



The Profound Impact of two Contemporary writers, Sadegh Hedayat and Ahmed Shamlou, on the Crisis of National Identity in Modern Iran

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Abstract:

The contemporary history of Iran is deeply intertwined with the problem of the Iranian identity crisis, making it a significant area of study. The main question of this research is: What impact have intellectuals had on the national identity crisis in Iran? This research, using Skinner's hermeneutic method, is conducted on the works and ideas of Hedayat and Shamlou, who are both intellectuals of contemporary history and from two different generations. The presupposition is that intellectual writers have exacerbated the national identity crisis and have had a destructive impact on Iran's national identity in the contemporary era. The results show that Hedayat had a fragmented identity and considered Iran's issues and problems to be a result of superstition born from religion. He believed in a form of extreme archaizing and challenged religious identity in his works. Shamlou, with secular thoughts, opposed what he called "Iranianism" and criticized Iran's cultural roots and symbols. This research not only sheds light on the past but also paves the way for future studies in this area, offering a hopeful outlook on the potential for positive change in Iran's national identity crisis.

Keywords: National identity, national identity crisis, Ahmad Shamlou, Sadegh Hedayat

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Introduction:

National identity, the most general level of identity, plays a pivotal role among the types of identity. The strength of national identity acts as a shield, protecting citizens against the rapid changes in technology and communications, and thereby, today's global culture. It is this national identity that fosters solidarity among individuals in a society and shapes their collective goals. In the current era of expanding communications, governments are striving to transmit and stabilize their value system to individuals through various means such as education, advertising, and other socialization tools (Rabani & Rastegar, 2013). Identity, in essence, is a person's mental image in response to who they are. It is a signifier that bridges the gap between the individual and society. Each individual must construct an identity to establish their relationship with society, an identity that serves as a link between themselves and society or other humans. Similarly, every society must create an identity to integrate individuals as members based on it (Nojumian, 2010, pp. 121-122). The root of identity, 'hu,' meaning 'he' or 'she,' indicates that identity is not formed except concerning others who construct identity (Pirani & Rajabi Esfanjani, 2023, p. 61).

National identity is a recent term that has replaced terms like "national character" and later "national consciousness" (Zargar & Aryafar, 2010, p. 25). National identity is the constant reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions that constitute the distinctive heritage of nations and identify

individuals with that pattern, heritage, and cultural elements (Smith, 2004, p. 119).

National identity is both a factor of solidarity and the formation of a collective spirit in a nation, as well as a characteristic that distinguishes and identifies it among others. National identity is the highest level of collective identity, reflecting the relationship between a person and their country. It is the process of a nation's conscious response to questions about itself, such as who it was and who it is now, its original and permanent homeland, its culture and civilization, its role in the development of global society, its current political, economic, and cultural status in the worldwide system, and how much the values inspired by its historical identity will help achieve the society's social, political, and artistic goals (Jafarzadeh Pour & Heidari, 2014, pp. 66-67).

National identity can be considered a sense of pride among people who naturally belong to each other and share common interests, history, and destiny. National identity is a dual concept that simultaneously implies similarity and distinction. This means that, on the one hand, it unites us around a single axis by emphasizing commonalities and forms an "us." On the other hand, it distinguishes this "us" from others, thereby identifying us through internal similarities and differences (Rabani & Rastegar, 2013). Therefore, for national identity to exist, individuals must share something in common.

Components of National Identity:

There are various views on the components that make up national identity. However, summarizing these views, the crucial components of national identity are territory, history, religion, culture, language and literature, nationality, political system, a unified economy and lifestyle, myths, society, unified laws and norms, and national capabilities and behavioral and intellectual patterns (Goudarzi, 2008, pp. 109-111). To better understand identity, one must recognize the place of global society among different types of communities and, thus, national identity among other identities. Today, apart from occupational communities, we can generally identify six types of society: family, tribe, nation, religious community, and global society.

Therefore, in each society and at that level of identity, five sub-identities can be mentioned, each composed of values, beliefs, norms, symbols, and emotions related to that specific identity (Aboulhasani, 2008, pp. 1-4). In contemporary history, intellectuals have greatly influenced national identity and, sometimes, due to the influence of Western culture, have caused crises in an identity that had existed for centuries. Although national identity is a recent concept, its roots must be sought in the past, which also looks to the future. In reality, national identity is a journey from the distant past to the near future. Without visions and ideals, national identity cannot be interpreted as a future rooted in the past, culture, habits, traditions, religion, etc. Generally, Western-oriented intellectuals believed that by destroying the past, they could build the future. This hypothesis, also put into practice, led to a crisis in Iran's national identity and expansion. Therefore, the central hypothesis of this

research is that intellectuals have contributed to creating a national identity crisis, and this influence is generally reflected in their opinions, views, and writings.

Theoretical Foundations

The contemporary history of Iran can be considered the history of the identity crisis of Iranians. This is because, from the Qajar era onwards, and especially during the Constitutional Revolution, the identity of Iranians faced significant problems and crises influenced by the introduction of new Western ideas and the rise of nationalism. Until the early years of the arrival of Western modernity in Iran, there was no perceived conflict or contradiction between Islam and the identity elements of Iranians. However, with the advent of modernity in Islamic countries, including Iran, and the noticeable backwardness compared to the Western world, a group of intellectuals sought answers to the cause of this backwardness, considering Islam as the factor behind the disorder in Iranian society. Thus, during the Constitutional era and later in the Pahlavi period, a form of return to pre-Islamic Iranian history emerged, known as the ancient movement. Although this movement did not gain the necessary social foundation and was limited to the intellectual class due to its connection with power, especially during the Pahlavi era, it gradually found a significant role in cultural policymaking. While the intellectual movement began during the Constitutional era, its consolidation should be sought in the Pahlavi era.

For this intellectual movement, Islam was perceived as an alien and imposed element that separated Iran and Iranian society from its glorious past and racial purity, leading to a state

of abjection. Therefore, the first step towards progress was the removal of Islam from Iranian identity and a return to the splendid heritage of the past (Soleimani & Azarmi, 2017, p. 208).

The reactions of thinkers to the new culture and civilization were not uniform. Some accepted Western appearances and culture and were passive in the face of new phenomena. This group saw salvation in rejecting Iranian culture and identity. Mirza Malkam Khan, Akhundzadeh, and Taqizadeh were the thinkers who held this belief. They considered the social development of Iranians contingent upon abandoning their identity, culture, literature, script, and traditions in favor of imitating and adopting the West.

In contrast, another viewpoint believed in the exchange between the two cultures and sought to understand the reasons for backwardness. This perspective emphasized identifying the factors disrupting tradition and causing the identity crisis and stressed preserving national identity through traditions. This view represented a kind of self-awareness that emphasized the continuity of tradition, culture, and identity.

Opposed to these two viewpoints, another perspective viewed the modernization process positively, considering it a stage of perfection and evolution. This viewpoint saw national identity comprising ancient, religious, and Western elements. The Constitutional Revolution had two impacts on Iranian national identity, which, in a way, brought Iranians into an identity crisis. One was the elimination of the secular legitimacy of the king. The monarchy lost its secular legitimacy and previously held credibility during the constitutional period.

The second occurrence in the Constitutional period was the destabilization of the exalted position of religion. Therefore, in this crisis period, Iranian identity consisted of scattered elements such as religion, the monarchy system, and modernity, or in other words, Iranianism, Islamism, and Western modernity (Ashna, 2009, p. 59).

A significant portion of the intellectuals of the Constitutional era defined the consolidation of national identity and unity as the elimination of ethnic, linguistic, and religious distinctions and groupings and the homogenization of the language and culture of the Iranian people (Khorramshad et al., 2018, pp. 43-43).

Intellectualism and National Identity:

Iran's defeats in the Iran-Russia wars and the acceptance of the disgraceful Treaties of Turkmen Chay and Golestan not only highlighted Iran's backwardness but also made Abbas Mirza and his associates aware of the country's profound lag. Comparing Iran with European countries led them to take measures to remedy the situation, including translating books on science, astronomy, and mathematics and sending students to Europe for education. Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir initiated the second wave of intellectualism. Although his government was short-lived, and he did not have the chance to implement all his grand ideas, what he accomplished briefly remained talked about for years (Asil, 2009, pp. 90-99).

In the early 1940s, the Iranian Academy proposed "roshanfekr" to replace the Arabic-sounding "monaverolfekr." This term quickly

found its rightful place in Iranian political discourse. Consequently, the collective term "roshanfekran" replaced the French and English "intellectuals" and the Russian "intelligentsia." However, this equivalent can be somewhat misleading because "roshanfekr" acquired a broader meaning than its English, French, and Russian counterparts. These three foreign terms, which emerged in Europe in the late 19th century, had somewhat specific connotations. Intellectuals were products of philosophies that fostered skepticism towards traditional beliefs and, historically, resulted from secularism, humanism, and liberalism. In these eras, they played both the enlightening role of disseminating rational knowledge and the ideological role of using rationalization for political purposes.

Despite this, no precise definition of intellectuals is universally accepted. According to Julien Benda, intellectuals can be seen as a small group of philosopher-kings with superior talents and moral characteristics, shaping humanity's conscience. Max Weber views intellectuals as people with specific traits that grant them special access to personal achievements and cultural values, fundamentally engaged in intellectual work and being both creative and critical. Overall, definitions can be categorized into four groups:

1. Intellectuals seek to express truth and preserve ultimate and immutable values in truth, beauty, and justice.
2. Intellectuals are groups that establish ideologies and criticize the current situation.
3. as a socio-cultural class, Intellectuals are influential in developing and advancing culture.

4. Intellectuals lag behind the masses, essentially reflecting the concept of intellectualism's decline from a universal state to a local and indigenous form.

During the Constitutional Revolution, Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani introduced the term "monaveraloql" into the literature, using it for individuals influenced by the intellectual movement and the age of rationalism in 19th-century France, acting according to law and modernity. After a while, the term "monaveraloql" transformed into "monaverolfekr." The monaverolfekran were proponents of modernity and supporters of overthrowing political despotism and establishing the rule of law. Eventually, during the Pahlavi era, "monaverolfekr" was replaced by "roshanfekr."

Typology of Iranian Intellectualism

Some researchers have divided Iranian intellectuals into four generations.

First Generation:

The first generation of Iranian intellectuals were the reformists of the late Qajar period who believed that Iran needed to be modernized from above. They recognized that relying solely on Iran's religious and civilizational power was insufficient for its continued existence. Hence, the urgency of reforms and the praise of the concepts of progress and development can be seen in the works of all first-generation intellectuals. The first generation sought to adapt European institutions, such as the concept of a law-based government or the separation of powers, to the conditions of Qajar-era Iran. Establishing institutions such as Dar ul-Funun and the Freemasonry House

indicates that they promoted and prescribed instrumental modernity to defend Iran's independence. Many first-generation intellectuals were active in overseas centers, including Istanbul, the Caucasus, and Cairo.

Second Generation:

The newly established and nascent parliament of Iran significantly changed the country's political life. However, this developing institution coincided with the failure of constitutionalism and the rise of Reza Shah's government, which focused on national unity and administrative centralization. During this period, the second generation of Iranian intellectuals, such as Foroughi, Davar, Taqizadeh, Nima, Hedayat, and others, emerged on the intellectual scene of Iran. The goal of the second generation of Iranian intellectuals was to modernize and secularize the structure of Iranian society systematically.

Third Generation:

On the one hand, the third generation of intellectuals sought to enhance the cultural space through their translations and writings, consciously introducing European and modern ideas into Iran. On the other hand, they participated in the political and social reforms of Reza Shah. The growth of the middle class in Iran and the establishment of civil institutions like universities alongside traditional institutions created third-generation intellectuals who became important cultural intermediaries. Through their activities and works, society became more rapidly acquainted with the project of modernity. With the rise of the leftist

movement in Iran and Islamist ideas in the intellectual domain in the late 1940s, individuals like Natel Khanlari and Hamid Enayat, who advocated rational awareness and logical acquaintance with Western culture, were marginalized. The pursuit of modernity by the third generation and individuals like Al-e-Ahmad and Shariati led to opposition to modernity.

The third generation had three main characteristics:

1. It was influenced by a totalitarian-Marxist Russian perspective while advocating a return to the Islamic authenticity of society.
2. It considered itself the political and moral legislator of society.
3. It spoke of indigenous modernity and opposed the mechanistic view and the industrial and urban systems.

The propagation of ideological discourse became the starting point for third-generation intellectuals, who sought authenticity and indigenism against the trend of globalization.

Fourth Generation:

The defeat of leftist ideological and political thought in Iran, the end of the war, the growth of the young population, and changes in international circumstances, such as the end of the Cold War, led to the emergence of a new generation of intellectuals in Iran, known as the fourth generation of Iranian intellectuals. They opposed the idealistic intellectuals of the third generation and the instrumental intellectuals of the first and second generations, possessing a dialogical characteristic. The

responsible view of the fourth generation towards Western culture and Iranian civilization leads to the rejection of any idealistic or demonic perspective. These individuals prioritize the necessity of critical reasoning and dialogue with tradition and modernity over any other subject in the realm of thought. The fourth generation of Iranian intellectuals bears the mark of a significant event, the Islamic Revolution 1979. The primary aim of this new generation of Iranian intellectuals is to transition from opposition to what is termed as competition. The study of the works and actions of the fourth-generation Iranian intellectuals indicates that Iran's political sphere requires more pluralism, competition, and interaction (Pourfard, 2013: pp. 54-56).

Two of the most famous writers and intellectuals in contemporary history from two different generations, whose works and opinions significantly influenced the writers of their own and subsequent generations, are Sadegh Hedayat and Ahmad Shamlou.

Sadegh Hedayat: Sadegh Hedayat is one of the most influential contemporary fiction writers, and many modern authors and translators have taken inspiration from him in creating their stories and books. Sadegh Hedayat has an excellent literary style and a unique storytelling approach. Iranian writer and intellectual Sadegh Hedayat were born in Tehran on February 17, 1903. He belonged to an influential family; his father, Hedayat Qoli Khan, known as E'tezad-ol-Molk, was a notable figure of the Qajar era, and his grandfather was also considered an essential aristocrat of the Naser al-Din Shah period. Hedayat was the sixth child in the family. This family

maintained its influence during the Pahlavi era as well; for instance, Mahmoud Khan, one of Sadegh's brothers, was a judge of the Supreme Court and the Deputy Prime Minister, and Isa Khan, another brother, served as a high-ranking general in the Iranian army.

Hedayat was sent abroad for further studies, and although he wrote numerous works abroad, he failed in his studies and had to return to Iran. Sadegh Hedayat's return to Iran led him to pursue literary and artistic activities more seriously. This well-known writer and translator have left behind more than dozens of novels and short story collections. In addition, Hedayat has noteworthy non-fiction writings, some of which are written in French. Editing the quatrains of Khayyam is also considered one of his significant works. Ultimately, Sadegh Hedayat committed suicide on April 9, 1951, at the age of 49, by leaving the gas valve open in his residence in Paris. A series of unfortunate events led to Hedayat's worsening depression, and he ended his life.

Ahmad Shamlou: Ahmad Shamlou was born on December 12, 1925, on Safi Ali Shah Street in Tehran. His father, Heydar Shamlou, was a military man. As mentioned in Ahmad Shamlou's collection "Medayeh Bi-Selleh," "his ancestry traces back to the displaced people of Kabul through one link." His mother, Kokab Iraqi, was from the Caucasus region and had migrated to Iran with her family after the fall of the Tsars. Due to his father's military service in various parts of the country, the Shamlou family was constantly on the move, so much so that Shamlou's early years were spent in the cities of Rasht, Semirom, Isfahan, Abadeh, and Shiraz. Shamlou's birthplace is

listed as Rasht in some records because his birth certificate was issued in that city.

Ahmad Shamlou's elementary education occurred in Khash, Zahedan, and Mashhad. Living among different ethnic groups and dialects piqued Ahmad's interest in their differences, sparking the initial idea to collect data for writing about folk culture during these years. After returning to Tehran, he enrolled in the first year of high school at the Tehran Industrial School, eager to study German grammar. However, he soon had to continue his high school education in Gorgan due to his father's assignment in Turkmen Sahra.

Shamlou's acquaintance with and interest in politics coincided with the 1940s, a period of political turmoil in northern Iran. During this time, Ahmad began his political activities, which led to his arrest and transfer to the Soviet prison in Rasht in 1943. It should be noted that Shamlou later attributed his political thoughts of that time to the excitements of youth and being manipulated by the powers. After his release, Shamlou and his family moved to Urmia, where he continued his high school education in the fourth grade. However, the rise of the Democratic Front and Pishavari's activities led to the arrest of Ahmad Shamlou and his father, and they were nearly executed. After their release, they returned to Tehran, and Ahmad, having not completed the fourth grade, left school permanently.

Shamlou's interest in literature and poetic talent drew him into the literary field. The publication of the poem "Phoenix" in a newspaper was his first step towards becoming acquainted with Nima Yooshij. Inspired by Nima's talent, Shamlou sought and found him, marking the beginning of their relationship. In

the Nima years, Shamlou began his journalism career, serving as an editor for the weekly magazines *Ferdowsi*, *Khosheh*, and *Ketab-e Hafteh*. During these years, he was heavily influenced by Nima. He adopted the modernist style of poetry, although before and shortly after meeting Nima Yooshij, Ahmad Shamlou wrote traditional Persian poems such as ghazals and qasidas and composed folk songs.

Before the political upheavals of 1953, Ahmad Shamlou published the long poem "Twenty-Three" and the collection "Resolution," which were well-received as pioneering works by literary circles. During this period, he also served as a cultural advisor to the Hungarian embassy for two years. However, in August 1953, during the turmoil and political repression following the coup against Mossadegh's government, Shamlou was imprisoned again. Security agents raided Shamlou's printing house and home, destroying several of his works, including the "Iron and Emotion" collection and several translations. Although Shamlou went into hiding for a while, he was eventually arrested at the office of the Ettelaat newspaper. During his year-long imprisonment, Shamlou continued writing poetry, studied Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, and researched Persian grammar. He also started writing a long story that he never completed before his release.

White Poem: The publication of the *Hava-ye Taze* collection in the 1930s was the peak of the newest poetic form of Iranian literature. White poetry, prose poetry, or Shamlou poetry, sometimes mistakenly considered a type of Nimai poetry, is the most refined type of Persian poetry that has freed itself from the

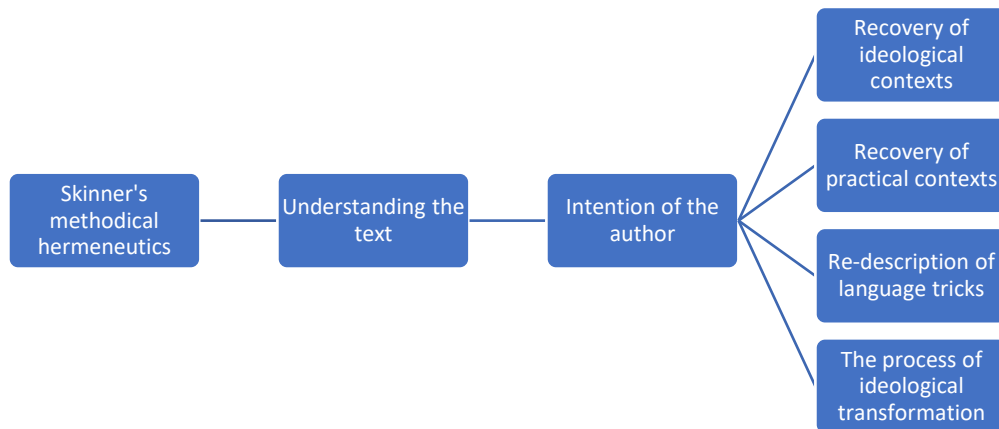
shackles of weight. Although Shamloui's poetry lacked the prosaic weight standard in Persian, music flowed in it. However, some people of literature deny the existence of music in this poem and consider this poem to be free of any restrictions.

After the revolution, Shamlou became a member of the board of directors of the Writers' Association and published numerous articles on current political issues and social pathologies.

Research Method:

This study examines the identity crisis in the works and views of two writers, Sadeq Heydary and Ahmad Shamlou. The primary reference was the works of these two writers, and the data was extracted using Skinner's hermeneutic analysis. Skinner's main issue is what appropriate procedures should be adopted to understand a work. According to Skinner's clarification, two conventional approaches have been presented. One is the contextual reading methodology, which considers the context as the determinant of the text's meaning. Therefore, any text depends on understanding its intellectual, social, religious, political, and economic context. According to this methodology, to understand the meaning of a text, one must reconstruct the "general context" or the final framework within which

the text was formed. The other is the textual reading methodology, which emphasizes the inherent autonomy of the text as the only necessary key to understanding its meaning and considers any effort to reconstruct the social context futile. According to Skinner, both methods suffer from inadequacy, and neither alone can be a sufficient or appropriate method for understanding a work. According to the textual reading method, the interpreter can understand the meaning of a text solely by focusing on the text itself. This methodology is based on two fundamental assumptions: one, that the text is a self-sufficient object with an independent and autonomous world, and the interpreter can understand the meaning of the text through contemplation in this world without regard to the author's intent and without the need to know the socio-historical context of its creation. The other assumption is that texts contain fundamental and eternal questions and universal and transcendental ideas that humanity has always been and will always be engaged with throughout history. While criticizing and rejecting these two assumptions, Skinner criticizes the textual reading methodology and reveals its inadequacy in understanding political ideas (Mortezavi, 2009, pp. 286-303). The process and stages of his method of understanding the author's subject can be summarized in the following figure (Asadi Kojji et al., 2021, p. 190).



Skinner's hermeneutics is based on understanding three fundamental issues, which means that the author's intention can be represented by understanding the works and texts and the historical and political contexts (Irfan et al., 2022, p. 274).

Research background

Daneshgar (2023), in an article titled "Linguistic Identity, Re-reading the Narrative of Persian Textbooks from Persian Poetry," has considered poetry an important national identity component. Navazani, Hersij, and Eyvazi (2022), in a quantitative-qualitative study using Schwartz's scenario planning method titled "Designing Scenarios for Overcoming Identity Challenges in Iran (2021-2022)," identified five critical uncertainties related to the identity challenge in Iran: media transformation, tolerance and forbearance, the transformation of the national education system, political culture, and development and efficiency. They found the predominant scenario to continue the current situation and the intensification of the identity challenge.

Nazari Moghadam (2022) considered Iranian tolerance and religious forbearance in dealing with religious minorities as indicators of Iranian national identity.

Zakari and Shirvani Shiri (2022), in a study titled "Content Analysis of the Second Step of the Islamic Revolution Statement Based on Islamic-Iranian Identity-Creating Components," identified 24 main Islamic-Iranian identity-creating components in this statement, including power, efficiency, commitment, awareness, continuity, and directionality, among others. They found the Supreme Leader's primary emphasis on creating insight and vision among all people, especially the younger generation.

Moradi and Khan Mohammadi (2020), in a study titled "Examining the Religiosity of Young People in Sarpol-e Zahab and Some Related Factors," concluded that three variables: social capital, national identity, and ethnic identity have a direct and significant relationship with the level of religiosity.

Khan Mohammadi and Kaveh (2019), in a study titled "The Impact of Western Media on

the National Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran through the Identity Crisis," concluded that foreign media, by targeting people's values and beliefs as the most critical identity components, have put national security at risk. This research shows that Western media, by inculcating values contrary to Islamic and revolutionary values, have caused an identity crisis at three levels: individual, social, and power structure, thereby threatening Iran's national security.

Ashayeri and colleagues (2018) identified the significant indicators of national identity as geography, history, territory, sovereignty, religion, common language, and independence. A survey study found that social capital, values and norms, identity, media consumption, and attitudes influence national identity.

Akbari and Eyvazi (2013) examined the status and dimensions of national identity, considering the most critical building blocks to be linguistic, historical, geographical, and religious dimensions.

Zoroufi (2009), in a study titled "Examining the Relationship between National Identity and Media Use among Students," concluded that television use is associated with increased national identity, while mobile and internet use is associated with decreased national identity.

Zahiri (2015), in an article titled "The Nature of National Identity," considered national identity to be one of the fundamental concepts of social sciences, viewing it as superior to other identities and contributing to social and political cohesion.

Hartgen and Opfinger (2012) showed that the relationship between national identity and

religious diversity is negative and inverse. Religious diversity and the feeling of a lack of homogeneity act as a barrier to forming a common public identity.

Findings

Studies on Hedayat's work in ancient Iranian culture, Aryan ideas, Buddhist thought, and new Western literary and psychological schools on the one hand, and his deep inclination towards the surrealist literary school on the other, had such an impact on his personality that they transformed him into an influential writer. The themes of most of Hedayat's stories are preoccupied with death, criticism of a society under despotism, and the rejection of superstition. His stories' images, descriptions, characters, and figures often have a national color. As a distinctive writer and child of the Constitutional Revolution era, Sadeq Hedayat can be considered significant in individual and collective identity dimensions. Understanding Hedayat and comprehending his works and thoughts on personal and national identity is complex. Like the heroes in some of his works and his era, Hedayat is fragmented and engaged with a multifaceted identity. These fragmentations thwarted this famous Iranian writer's efforts to find individual and collective identity and, fundamentally, reach any transcendent and salvific truth. As an intellectual writer, Hedayat had a unique identity and ego. Still, the backward society of that era, caught in the conflict between Iranian-Islamic cultures and modern Western culture and a sort of identity crisis, was not without influence on him and his works. (Jafari, 2004, pp. 119-120).

Hedayat had a great interest in studying folk culture and collected the legends, parables,

and folktales of ordinary people. His research works, such as "Usaneh" and "Folksongs," are a result of this interest. However, at the same time, in a work like "The Blind Owl," which has psychological aspects, he holds a pessimistic view of the masses and severely criticizes and even mocks their worldview and way of life (Sharifi, 1993). Hedayat's research in folk culture could have been a foundation for formulating a theory on national identity; however, it did not turn out that way. Instead, he criticized superstitions and religious prejudices when dealing with ordinary people. For instance, in the story "Seeking Forgiveness," he criticizes the behavior of religious devotees who go on pilgrimages to seek forgiveness and, despite committing many sins, ask God to forgive their faults through religious intermediaries (Sharifi, 1993, p. 321).

Hedayat's flaw lies in that instead of understanding religion from its primary sources and not equating the authenticity of religion with the impurities and actions of its hypocritical defenders; he attributes the faults of superficial religious followers to the religion itself. He rejects both altogether (Jamalpour, 1988, p. 120). Hedayat also briefly leaned towards romantic nationalism, which was fashionable among Iranian intellectuals, seeking a national identity in ancient Iranian culture and Aryan (Zoroastrian) beliefs before the Muslim-Arab invasion. By referring to the past and even creating myths like "Parvin, the daughter of Sasan" and "Maziyar," he attempted to create a new meaning for individual and national identity (Jafari, 2004, p. 123). In an article titled "The Pahlavi Script and Phonetic Alphabet," which discussed the Avestan script and the Pahlavi language, Hedayat advocated for pure writing and avoiding foreign words, even suggesting abandoning the current Persian script

derived from Arabic. However, he later abandoned this extreme theory and mocked artists inclined towards pure writing in "Vagh Vagh Sahab" and "Vulgarity" (Qaemian, 1965; Hajari, 1992, pp. 43-47).

In his writings, Sadegh Hedayat has extensively addressed religious topics as one of the foundations of national identity. In his writings, he has reflected on religious events, including Ashura. Still, unfortunately, influenced by Western culture, he has risen against the values of Islam and the authentic beliefs of the Shia school and has clashed with religious thoughts. Similarly, others, without intention or malice but merely due to ignorance and negligence towards religious concepts and thoughts, have attacked some religious sanctities. Looking at Sadegh Hedayat's works, it becomes clear that unfair judgment about characters, clumsy entry into story scenes, negative analogies, distortion of historical events, and insulting the beliefs and cultural values of Iran's religious fabric are among the primary tactics for distorting the Ashura event, in Hedayat's works. Enumerating and identifying the ways intellectual writers, including Sadegh Hedayat, approach the subject of Ashura can serve as a model to avoid these poor judgments in other literary productions, as such distortions may also appear in the works of other writers (Khalil et al., 2020, pp. 7-17).

Shamloo and Iran's Past

Shamloo has been recognized as one of the most prominent literary modernists and secular intellectual figures in the literary circle. In a speech he gave at the University of Berkeley in 1990, Shamloo said, "Ferdowsi has created a monstrous image of Zahhak, a man who

emerged from ordinary people and rose against the class system of Jamshid, or, in other words, a democratic king shown as a monster. All of this continues with mocking the Zoroastrians and their rituals, insulting Sohrab Sepehri's poetry and person, and Shamloo continues by criticizing Iranian history and culture and what is considered Iranian identity, saying, '... Unfortunately, what we have today under the name of history is nothing but lies and nonsense that courtiers and flatterers of various periods have put together. This distortion of facts... and accepting without question what Ferdowsi has reluctantly presented as a divine revelation is our fault, not his. as he was pursuing his class interests or beliefs.' (IRNA, July 24, 2018).

Although Shamloo's view has faced much criticism in the literary community, researchers emphasize that among the prestigious Persian works, none are as intertwined with the theme of 'Iranian nationality' and 'Iranian national identity' as Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. National elements and symbols, such as the land or specific geographical borders, customs and traditions, history, common national language, and finally, the place of people, religion, and government, are evident throughout this unique and grand work. Rightfully, *Shahnameh* is considered the document of Iranian national identity. The manifestation of national feelings in our national epic is due to the existence of a country called Iran and a unified nation called the Iranian nation, which, despite consisting of various tribes and ethnicities, all consider themselves Iranian due to unity in culture and nationality and have chosen the Persian language, which throughout the tumultuous history of Iran has been intertwined with Iranian culture and nationality and even considered its visible manifestation, not as a

language belonging to a specific ethnic group but as their common language (Moulaei, 2021, p. 200).

Cultural heritage and elements stem from the people's cultural context, such as popular beliefs, art and music, entertainment, and both material and spiritual worlds. The land's inhabitants provide shared memories and an outlook on the world that can bind their interests together. The specific patterns of their society influence individuals' actions in a cultural context, and sometimes unconsciously use this heritage in their speech and writing (Raznhan, Joudaki, 2016, p. 63).

In this context, the Iranian Constitutional Movement in 1906 marked the beginning of new thinking in all social and human dimensions of Iran, leading to contemporary Iranian literature heralding new values and thoughts in the fields of culture, politics, society, and philosophy. This literature was greatly influenced by the literary and philosophical movements of the Western world, so much so that in terms of content, the prevailing thought was a combination of two or more heterogeneous and synthetic cultures. Following this, in September 1941, several poets whose thoughts were ideologically aligned with new philosophical, political, and social movements adopted a deconstructive approach towards sanctities, religious beliefs, monotheistic worldviews, and the universe in their poetry. The central point of this new thinking was the rejection of their faith in the essence of God, divine religions, their perspective on humanity, nature, society, social environments, social poverty, reincarnation, and nihilism. Nimaic poetry, especially free verse poetry, emerged as the center of materialistic new thinking during this period. Between 1941 and

1979, secularism became a hallmark of intellectualism, and most intellectual poets exhibited this characteristic in their poetry and writings. Shamlou was also influential in this movement in such a way that the horizon of expectation in Shamlou's poetry is materialistic. In his thought, the chain of evolution, the dialectic of matter and spirit, has formed a dialectic of man, nature, reincarnation, etc., and has replaced theistic thought (Sadeghi Naghdali et al., 2020, p. 89).

Shafii Kadkani writes: "What Shamlou has given meaning to in Persian poetry is the infinite expansion of materialistic, humanistic thought that began with the Constitutional Movement and reached its peak in his poetry. None of Nima's students, nor Nima himself, insisted on humanism to the extent of atheism as much as he did" (Shafii Kadkani, 2011, p. 305). According to Shafii, Kadkani, Shamlou, and Akhavan, they have presented the most explicit confrontation in their poetry (Sadeghi Naghdali et al., 2020, p. 92).

The Discourse of Literary Modernism:

The most influential figures in the discourse of literary modernism are Jalal Al-Ahmad, before the revolution and during the era of the Islamic Republic: Ahmad Shamlou, Houshang Golshiri, Nader Naderpour, Mohammad Mokhtari, Mohammad Jafar Pooyandeh, and Simin Behbahani. These intellectuals have gone through three periods: the first period was before the revolution (1967-1969), the second period from 1979 to 1981, and the third period from 1990 to the present. The formation of literary modernist intellectuals, of which Shamlou was a member, is based on two principles:

- a) Defense of freedom of expression
- b) Defense of the professional resources of writers.

In the second period, the literary modernists' announcements and positions often referenced the constitution of the Pahlavi regime and never demanded regime change or legal opposition to it. However, in the second period of their activities, there was a split between the Tudeh party members and the pro-Western supporters. As a result, Ahmad Shamlou, Bagher Parham, Gholam-Hossein Saedi, and others were elected to the board of directors of the Writers' Association. At the same time, five members of the Association—Mahmoud Etemadzadeh, Siavash Kasraei, Houshang Ebtehaj, Fereydoun Tonkaboni, and Mohammad Taghi Boroumand—were expelled. In the second period, literary modernist intellectuals shifted from cultural positions to clear political stances and everyday issues. They were highly dissatisfied with the existence of a religious system in Iran and, influenced by Western culture, supported a democratic system, fueling ethnic and tribal conflicts in their literary publications.

Although within the Writers' Association, there is no doubt about the religious commitment of intellectuals like Jalal Al-Ahmad, Shams Al-Ahmad, and Mousavi Garmaroudi, most of the intellectuals in the Association can be considered secular and laic. Most of the Association's intellectuals have not shown concern for religion and religious values, and at most, they regard religion as relevant only to personal matters and individual spheres. In summary, it can be said that the literary modernist intellectuals encompass a range of leftist

Marxist and right-wing liberal currents (Pourfard, 2013, pp. 206-210).

The Nationalistic Discourse in Shamlou's Works

During the Pahlavi era and the discourse of Pahlavism, nationalism was defined more around the axis of the Shah rather than the homeland, with this notion being interpreted as royal nationalism. Patriotism and national sentiment were more understood as loyalty to the monarchy than the country. In other words, the particular interest and attachment promoted as the goal of this nationalism aligned with the objectives of the monarchy and the Shah's position. This was prominently reflected in the slogan "God, Shah, Homeland." This type of nationalism, emphasizing voluntarism and the expansion of political power, pushed back the domain of civil society, where participation, freedom, and the right to choose had no meaning. Perhaps this could justify the conflict between Mosaddegh's national government, the most nationalistic government during the Pahlavi era, and the American coup of August 19, which, in reality, overthrew a national government using foreign power (Sadraei & Sadeghi, 2018, pp. 195-196).

The Formation of the National Identity Crisis in Iran

What has been threatened in the struggle for global communications is the identity of individuals, the self-awareness of ethnic groups, and the intrinsic authenticity of nations. In the invasion of cyberspace and the pressure of the

legal structure on cultural diversity and civilizational differences, our unique characteristics and distinctive elements can be identified as defining elements. The most prominent eras of Iranian identity are the Achaemenid, Sassanid, and Safavid periods; however, after a period of social decline and with the beginning of the Naseri era, Iran embarked on a path of self-recreation (Jalili & Jamalzadeh, 2022, p. 8). The influences of Western culture on the national identity crisis, especially the individual identity crisis in Iran, are undeniable. This culture impacts various axes and creates the crisis, including:

- Challenging Indigenous and religious identity
- Challenging Iranian national identity
- Challenging religious elements
- Challenging political identity
- Challenging the political narrative of Iranian society
- Challenging societal ethics and denying the local lifestyle model

It should be noted that culture is the fundamental basis of Iran's national identity. Individuals' alienation from themselves, distancing from their own culture, and the lack of stabilization of national values weaken and forget national identity (Ghorbanzadeh-Savar et al., 2016).

Conclusion

In the past one or two centuries, identity has been an important issue in Iran, and various

currents have addressed it based on their intellectual roots and foundations. The issue of identity is essential because any progress and development becomes possible on its basis. If a society and a nation do not have an independent and cohesive identity, they cannot progress.

Westernized intellectuals took the initiative during the Constitutional Revolution when the issue of Iranian identity in the new world was at the center of discussions. They sought to define and explain Iranian identity based on pre-Islamic culture and compatible with Western ideas. This effort by intellectuals was met with opposition from several Shia scholars, and this confrontation manifested during the Constitutional Revolution as a clash between tradition and modernity or constitutionalism and religious law. This discussion and confrontation continued during the first and second Pahlavi periods. With the increasing influence of Western culture in Iran and the proliferation of leftist ideas in the intellectual and political spheres, it took on new dimensions. The Islamic Revolution and the explanation of Islamic-Iranian identity somewhat resolved the issue of Iranian identity in the modern era; however, opposing and divergent currents continued to believe in the existence of an identity crisis in Iran and theorize about it.

In recent decades, especially in the past decade, considering the regional and global political developments related to Iran, the issue of Iranian identity has once again gained the attention of various currents, and against the backdrop of economic and livelihood problems, the identity-based on the discourse of the Islamic Revolution has been challenged. At this juncture, the issue of Iranian identity is brought up with the assumption of an identity

crisis in today's Iranian society. This assumption stems from the notion that the discourse of the Islamic Revolution has reached an impasse and has been unable to maintain its position against other discourses, particularly Western culture. All the discussions and theories that have been proposed in recent years by opposing and divergent currents on ideological, historical, economic, and social issues have aimed to weaken the Islamic-Iranian identity emerging from the discourse of the Islamic Revolution and replace it with fabricated identities. Here, we are not facing an identity crisis but a war of identities, and understanding the dimensions of this soft confrontation is vital.

The starting point of the discussion about the issue of identity in Iran has been accepting the existence of the identity crisis. Therefore, any inquiry into this issue depends on discussing this matter and accepting or rejecting the existence of an identity crisis in Iranian society, which is a lengthy discussion. If one does not believe in the existence of such a crisis in Iran, the issue is raised as follows: What is the current identity of Iranians, what are its characteristics, and what threats does it face? If one believes in an identity crisis, various questions arise, including what caused this crisis, how this crisis should be resolved, and why the previously existing identity has entered into crisis.

According to the standard definition, identity means belonging to a material and spiritual set that has been formed beforehand. Many nations have experienced identity crises at specific points in their history but have sought to resolve their identity issues and move toward progress quickly. Iran has faced identity transformations at various junctures. The invasion

of Alexander the Great, which led to the fall of the Achaemenid Empire, is one such juncture. The Western invaders tried to replace the elements of Iranian identity with Greek elements but failed, and over time, Iranian culture overcame the invaders. Iranian culture rebuilt and strengthened itself by absorbing and assimilating the positive aspects of the invading culture and rejecting its undesirable aspects. The next juncture was the Arab invasion and the advent of Islam in Iran. The Iranian identity faced a crisis during this period, but they resisted the imposed identity changes for four centuries. This resistance was not hostile but involved absorbing and adapting the new cultural elements with pre-existing ones, resulting in a new, superior, robust identity. This newly formed culture influenced all territories under Muslim rule. During the destructive Mongol invasion, this identity was strong enough to overcome all adversities, destructions, defeats, and despair, eventually overcoming the invaders and regaining power during the Safavid era. The subsequent invasion by the Afghans once again challenged Iranian identity, but despite defeats and hardships, Iranians, relying on their cultural heritage, overcame the invaders.

With the fall of the Safavids, Iran entered a period of chronic instability, primarily caused by foreign infiltration aimed at exploiting its valuable resources. This infiltration expanded during the Qajar period to include intellectual and cultural spheres, leading to Iranians rupturing from their identity-forming components. Iranians during the Qajar era became acquainted with Westernizing reformist ideas, and intellectuals of that time, observing Europe's capabilities and advancements, rejected religious beliefs and traditional values.

Consequently, amidst Iran's tumultuous history, an identity crisis emerged within Iranian society.

Western-leaning intellectuals believed that only by abandoning traditions and the past and embracing Western culture could growth and progress be achieved. This approach created a void in Iranian identity, which was initially attempted to be filled by turning to ancient Iranian culture, albeit exacerbating the identity crisis. During the Pahlavi period, antiquarianism was also vigorously promoted, as the regime lacked an independent discourse and identity-building framework.

The occurrence of the Islamic Revolution highlighted contemporary discussions on Iran's identity crisis, emphasizing it as one of the leading causes for the revolution's emergence and the people's adherence to the discourse presented by Imam Khomeini. This issue has been influenced by internal, regional, and global developments in recent decades, remaining a subject of debate and theoretical discussion.

According to this discourse, the Islamic Revolution became an identity-building discourse, resisting the infiltration and onslaught of foreign ideologies and thoughts, which prevented a root-based solution based on the Islamic Revolution's discourse. Essentially, the identity crisis in Iran today is not due to identity lessness but rather stems from a multi-identity confusion among Iranians, particularly the youth facing Iranian, Islamic, and Western identities without the ability to discern and deepen within each.

Furthermore, globalization has exacerbated the identity crisis at a time when the expansion of communications has weakened national

boundaries between countries. The identity crisis in Iran relates to the emotions of the elites and the masses regarding their homeland. It intensifies conflicts between national loyalties and commitments, posing challenges to unity and cohesion.

Environmental and international factors have stirred the identity crisis in Iran, although internal factors and the actions of political systems cannot be disregarded. Iranian identity and culture have faced crises in critical historical periods, subject to assimilation and jeopardization by clashing with Western civilization. In the contemporary era, the primary challenge against Iranian identity is manifested through comprehensive Western influence within Iran. Iranian and Islamic cultural identity has been under threat due to the impacts of encounters with Western civilization across economic, political, scientific, artistic, ideological, and religious dimensions.

Opposition movements to the Islamic Revolution's discourse initially emphasized that an Islamic identity was unachievable. It has been argued that prominent Shia figures like Ayatollah Borujerdi and Ayatollah Khoi, who were traditionalist in approach and apolitical, did not contribute to identity formation. Alongside these movements were other traditionalists, such as Daryush Shayegan and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who introduced and analyzed Eastern culture against Western culture and engaged in the identity debate.

Shayegan initially positioned Asia against the West before the Islamic Revolution, but post-revolution, his perspective changed, emphasizing the diversity of worldviews and asserting a "forty-piece identity." Reza Davari Ardakani and his advocacy for an Islamic

identity faced criticism from integrationist currents. Davari Ardakani, post-Islamic Revolution, criticized the West based on Westernization, considering the Islamic Revolution as the beginning of a new era in confrontation with Western modernity.

In discussions regarding Iranian identity, secular intellectuals emphasized pre-Islamic Iranian identity and its synthesis with Western thought and culture versus Islamic and religious identity. Their emphasis on pre-Islamic culture was not reactionary but aimed at delineating Iranian and secular national identity.

Thus, amidst the infiltration of foreign currents into Iran's intellectual sphere, the scattering of views and opinions on identity formation in the modern era has resulted from the penetration of foreign currents in Iran's intellectual space. It is impossible to achieve a thorough understanding until a comprehensive and balanced discussion on identity from various aspects is undertaken. Without considering indigenous identity-building components, expectations for defining Iranian identity in the modern era cannot be met.

One reason for the Islamic Revolution was the movement of Iranian Muslims to address the contemporary world's identity crisis. The Revolution's discourse managed to alleviate some of Iran's identity issues to a certain extent.

With all the events in the years following the revolution, especially in recent decades, opposition movements and reactionary currents have always sought to undermine the identity derived from this discourse, emphasizing the crisis of identity within Iranian society. However, an identity based on the discourse of the Islamic Revolution is free from crisis and remains the most pervasive and cohesive

identity for Iranian society. These currents attribute their intellectual crisis in defining Iranian identity to the existing identity discourse, effectively confusing their intellectual crisis with an identity crisis.

These movements aim to weaken the discourse of the Islamic Revolution, remove its political Islamic aspect from Iranian identity, create a vacuum in Iranian identity, and then fill that vacuum with their desired ideology. Through this, they aim to widen the gap between the government and the people and position society against Islamic governance.

In this context, movements such as secular and religious intellectuals, religious reformism, nationalism, and Iranian nationalism have attempted to redefine Iranian identity according to their intellectual foundations and desired goals, aiming to detach the younger generation from the discourse of the Islamic Revolution. It is crucial to note that if the discourse of the Islamic Revolution does not shape identity formation for the younger generation and provide suitable content to preserve and deepen the derived identity, reactionary movements will continue to be active in this realm, potentially shaping a generation either grappling

with identity crises or opting for a different, alienated identity.

Ahmad Shamlou and Sadeq Hedayat, two influential intellectuals and writers in contemporary history, generally believed that progress could be achieved by breaking away from the past. They often criticized the religious and traditional culture, considering it a cause of Iran's misfortune and backwardness, advocating for criticizing and uprooting this culture to facilitate Iran's contemporary progress. They recommended a Western model for Iranian identity, believing that religion was a factor of backwardness that should either be set aside or relegated to a personal and private matter with no societal impact while embracing a Western identity for progress and development, defined more by Western thinkers through instrumental reason.

While critical examination of Iran's past and reforming culture by removing superstitions from the core of religion and sidelining traditions entwined with superstitions can aid cultural reform, one must always consider this with a dual focus on both past and future for progress, development, and cultural perspectives simultaneously.

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