through Translations

In the views of many researchers, translation has been a vehicle for transferring certain ideas into Iran. In broader terms, it has been the chief means of introducing Iranians to new ideas, schools of thought and literary trends. In other words, it has been considered a necessary component of the drive towards modernity (Karimi- Hakak, 2013).

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century translations of western works introduced new cultural paradigms and literary traditions into the Persian literature and enabled it to undergo a revolutionary change and experience perhaps the deepest and most intense transformation for its

entire existence. To understand the significant role played by the translation in the rise of modern Persian literature, a historical review of the new literary genres introduced into Persian literature by the translation of western works or written originally in Persian under the influence of European works seems necessary. This is why the following section represents a historical review of such literary genres which finally led to the rise of modern Persian literature in Iran.

#### 4.1.1. Drama

Drama is a new literary genre in the Persian literature and cannot be found, in its modern sense, in the classical Persian literature. It began in Iran by the establishment of Dár al-Fonún and the translation of Molière's plays (Arianpour, 1976, p.336). At least three of Molière's plays (*Le Médecin malgré lui*, *Le Misanthrope*, and another entitled *The Ass* which must be intended for *L'Étourdi*) appeared in Persian translations (Browne, 1956, p.459). The most important one was the translation of Molière's *Le Misanthrope* which was the first translation of drama into Persian and introduced drama to Iranians (Malekpour, 1982, p. 317). Under the influence of Ahmed Vafiq, who had translated and published Molière's *Le Misanthrope* in Istanbul in 1869, Mirza Habib Esfahani (1835-93) produced his own Persian adaptation under the title “*Gozāresh-e mardom goriz*” (the Adventure of him who fled from mankind) which was printed in Constantinople in 1869-70 (Javadi, 2005, p.836). In spite of being an excellent translation, it went unnoticed and never attained any great popularity.

In fact, the drama in its modern form was effectively introduced to the Persian literary scene in 1874, when Mirza Ja'far Qarajehdaghi (1835-1893) translated the Azerbaijani comedies of Fath Ali Akhundzadeh (originally written between 1850 and 1856) into Persian (Javadi, 2005). Akhundzadeh (1812- 1878) is the first Iranian playwright who wrote his works in an imitation of European (especially French) works, he was inspired by the works of Shake-

speare and Molière. He wrote six plays, called “Támsílat” (the Allegories), in Azerbaijani Turkish and his first play was “Hykayat-i- Mullá Ibráhím Khalíl-i-Kímiyá-gar” (the Alchemist) which is considered as the prelude of his play-writing art (Arianpour, 1976, pp. 345- 351).

However, according to the historical documents, the first Persian plays were written by Mirza Ağa Tabrizi (1815 - 1915) in 1870-1 (Hoqouqi, 1998, p.37) which were partly published in 1908. A complete edition of these plays, which are (1) the “Adventures of Ashraf Khán, Governor of ‘Arabistán”, (2) the “Methods of Government of Zamán Khán of Burújird”; and (3) “Sháh-qulí Mírzá goes to Karbalá and spends some days at Kirmánsháh with the Governor Sháh Murád Mírzá”, was published in 1921-2 in Berlin (Browne, 1956, p.463). Evidently, Mirza Ağa Tabrizi was influenced by the works of Akhundzadeh and wrote dramas in an imitation of Akhundzadeh's works.

#### 4.1.2. Novel

There is no scarcity of narrative writers in classical Persian literature. But novel, as defined in the West, is new in Persian literature and dates back to the latter part of the nineteenth century. It was born in Iran as a result of translation and the socio-cultural developments of the time. As far as we know, the issue of novel writing in Iran was first raised in 1871 in Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzade's letter to Mirza Aqa Tabrizi that considered drama and novel beneficial to the nation and in accord with the readers' tastes. Akhundzadeh was largely influenced by European realist writers. Although the Persian translation of his Azerbaijani novel “Setāregān-e Faríb-khorde ya Hikāyat-e Yusef Shah” (The Betrayed Stars or The Story of Yusef Shah), translated by Mirza Ja'far Qarajehdaghi, was published in 1874, the conditions of the time were not favorable for the creation of such new form of expression (Mir-Abedini, 1998, p.1159).

In fact, the translation of James Molier's *The Adventures of Haji Baba of Isfahan* and Alexandre Dumas's *Les Trois Mousquetaires* (The

*Three Musketeers*) formed the vanguard of a rising flow of narrative prose translated from other languages. The first novel was translated by Mirza Habib Isfahani in 1872 (first printed in Calcutta, 1905) and the second one by Muhammad Taher Mirza (first printed in Tehran in three volumes, 1889) (Aryanpur Kashani, 1973, p.297).

Mir-Abedini (1998, p.30) mentions Prince Muhammad Taher Mirza (1834-1900) as the most active translator of the time who translated Alexandre Dumas's historical novels. His best translations are *Le Comte de Monte Cristo* (1894) and *Les Trois Mousquetaires* (1889). These translations along with translations of novels by Dumas père, Fénelon, Daniel Defoe, Jules Verne, Lesage and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, laid the foundations of the Persian novel which appeared in the early twentieth century (Javadi, 2005, p.835).

However, one has to wait until 1895 in order to speak of the first Iranian new novel-like story; that is, the year Zain al-Abidin Maragheh's novel “Safar-Nāme-ye Ebrahim Beig” (Ibrahim Beig's Travel Story) was published. The second attempt in the direction of novel writing was Abd ol-Rahim Talebof's novel “Masalek ul-Mohsenin” (The Journeys of the Virtuous) which was published in 1905 (Mir-Abedini, 1998, p.1160). Although they were influenced by the translated works from European languages, but their works are only considered as the early experiences in the formation of the Persian novel, not a complete artistic and literary Persian work (Arianpour, 1976, p.236).

The historical novel was the first genre of fictional prose which attracted a significant readership in Iran. One of the first attempts in this direction was a trilogy: “Shams o Tagra”, “Mari-e Venisi” (The Venetian Maria), and “Togrol o Homay”, written by Mohammad Bagher Mirza Khosravi (1849-1919) and all three published in Kermansah in 1910. In fact, this trilogy is a reminiscent of Dumas' novel *Les trois mousquetaires* (Yavari, 2002a).

In the given span of time, in spite of the attempts in direction of writing Persian histori-

cal novels, it was replaced by the social novel in 1920's. Social novels were influenced by the literary naturalism of European novelists like Emile Zola. The first Persian social novel was Morteza Moshfegh Kazemi's "Tehran-e Makhuf" (The Horrible Tehran), which appeared in two volumes in 1921-23 (Arianpour, 1976). The narrative style of the work of Moshfegh (1902-1977) is based on such western novels as *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *La Dame aux camellias* by Dumas, and *Crime and Punishment* by Dostoyevsky (Alavi, 2007).

#### 4.1.3. Short Story

Short story is also a new literary genre in the Persian literature which cannot be found, in the European sense, in the classical Persian literature. The early short story writers in Iran were mostly those either familiar with at least one foreign language or who tried their hand at translating European texts. It should be said that the short story began with "Yeki bud Yeki Nabud" (Once Upon a Time, 1921) by Jamalzadeh in Iran. Authors such as Sadeq Hedayat, Bozorg Alavi, Sadeq Chubak and Ibrahim Golestan, all of whom (except for Jamalzadeh) were also translators of short stories, formed and shaped the genre.

Jamalzadeh (1895- 1997) was the first to introduce the techniques of European short-story writing in Persian literature. As a result of his stay in several foreign countries, he became fluent in French, German, and Arabic. His short stories focus on plot and action rather than on mood or character development and in that respect are reminiscent of the works of Guy de Maupassant and O. Henry (Mirsadeghi, 2003). In fact, from the point of technique, one can feel clearly the effect of western literature in Jamalzadeh's works.

Due to spending a significant span of his life in French-speaking countries, Sadeq Hedayat (1903, 1951) was fluent in French and was familiar with French literature. He began his literary carrier by translating the works of Franz Kafka and Anton Chekhov. "Hedayat can be

regarded as the first translator who rendered such works into Persian" (Baharlouian & Ismaili, 2000, p.167). He wrote collections of short stories including "Seh Ghatra Khun" (Three Drops of Blood, 1932) and "Zenda be Gur" (Buried Alive, 1930) (Yavari, 2002b). "Seh Ghatra Khun" (Three Drops of Blood) is modernist in style, using techniques of French symbolism and surrealism in literature, of surrealism in modern European art, and of expressionism in the contemporary European films which had distant precedents in Laurence Stern's *Tristram Shandy* and Rabelais' *Gargantua* and other works. Generally, the writings of Hedayat constitute the first major attempts toward creating a new ethos in Persian narrative literature (Hedayat, Sadeq, 2013).

Other influential writers of Persian short stories who had a main contribution to the development of the modern Persian short story were Bozorg Alavi (1904-1997), Sādeq Chubak (1916-1998) and Ibrahim Golestan (b. 1922). They had the privilege of knowing several foreign languages and translated some masterpieces written by European authors. In general, their stories followed in part the example of European works.

#### 4.1.4 Modern Persian Poetry

The classical Persian poetry has had a long history in Iran; it was always very popular among all-classes of Iranians and was considered the essence of art. But, close to a century ago, and in the process of the modernist movement in Iran and along with social changes, poetry also evolved in modern Iran. It cast off its abstract platitudes and started to reflect people's life. In fact, the modern Persian poetry got largely imaginary ideas from European poetry, especially from France, England and Russia (Ghorbani, 2001).

Accordingly, while the formal and traditional type of poetry continued in Persian, from the second decade of the twentieth century there were poets who experimented with modern poetry and blank verse. Abolqasem Lahooti (1887, 1957), Taqi Ra'fat (1889, 1920), Shams

Kasmai (1883, 1961) and Ja'far Khamene'I (b.1887), some under French and others under Turkish literary influence, tried their hand at new forms and styles (Javadi, 2005).

In 1909, two years after the victory of the modernist Constitutional Revolution, Abolqasem Lahooti composed the first new poem called "Vafay-e be Ahd" (the Fulfillment of a Promise). He wrote his first blank verse (the so-called Nima's verse), called "Sangar-e Khonin" (The Bloody trench), in 1923 in Moscow, which was the translation of one of the Victor Hugo's poems (Langroudi, 1991).

In spite of the attempts of the above mentioned pioneers of new poem (whose writings were by and large a simple mimicry of western poets), they have not been considered as the founders of modern Persian poetry. Because innovation could only be seen in the form of their poems and they did not try to separate radically themselves from the old and traditional themes, expressions and similes (Langroudi, 1991). It was Mohammad Esfandiyari (1897–1959), better known as Nima Yushij, who changed the course of the Persian poetry and announced his departure from the old classical prosody ('aruz) and his adoption of a new style (she'r-e āzād, 'free verse') (Talattof, 2000, p.26). Nima knew French and was familiar with Western literature and culture, the influence of the French impressionists was instrumental for him (Javadi, 2005). "Afsāneh" (Myth, 1922), Nima's long lyrical poem, is considered the cornerstone of the modern Persian poetry (Langroudi, 1991). It has been very much under the influence of the French Romantics (Javadi, 2005). Evidently, it has been deeply influenced by the works of Victor Marie Hugo, Alphonse de Lamartine and Alfred de Musset (Zabihniya Omran, 2012).

#### **4.1.5 Modern Literary Criticism**

Literary criticism in the European sense could not also be found in the classical Persian literature. In the nineteenth century, influenced by European liberal thought and Russian critical ideas, the

intellectuals of Iran confronted the despotic Persian system and the literature that served it, which led to the interest in the topic of literary criticism. The new style of criticism was radically different from what we find in classical Persian literature; it consisted of judgments on subject and style of expression and extended its horizons to embrace rational standards, while classical Persian literary criticism was mostly limited to the discussion of the rhetorical and lexical artifices of discourse. Modern literary criticism reoriented writers and poets away from themes that had nothing to do with the lives of the ordinary people and the social worth of literary works was judged. The model of Iranian intellectuals in this field was European literature. This realist standpoint went hand in hand with social attitudes, which recalls contemporary critics such as Belnisky (1810-48) in Russia in the decade 1838-48 (Parsinejad, 2003).

Mirza Fath 'Ali Akhundzadeh (1812- 1878) is known as the founder of modern literary criticism in Iran. It was with Akhundzadeh's *Qertitika* (Criticism), written in 1866, that modern literary criticism was introduced into Iran. Akhundzadeh was master in Russian language, enabled him to read in the original language works by Russian writers and thinkers. While Akhundzadeh was particularly affected by the prevailing realism in the Russian literary world, it seems that some particular aspects of his ideas developed under the influence of Voltaire and Moliere. It is worth noting that Akhundzadeh influenced a generation of thinkers and innovators, among them Mirza Aga Khan Kermani(1853-1896), Mirza Malkom Khan(1833-1908), Zayn al-Abedin Maraghe'i (1840, 1910) and Abd al-Rahim Talebof (1834, 1911), who were pioneers of Persian literary criticism in the nineteenth century (Parsinejad, 2003). They were also affected by European works; for example, Mirza Malkom Khan relied on the influence of the French positivist Auguste Comte and Voltaire in his works. Mirza Abd al-Rahim Talebof, inspired by the Russian translation of John Stuart Mill's *On Freedom*, wrote "Ezahat dar Khosus-e Azadi" (Explanations



on liberty) (Parsinejad 2003).

Accordingly, it should be said that among the factors of crucial importance for the development of modern Persian literature was the legacy of the early translations from European, mostly French, literature. Each of the above mentioned works laid the foundation of a profound change in the intellectual climate of Iran, and thereby new literary genres emerged gradually and the modern Persian literature was developed.

#### **4.2 The Main Reasons of Literary Interference in Iran**

Interference is defined as a relationship between literatures, whereby a certain literature A (a source literature) may become a source of direct or indirect loans for another literature B (a target literature). It should be mentioned that interference cannot be divorced from literary history, since it is part of the historical existence of any cultural system. This means that interference cannot be analyzed as an issue per se, detached from the historical context (Evan- Zohar, 1990, p.54). Accordingly, the historical context in which literary interference occurred evidently in Iran and led to transformations in the Persian literary polysystem should be studied to recognize the conditions which gave rise to the literary interference.

In the nineteenth century Iran suddenly found itself the focus of ever-growing attention and rivalry on the part of Britain, France and Russia. This was a prelude to further relations with Europe and thereby the first wave of the long and uneasy journey of modernization began in Iran. In this period of time, dispatching some students to Europe to learn western techniques, the proliferation of newspapers and books which was resulted from the spread of printing presses in Iran, the foundation of the Dár al-Fonún (Polytechnic) in 1852 which made feasible the extensive contacts of Iranian intellectuals with a European culture, the completion of the telegraph line to India and Europe in 1864, repeated journeys of Naser al-Din Shah to European countries, the establishment of bookshops

which sold European books in the country and especially the translation of European literary, philosophical, historical works led to the extensive contact of Iranians with the European ideas and cultures, especially during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

As Evan- Zohar (1990) points out, contacts will sooner or later generate interference if no resisting conditions arise. In the case of Iran, there were no resisting conditions because Iranian intellectuals of the period, unable as they were to find a basis for reason in traditional dogma, turned perforce to assimilating the thought of European thinkers (parsinejad, 2003). They sought to attain western civilization, sciences and technology, particularly after the Constitutional Revolution (1905-11). In fact, the desire for change promoted a favorable attitude in Iran towards occurrences in European societies and the intellectuals hoped to get away from the available undesired situation with the help of the European civilization, if transferred. Then, besides other disciplines, there was a kind of cultural openness towards European literatures and it was thought that anything that comes from abroad must be good.

In addition, Even- Zohar (1990) explains that interference occurs also when a system is in need of items unavailable within itself. In the case of Iran, in addition to not existence of resisting conditions, there was a strong feeling of need. Most of the westernized intellectuals felt that the norms governing the Persian literary system are no longer effective and therefore must be replaced. It was thought that Iranian literature needed the translation of old and new literary masterpieces more than anything else, for the Iranian intellectual and literary stagnation and underdevelopment of the time was largely due to the lack of contact with the modern world's literary thoughts, styles and methods (Baraheni, 1985).

Accordingly, it can be deduced that the lack of the resisting conditions and the feeling of need to options that the Persian domestic repertoire did not offer, while accessible European

systems seemed to possess them caused the occurrence of literary interference in the Persian literary polysystem during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, while translation as an indirect channel was the main channel of the literary interference.

However, literary interference can be confined to the center or to the periphery of the target literature. Only when a source literature repertoire interferes with the higher stratum of a target literature, it can maintain a central position in the target literary polysystem and participate actively in shaping its repertoire (Evan-Zohar, 1990). For this reason, the next section investigates factors which caused translated literary works assumed a central position in the Persian literary polysystem and led to the rise of modern Persian literature in Iran.

### **4.3 Translated Literature and its Central Position within Persian Literary Polysystem**

To recognize the conditions which resulted in the central position of the translated western literature in the Persian literary polysystem, we should examine the three situations, described by Evan-Zohar (1990) as three major conditions which can cause translated literature occupy a central position in a given literary polysystem (see the section of the methodology), with regard to Persian literature.

It would be quite awkward to describe Persian literature as "young" or "peripheral" whereas it has had a long history and spans nearly three millennia in the course of history. It has played a significant role in enriching and enhancing the Islamic civilization and culture and has profoundly influenced the literatures of Ottoman Turkey, Muslim India and Turkic Central Asia and been a source of inspiration for Goethe, Emerson, Matthew Arnold and Jorge Luis Borges, among others. The importance and excellence of the Persian literature was largely recognized by the great European authors and thinkers. For example, among others, Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804- 1869), on seeing the *Shahnameh* of Ferdowsi, said that "if we could realize that great

works such as the *Shahnameh* exists in the world, we would not become so much proud of our own works in such a silly manner (Bruijin 2013). Then, it can be seen evidently that Persian literature hasn't been young or peripheral.

However, the state of Iranian literature in the era under focus, late nineteenth and early twentieth century, was exactly in accord with the third situation, when there are turning points, crises, or literary vacuum in a literature. Historically speaking, under the influence of the contact with European countries, Iranian society in those days was experiencing some new entities and features that mark the beginning of a new era.

In the pre-modern times, the (written, formal, elevated) literary language was distinguished from the (oral) colloquial language of the common people in Iran and the use of colloquial language was not customary in the literature. Generally, at that time, poetry was always very popular among all classes of Iranians and was considered the essence of art which fulfilled the role of other forms of art (Mollanazar, 2001). Classical Persian poetry was produced almost entirely under royal patronage and was structured around abstract and subjective themes. It was not a true reflection of major people life and feelings and did not tap into the everyday language.

But, toward the end of the 18th century, various influences, including contact with the west, establishment of modern schools, attempts to facilitate education for the public, growth of the rate of literacy, expansion of newspapers and books, and formation of the middle class in the society began to transform Persian literature. In order to improve the efficiency of government and the spread of information, an attempt was made to simplify the written language as it was used by officials and historians. Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir was the most influential figure in the advance of the simplification of language (Mollanazar, 2001).

Progressive ideas proliferated increasingly toward the end of the Qajar dynasty, especially during the constitutional Revolution of 1906. With the constitutional revolution, popular life

has come into the limelight, the ordinary people were involved in historical events and their existence gained significance in the social hierarchy, then their style of language attained 'canonicity', while in the past, the elite classes were considered important and the language developed by them was used in literature and read by them, common people were rather ignored in the hierarchy of power; their language, the 'language of the people' was, too. Then, a turning point emerged in the country and the need for a new form of expression which had no precedent in the Persian literature became apparent.

Arguing that the classical literary models were no longer able to reflect the requirements of the time, the intellectuals and literary figures of this era looked for a modern way and model to utter their critical ideas and to express the demands and problems of that changing society. They tried to avoid the sophisticated language of classical Persian literature and create a new literary language that could be the voice of all the people in Iran. In this situation, translation of Western works came to serve as a helpful model. Since the translators wanted to remain true to the originals, a simpler and more natural language was adopted. Generally, Persian prose translators acknowledged the language of speech and used it in their translations. Then, translations from European languages played a very significant role in shaping the simple style of writing, and helped to fill the felt literary vacuum.

It should be said that in addition to a move toward simplicity of writing style, due to the exigencies of the period, intellectuals and literalists tried to find suitable grounds to enlighten the people and to train their thoughts by books and articles, they wanted to criticize the available undesired conditions of the country. In this vein, they thought that the age of the classical literature, especially the classical poetry was over and it with its abstract and subjective themes belonged to the age of tradition. It was considered that classical literature could not describe the political and social aspirations of the age. In these conditions, it was especially assumed that

European literary genres could satisfy the need of Iranian intellectuals to a kind of literature with satirical and combatant theme which dig a tunnel into truth and reveal the existing realities (Ghazalsoftli, 1998). Again, the translation of various European works came to serve as a helpful model and they approved beneficial to fill the existing literary vacuum.

Accordingly, the dynamics within the Persian literary polysystem, socio-cultural conditions of the country, created turning points in which established models were no longer tenable for the younger generation of Iranian intellectuals and literalists. At such historical moment, the need for new literary models and themes (simple style of writing and combatant literature), which had no precedent in the indigenous stock of the Persian literary polysystem, was felt enormously and it was considered that translated works could fill suitably the available vacuum, then it was easy for European models to infiltrate into Persian literary repertoire and hence, translated literature assumed a central position in the Persian literary polysystem.

## **5. Conclusion**

Translation is an indispensable tool for communication between the diverse linguistic groups. It opens new horizons for the people living in the country and as a means of bridging the gap between languages, cultures, and literatures, can fill the vacuum existing in a target language. Translation into Persian has a long and eventual history; it has played an important part in the evolution of Iranian civilization. Especially, since the middle of the nineteenth century, translation from European languages has been an integral part of various modernization projects in Iran; it has played a significant part in the introduction of new themes and models into the Persian literary polysystem.

It can be claimed that such literary genres as drama, novel, short story, modern Persian poetry and modern literary criticism, in their modern sense, were unprecedented in Persian literature before Western culture's influence in Iran.

Translations from Western languages in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century provided writers with the model examples which were previously unknown to them. They led to new learning in the area of literature and thereby the foundation for a profound change in the literary climate of Iran and the emergence of new literary genres was gradually laid.

From the perspective of the polysystem theory, it was also observed that special literary interference occurred in Iran due to the broad contact of Iranians with the European ideas and cultures, not existence of resisting conditions and a strong feeling of need to options which were not available in the Persian literary system, but offered by accessible European systems during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, while the translation as an indirect channel was the main channel of the literary interference.

It was shown clearly that under the Qajars, especially after the constitutional Revolution of 1906, the translated literature assumed a central position in the Persian literary polysystem because the dynamics within the Persian literary polysystem led to the emergence of a turning point in the country in which the translation of European works participated actively in filling the felt literary vacuums. In fact, the lack of a simple style of writing which could be understood by common people and suitable literary genres with satirical and combatant theme to enlighten the people and to awaken them about their rights in the classical Persian literatures caused that such literary vacuums were felt among Iranian intellectuals and literary figures. In such a situation, translation brought about in Iranian culture new local elements, new linguistic structures, and new literary genres and styles that had never been there. Hence, translations filled the felt vacuums and occupied a central position in the Persian literary polysystem. Accordingly, It can be claimed that the translation dynamically facilitated and contributed to the construction and shaping of the modern Persian literature. In the late nineteenth and early

twentieth century, it was quite natural and acceptable that translated literature held a central position in the Persian literary polysystem, since its development depended heavily on the translations made from European languages into Persian.

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