

Nima Yushij: Founder of Modern Persian Poetry and Architect of Literary Modernity in Contemporary Iran

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Abstract

Nima Yushij (Ali Esfandiari), widely recognized as the father of modern Persian poetry, is among the most influential figures in the evolution of contemporary Iranian literature. This paper adopts an analytical-comparative approach to explore the life, works, and intellectual legacy of Nima. From the revolutionary poem *Afsaneh* to his ontologically nuanced later works, he not only critiqued classical traditions but also laid the groundwork for a poetic discourse deeply integrated with society, history, and language. Additionally, the study examines his socio-cultural background and ideological development, analyzing his profound influence on the trajectory of literary modernity in Iran.

Keywords: Nima Yushij, modern poetry, literary modernity, modernist criticism, *Afsaneh*, symbolism, comparative literature, ethnography

1. Introduction

The transformation of Persian literature in the twentieth century owes much to the emergence of pioneering literary figures, among whom Nima Yushij occupies a foundational position. More than a poet, Nima was the architect of a new poetic language—one that emerged from within the classical tradition yet consciously moved beyond its confines. This study aims to critically reassess his intellectual and poetic contributions within a systematic and scholarly framework.

2 . Biography and Genealogical Background

Ali Esfandiari was born in 1898 in the village of Yush, situated in Mazandaran province. His paternal lineage stemmed from the local aristocracy of Tabaristan and traced descent from the Padusbanid dynasty. On his mother's side, he had Georgian ancestry, which contributed to his hybrid identity and intercultural perspective. Research by Siros Tahbaz indicates that Nima consistently refrained from using his legal name in his manuscripts, possibly signifying a conscious rupture from his traditional class identity.

3 . The Emergence of Poetic Voice and Formation of a New Language

Nima made his literary debut in 1921 with the publication of *The Pale Tale*, but it was *Afsaneh* (1922) that established him as the definitive originator of modern Persian poetry. This poem served as a manifesto for poetic emancipation, signaling a departure from classical conventions and embracing an existential view of life. Through *Afsaneh*, Nima transcended formal boundaries, crafting a symbolic and innovative language aligned with the lifeworld of the modern subject.

4 . Nima's Vision and the Horizons of Modern Persian Poetry

Nima's poetic school, commonly referred to as "Nimaic poetry," catalyzed the emergence of *she'r-e sepid* (free verse), *mowj-e now* (New Wave), and even strands of postmodern poetics in Iran. His poetic oeuvre, rich in symbolist elements, exhibits a layered, intertextual, and philosophically charged structure. Collections such as *The Phoenix*, *The Raven*, and *The Amen Bird* reflect his expansive and transformative literary worldview.

5 . Nima as a Social Poet and Intellectual of His Time

Nima's intellectual development unfolded during periods of intense political upheaval, including the Constitutional Revolution and the Jangal Movement. His collaboration with the publication *Red Iran* and participation in the Iranian Writers' Congress underscore his social engagement. Notably, Nima's leftist orientation remained inextricably linked with aesthetic inquiry, forming an organic synthesis of ideology and artistic expression.

6 . Works, Stylistic Features, and Linguistic Innovation

Through poems such as *Darvag*, *My House Is Cloudy*, *Maneli*, and *Siyoolishe*, Nima constructs a mental landscape intertwined with nature, language, and the existential condition of modern man. His use of the Mazandarani dialect in the *Rouja* collection further accentuates the ethnographic dimension of his poetics, situating his work within both regional and national literary contexts.

7 . Death and Cultural Legacy

Nima passed away in Tehran in 1960, and his remains were subsequently relocated to his birthplace, Yush. His mausoleum has since become a cultural monument symbolizing the enduring legacy of the literary and intellectual movement he pioneered.

Commemorative efforts and academic engagements continue to affirm his foundational role in the formation of modern Persian literary identity.

8 . Conclusion

Nima Yushij should be recognized not only as a poet but as a visionary thinker who played a crucial role in reconstructing the linguistic and intellectual framework of modern Iranian literature. By opening new poetic horizons, he shifted Persian poetry from the repetition of tradition to a dynamic, pluralistic, and future-oriented mode of expression. This paper has sought to demonstrate how Nima, through transcending traditional boundaries, produced a body of work that remains a benchmark of literary modernity.

Appendix: Selected References (Sample from 50 Sources)

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