‘Do not say they are dead’ : the political use of mystical and religious concepts in the Persian poetry of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88)

Nematollahi Mahani, M.A.

CHAPTER ONE

LTERARY TRADITION BEFORE THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION 1979

Classical Persian poetry is a living tradition. Aspects of this poetic tradition appear in all areas of Persian culture: in music, architecture, material culture, etc. Iranians' lives are interwoven with poetry. People with various educational backgrounds i.e., intellectuals, university students read several couplets a day. They recite poems to give a piece of advice, to show their sympathy, to express their viewpoints or their emotional feelings. Poems are also abundantly broadcast from radio stations or television channels. Poetry is part of Iranian life. This study will discuss the main role of classical and religious concepts in the poetry that lead to popular Iranian participation in the war.

The Islamic Revolution changed not only the political system, but also Persian culture and literature in various respects. In the field of literature, a new literary movement began, seeking to erase the ideals and conventions of the Persian poetry from immediately before the Islamic Revolution, much of which had been inspired by the West. In this process of changing literary values from secular and Western-inspired conventions to religious and revolutionary values, the new leaders and supporters of the Republic found that poetry could also be used to mobilize the population in support of political ideas.

This was not the first time that Persian poetry had been used for a political purpose: examples abound in the thousand-year history of Persian poetry. The most obvious parallel is with the literary movement of the Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911), when poetry was used to awaken the Iranians. With the crumbling of the Qājār court, poets no longer wrote for a courtly audience, they turned their attention to ordinary people, choosing subjects closer to the heart of the crowd, informing them of Western political philosophy, modern education and the place of women in society, equality between all individuals and

many other topical issues.[13] The Constitutional poetry involved a thematic change. Poets adopted "non-poetic" themes that had not been popular in Persian poetry before this period. It could be said that they used poetry in the service of ordinary people rather than to serve the ruling authorities. The most common themes have been summarized as follows: "criticism of the Persian ruling class and the prevailing social, economic, and political order; praise of democracy and defense of civil and human rights; anticlerical and anti-religious sentiments; attitudes both favorable and hostile to Islam; xenophobic feelings especially against Arabs and Turks."[14] In this period, poets referred to the 'motherland' (*vatan*) as the beloved. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Iranian intellectuals presented a new identity for the Iranians to unify them and to prepare them for the challenges of the world. They integrated new terms such as *vatan, mihan* (native land) and *sarzamin* (country). These words played a major role in motivating the oppositional movements and in consolidating the state.[15] In the following pages I refer to several examples to show how the word *vatan* is used during the Revolution to condemn the Pahlavi monarch for making *vatan* to a ruined place.[16] During the war, the poets such as Simin Behbahāni (b. 1927) employed the word *vatan* in her poems to give a sense of nationality to the reader.[17] One poet of the constituitional period (1906-11), Adib al-Mamālek Farāhāni (1860-1917), addresses old-fashioned poets who praise the beloved, and asks them to write about their country:

tā key ey shā'er-e sokhan pardāz
mikoni vasf-e delbar-e tannāz
daftari por koni ze mowhumāt

[13] M.A. Jazayery, "Recent Persian Literature: Observations on Themes and Tendencies, " in *Iran: Review of National Literature*, eds. A. Paolucci, & J. Haidari, vol. II, no. I, New York: St. John's University Press, 1971, pp. 13-14.
[14] S. Soroudi, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Constitutional Revolution, vii The Constitutional Movement in Literature.
[15] R. Ch. Elling, *Minorities in Iran: Nationalism and Ethnicity after Khomeini*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 122-23.
[16] See page 38 in this study.
[17] For S. Behbahāni's poem see pp. 53-55 in the present study.

ke manam shā'er-e sokhan-pardāz
…
gar havā-ye sokhan bovad be sarat
az vatan ba'd az in sokhan gu bāz
havas-e 'eshq-bāzi ar dāri
bā vatan ham qomār-e 'eshq bebāz
az vatan nist delbari behtar
be vatan del bedeh ze ru-ye niyāz …[18]

O eloquent poet! For how long will you describe
The coquettish one who captures your heart,
Filling a book with imaginary things
To show how eloquent you are? …
If you desire to speak
From now on, you should speak about the motherland.
If your mind is on the play of love
Play with the homeland the game of love
There is no beloved better than the motherland
Give your heart to the motherland because of your need.

In the above poem, the poet raises the nationalist issue of praising the motherland. She is the only beloved worth being praised. The revolutionary poets ask other poets to join the protest and to fight against the Qājār ruler by using their pen. The poet implies that following the classical tradition and praising a beautiful beloved would not lead to a better life. One should gamble his life for the sake of one's motherland.

Another poet of the Constitutional period, Farrokhi Yazdi (1889- 1939) uses the motif of the 'path of love' (*rāh-e 'eshq*) in a *ghazal* to liken death in the cause of freedom

[18] M. Nur-Mohammadkhān, *Fekr-e āzādi dar adabiyyāt-e mashrute-ye Iran*, Eslām-ābād: Markaz-e tahqiqāt-e fārsi-ye Irān va Pākestān, 1383/2004, pp. 118 and 181.

to death for the sake of love:

> *… dardā ke khun-e pāk-e shahidān-e rāh-e ʻeshq*
> *yek jo dar in diyār nadārad bahā hanuz*[19] …
>
> Alas that the pure blood of the martyrs of the path of love
> does not have the value even of one barley grain in this country

In this poem, the youth who gives his life for the principles of the Constitutional Revolution, such as freedom and a codified law, is compared to a lover who sacrifices his life in the path of love. Using the motif of the path of love in the context of the revolution is a way of saying that one killed for the cause of freedom and equality is a martyr of love. The poet complains that the martyr's blood is not honored (i.e. because he is forgotten).

In this period there is a clear interaction between poetry and politics. While poets use classical imagery and metaphors in their *ghazals* and *qasides*, they treat current socio-political subjects. Poetry was not only a means to communicate with the masses; it also had a therapeutic function, especially when discussing religious themes. In her work *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution 1906-1911,* Janet Afary explains how, during the Revolution, religious rituals such as taʻziye found new political meanings. Imam Hosein's battle against the Umayyad troops and his death at Karbalā in 680 was introduced as the struggle of justice (imam Hosein) against evil (Umayyad caliph). In the years of the Revolution, the masses were reminded that they were historically responsible to defend the ʻ*olamā* (religious scholars) and the nationalist leaders. In 1906, when Iranians took asylum in the British legation in Tehran, they had a *rowze-khāni* (reciting the events of Karbalā) every night, and people cried out and beat their heads to show their grief.[20] The *rowze-khāni* reminded the one who took sanctuary in the embassy of the conflict between

[19] *Divān-e Farrokhi Yazdi*, *ghazaliyāt va qasāed va qataʻāt va robāʻiyyāt va fathnāme*, ed. H. Makki, Tehran: Moʻassese-ye enteshārāt-e Amir Kabir, 1357/1947, p. 150.

[20] J. Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, and the Origin of Feminism*, New York: Colombia University Press, 1996, pp. 55-56.

Muslims and infidels. The revolutionaries invoked religious principles to motivate the public to stand against both the foreign economic intervention and the Iranian government. For instance, their conflict with the British, because of its political intervention, was transformed into a confrontation between Muslims and infidels.[21]

The use of Persian literature and religious stories as sources of inspiration continued in later periods. The political change during late 1920s encouraged the poets to add several new themes to their literary works. Political themes were less prominent, to be replaced by themes of progress, such as "the advantages of education, the status of women, and the plight of the poor."[22] The poets of this period praised the motherland and encouraged the Iranians to be proud of it. They wrote to praise the king, and the outcome of modernization and social changes which resulted in the establishment of the University of Tehran, and the like.[23]

The close relationship between poetry and politics continued during the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979). In the first decades of Rezā Shāh's rule (1925-1941), several poets were praised as national icons and they became important in the life of Iranians. The state used the poet Ferdowsi (ca. 940-1025) and his *Shāhnāme* ('Epic of the Kings,' completed 1010) to cement a new identity for Persians, an identity freed from Arabic and Islamic components. The Pahlavis wished to revive pre-Islamic Iran, basing themselves more on pre-Islamic Persian culture than on the Islamic period. Rezā Shāh chose the surname Pahlavi to reanimate "the imperial glory of pre-Islamic Iran." The names of the months reverted from Arabic to Old Persian names, in 1925; the Persian solar calendar was used instead of the Arabic lunar calendar. The Pahlavi modernization program was mingled with secularization. New branches of education such as pre-Islamic history were added to the education system. The Pahlavi secular theory was propagated by a new system of education from the 1930s onwards.[24] The semi-official Society for National Monuments (*Anjoman-e*

[21] Ibid., p. 31. For the literary changes in prose and its effect on the progress of Constitutional Revolution see Hassan Kamshad, *Modern Persian Prose Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.
[22] M.A. Jazayery, "Resent Persian Literature: Observations on Themes and Tendencies, " p. 15.
[23] Ibid., p. 15-16.
[24] S.A. Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 68.

āsār-e melli) decided to commemorate the millennium of Ferdowsi's birth. In 1922, a group of statesmen and cultural figures established the society. In the year of Rezā Shāh's coronation, 1926, the Society decided to build a site on Ferdowsi's grave. To encourage a sense of nationhood and unity, and to understand the value of their culture and language, Society asked people to participate as a national duty. For this purpose, they sent the students of one school to the neighborhoods to gather donations. Iran had a "sponsored national lottery" to raise funds. Participation in the lottery was described as a national duty.[25] An international conference held in 1934 was, in part, celebrating Ferdowsi's millennium.

Rezā Shāh gave a speech in Ferdowsi's mausoleum and a documentary film was made about Ferdowsi's life by the filmmaker Abdol-Hosein Sepantā (1907-1969). The above-mentioned activities encouraged the Iranian publics to participate in the occasion.[26] To promote the image of Ferdowsi as a national icon, several articles were published in Persian newspapers and journals such as *Irānshahr* and *Kāveh*. These articles used topics such as the status of Ferdowsi in the life of Iranians, and the necessity of preserving his tomb to raise awareness of a national identity in Iranians. The architect Karim Tāherzāde recommended building memorial site at Ferdowsi's grave.[27] All the efforts: the film, the conference, publishing articles and building memorial site were parts of constructing a modern secular national culture. The state used a common history by referring to common national symbols to unify the Iranian public.[28]

In the years of Mohammad Rezā Shāh's reign (1941-1979), a line of genealogy

---

[25] A. Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State 1870-1940*, Washington: The University of Washington Press, 2008, pp. 124-25.

[26] A. Marashi, "The nation's Poet: Ferdowsi and the Iranian National Imagination," in *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture*, ed. T. Atābaki, London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009, pp. 99-100. For more information about nationalism in Iran in the Qājār and Pahlavi period see A. Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power and the State, 1870-1940*, Washington: The University of Washington Press, 2008.

[27] Ibid., pp. 100-101. For further information on the use of historiography and the use of Iranian memory in constructing 'national identity' see contributions of T. Atabaki, M. Tavakoli-Targhi, A. Amanat, O. Bast, and K. Scot Aghaie, in *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture*, ed. T. Atabaki, London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009.

[28] A. Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State,* p. 132.

cemented the Pahlavi kings to the mythical kings who feature in the *Shāhnāme*. The Pahlavi monarch drew on this new genealogy to legitimize his authority. For instance, the early Iranian king Cyrus the Great (ca. 600-529), who established the first great Empire, was commemorated by the Pahlavi government in the 1970s. The Pahlavi monarch intended to persuade his audience that he was going to glorify Iran and revive Iran's glorious past. For further political aims, poetry was used to remind Iranians of their pre-Islamic Persian heritage, a choice that the Pahlavi regime consciously made to minimize the role of religion in the public and cultural spheres.

Following the 1979 Revolution, the Islamic Republic tried to promote religious roots and principles in place of the pre-Islamic Persian culture propagated during the Pahlavi regime.[29] The state gave a new explanation to the mythical concepts of the *Shāhnāme.* In the early 1980s, the Islamic Republic began an effort to control literary discourses in the cities of Qom, Mashhad and Isfahan. The state hired writers interested in using their talents in service of the Revolution by teaching creative writing and poetry. Following these workshops, young participants began to publish their works in journals and anthologies. With government support, a large, new body of literary works relating to political Islam, the Revolution and the war were published.[30]

Yet the ideas and concepts elaborated in the *Shāhnāme* became a source of inspiration for the new leaders of the Islamic Revolution, especially due to the dualistic rhetoric of the revolutionary leaders who spoke of the revolution as a movement of 'light against darkness' (*enqlāb-e nur 'alayh-e zolmat*). The *Shāhnāme* depicts a battle of light (*nur*) against darkness (*tāriki*), good against evil, represented by demons coming from non-Iranians (*anirān*). During the war with Iraq, the word Satan (*Sheytān*) was popularly used to show the evil nature of the Iraqi authority who fought to uproot the Islamic Revolution. Iraq and its supporters were called Satan, and the United States of America was called the Great Satan (*sheytān-e bozorg*). The concepts remind the crowd of the battle between the cosmic

[29] S. Vakili, *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, New York: Continuum, 2011, p. 25.

[30] A. Karimi-Hakkak, "Introduction: Iran's Literature 1977-1997," in *Iranian Studies*, vol. 30, no.3/4, selection from the literature of Iran, 1977-1997, (Summer-Autumn, 1997), p. 205.

forces of good (i.e. Iran) versus evil (i.e. *anirān*) in the *Shāhnāme*, and the victory of the former. This account was so popular that references are made to it in travel-books such as *Drinking Arak off an Ayatollah's Beard* by Nicholas Jubber. He says that in the years of the Iran-Iraq war, the leaders of the Islamic Republic promoted the *Shāhnāme* as Iranians' national icon by having it recited at the military front.[31] The *Shāhnāme* taught the soldiers that they should fight bravely and exact revenge on their enemy.[32]

In early 20th century, the use of poetry for a political aim was not limited to Persian epics such as the *Shāhnāme.* Several poets started to change classical Persian poetic forms to fit a modern mould. This modernization was modeled on Western poetry and was introduced by Nimā Yushij through the 1950s. The 'new poetry' (*she'r-e now*) was born. In his poems, Nimā used new metaphors and imagery to illuminate social and political issues.[33]

While poets were experimenting with new forms of poetry, the Shāh endeavored to modernize Iran not only by reviving Iranians' cultural heritage, but also by implementing cultural programs. One such program was the Fifth Development Plan (1973-1977). Notions such as "return to one's roots" and "the rediscovery of past culture and heritage" were part of the cultural policy of the time. Especially since Iran was benefiting from a Western-styled industrial civilization, it needed to rely on Iranian cultural traditions to give the population a sense of solidarity. For this purpose, the Pahlavi regime gave priority to works such as establishing museums and popularizing architecture and decorative arts. Policies promoted the "recognition (*shenāsā'i*) of Iran's past culture" by fostering cultural events such as festivals. In particular, the Pahlavi regime celebrated the 2500th anniversary of the founding of the Persian monarchy. The main aim of this festival was to strengthen the identity of the country and unify the Iranian nation.[34]

---

[31] N. Jubber, *Drinking Arak off an Ayatollah's Beard: A Journey Through the Inside-Out Worlds of Iran and Afghanistan*, Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2010, p. 140.
[32] bid., p.141.
[33] N. Rahimieh, "Iranian American Literature," in *New Immigrant Literatures in the United States: A Sourcebook to our Multicultural Literary Heritage*, ed. A. Shama Knippling, Westport & Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996, p. 114.
[34] N. Nabavi, "The Discourse of 'Authentic Culture' in Iran in the 1960s and the 1970s," in *Intellectual Trends in Twentieth Century Iran: A Critical Survey*, ed. Negin Nabavi, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2003,

In this period, voices of protest were raised and the poets asked the Iranians to unite and overthrow the Shāh. Hamid Mosaddeq (1940-1998) writes: 'he who wants / I and you not to be us/ may his home be destroyed … if I sit/ if you sit/ who will rise/ all should fight against the enemy.'[35] The poet's question inspired the young men to protest against the Pahlavi monarch. In this poem the verb 'to rise' (*barkhāstan*) means to stand up, and an uproar. Voices of protest became stronger and several Iranian intellectuals such as Jalāl Āl-e Ahmad (1923-1969) spoke about "cultural invasion" (*hojum-e farhangi*) and westoxication, referring to Western cultural imperialism. The country was called to awareness of the increasing influence of Western culture and, as a traditional society, to resist Western moral and cultural influence.[36]

During the Pahlavi period, most notably the 1960s and the 1970s, poets used religious metaphors and motifs to mobilize the community to protest the authority of the Shāh. These poets believed that religious themes were vital in promoting protests against the Shāh and the influence of Western culture. *Kasi ke mesl-e hich kas nist* ('Someone who is not like anyone'), a famous poem of the time by Forugh Farrokhzād (1935-1967) is an impressive example, which I will use to show how the poets of twentieth-century Iran received Shiite concepts, and used them in a historical context. In her dream, the poet has seen a just savior who distributes bread, symbolizing nutrition, among people. She distinguishes between him and other people by calling him 'one who is not like anyone else' (*kasi ke mesl-e hichkas nist*), and waiting hopefully and watching for the savior to return.[37] In Shiite tradition, one, in his lifetime, should be waiting for the return of the twelfth imam, Mahdi. The image of 'one who is not like anyone else' may refer to the Mahdi, occulted in 873. According to the Shiite tradition, before the Last Day, he will return to establish justice and punish oppressors.[38] In her poem, Farrokhzād is waiting for a

---

p. 98.

[35] A. Makāreminiyā, *Barrasi-ye she'r-e defā'-e moqaddas*, Tehran: Tarfand, 1384/2005, p. 39.

[36] N. Nabavi, "The Discourse of 'Authentic Culture'*,* p. 98.

[37] A. Karimi-Hakkak, "Revolutionary Posturing: Iranian Writers and the Iranian Revolution of 1979," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 23, no. 4, (Nov., 1991), p. 512.

[38] For further information about the occultation of the Mahdi, see W. Madelung, in *The Encyclopaedia of*

savior who not only distributes bread but also shares the National Garden (*bāgh-e melli*), medicine, and cola.[39] No one can prevent him from returning.[40] Farrokhzād is waiting for a messiah, and Ayatollah Khomeini may be seen as a typical messiah who was coming to overthrow the Pahlavi monarch, Mohammad Rezā Shāh, and establish an ideal system of justice. It was claimed that after the Revolution the victorious state would distribute all natural sources (i.e. oil) among Iranians. In her poem, Farrokhzād uses several religious symbols. For instance, she asserts that the savior is able to light the electric bulb of God, the green bulb (*lāmp-e Allāh ke sabz bud*), on the sky of the *Meftāhiyān* mosque.[41] The Arabic word *Miftāh* literally means 'key'. The suffix '*ān*' in Persian indicates the person responsible for a task (i.e. to open a door). Thus the word Meftāhiyān refers to one who has a key to open the closed doors. Lighting the bulb of God and opening all doors implies that she is waiting for one who will re-establish the mosques. In that historical context, the word savior might refer to Ayatollah Khomeini, who many Iranians thought would remove the oppression of the Pahlavi regime. It is worth mentioning that in the Shiite tradition, the Mahdi, after his return, is expected to reside in a mosque and to punish the evildoers.

It is significant that in her poem Farrokhzād relies on religious terminology and symbolism. These poems became extremely popular among Iranian intellectuals. In fact, in 1977, literary gatherings were organized to voice dissatisfaction against censorship and political pressure. One of the events that influenced, and possibly hastened, the Revolution in Iran was a literary gathering called The Poetry Nights (*dah shab*) held by the Writers' Associations of Iran in Tehran.[42] In these gatherings, to inspire the audience to stand up against the regime, poets such as Simin Dāneshvar (1921-2012), Mehdi Akhvān-e Thāleth (1928-1990), and 'Ali Musavi Garmārudi drew on literary motifs familiar to their audience, such as shedding blood, self-sacrifice, and the execution of the mystic martyr of Islam,

---

Islam (2), under al-Mahdī.

[39] The word cola refers to Coca-Cola. A carbonated beverage made by Coca-Cola Company based in Atlanta, Georgia.

[40] F. Farrokhzād, *Divān-e ash'ār-e Forugh Farrokhzād*, with an introduction by B. Jalāli, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Morvārid, 1371/1992, p. 461.

[41] Ibid., p. 458.

[42] K. Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000, p. 17.

Hosein Mansur Hallāj. For instance, in his poem entitled *Mansur manam manam manam Mansur* ('I am Mansur, I am, I am, Mansur'), the leftist activist poet, Mansur Owji (b. 1937) refers to Hallāj in his revolutionary poem to politicize the mystic's life and death. He likens himself (i.e. any potential protestor) to Hallāj to assert that Hallāj sacrificed his life for a higher cause, meaning divine love. Thus the revolutionaries, like him, should offer their lives for their cause: the revolution.[43] He identifies their possible death as spiritual elevation.

It would be beyond the scope of this introduction to refer to the various ways in which poetry was used in a political context. What is important in general and for this book in particular is to see that the relationship between poetry and politics was very close in 20th century Iran. In every period of Iran's recent history, poetry has been used as a way of communicating certain ideals, whether nationalistic, religious, or progressive, to the crowd.

During the 1978-79 Revolution, poetry was used as a means through which poets awakened Iranians to participate in demonstrations against the Shāh. Despite all the hopeful voices, very soon the voice of hopelessness was becoming a recurrent theme in the poetry and prose written in this period. Although the state tried to unite the intellectuals, and push them toward conformity, as Karimi-Hakkak states, they resisted this compulsory union. The following poem by Shams Langerudi (b. 1950) shows the resistance.[44]

bar-mikhizim va mineshinim
bar-mikhizim va mineshinim
va in bāzi-ye bi rahm
tā hafr-e marg zir-e qadam hāmān
hamchenān edāme dārad…[45]

We rise and fall

[43] *Dah shab*, collected by N. Mo'azzen, Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1357/1978, pp. 29-31; for another example see the poem *Tekrār* ('Repetition') by M. 'A. Bahmani, Ibid., p. 113.
[44] K. Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran,* pp. 110-11.
[45] Ibid.

We rise and fall
And this mercilessness game
Continues in this manner
Until death comes digging under our steps …

During the Revolution, the rising (*bar-khāstan*) refers to a conventional rhetoric of protest and resistance against the Pahlavi regime. But in Langarudi's poem because each rising ends in a fall, the process yields death and destruction.

After the Revolution, and during the war between Iran and Iraq, a new type of poetry came into being which aimed at mobilizing Iranians to support the war against Saddām Hosein.

CLASSICAL SHIITE AND MYSTIC PARADIGMS IN THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

During the war, the stories of Karbalā and imam Hosein's martyrdom were recounted by the leaders of the Islamic Republic and the war poets to propagate the necessity of self-sacrifice for the cause of religion. The narrative of Karbalā was re-told on the battlefield, comparing the soldiers to imam Hosein's companions and supporters. The ruler of Iraq was likened to the Umayyad Caliph, Yazid (r. 680-683), who was called an infidel because, at his orders, the prophet's grandson, imam Hosein was killed in Karbalā. Thus the Iranian soldiers saw themselves as true Muslims fighting against Iraqi infidels to avenge imam Hosein's blood. The Iraq authority, Saddām Hosein was turned into an archetypical tyrant, like Yazid, and his soldiers were called corrupted unbelievers because they reiterated the Umayyad soldiers' act and killed Iranians. To propagate this view, the Islamic Republic made extensive use of theological concepts such as the opposition between the will of God and evil. Iranians were called the representatives of the divine will and justice on earth and the Iraqi soldiers were compared to evil and its accomplices.

To encourage the youth to sacrifice their lives on the front line, the leaders of the Revolution retold narratives in their Friday sermons, on radio and television and in

newspapers. In these stories, the mothers of imam Hosein's companions are represented as supporting the struggle. They encouraged their sons to compete in laying down their lives for the cause of imam Hosein and to become a martyr of Islam. Such narratives motivated the parents to send their children to the battlefield, believing that they would be sacrificing their lives in the path of Islam. The soldiers were promised that in paradise they would be companions of the Master of the Martyrs (*Seyed al-Shohadā*).[46] Companionship with imam Hosein in paradise is an abiding hope for the Shiite Muslim. Not only does a martyr receive this blessing, he also has a chance to intercede on behalf of his family.

In the war poetry, imam Hosein was compared to the Islamic mystic martyr Mansur Hallāj, whom the mystics said was killed because he revealed his excessive love for God. In mystical literature, he is the symbol of union between a lover and the Beloved. Drawing a comparison between imam Hosein and Hallāj leads the audience to believe that the former's death united him with the Beloved. The Shiite soldier, a believer and follower of imam Hosein, assumes when on the front that he is offering his life in the path of love to obtain the same spiritual station that imam Hosein attained: union with the beloved. The soldier is allowed to put himself in the cycle of history and make the same sacrifice that imam Hosein and Hallāj did.

Ayatollah Khomeini, who returned to Iran in 1979 as the spiritual leader, or imam, took up political leadership as well. He was called the leader of the Islamic Revolution. His connection to the prophet Mohammad's family was indicated by his name: Ruhollāh Musavi Khomeini. He was introduced as a descendent of the seventh imam, Musā al-Kāzem (745-799). He, presenting himself to be fighting like the twelve Shiite imams, was fighting for the oppressed and downtrodden. In his sermons, he emphasized the rights of the poor and needy people, taken away by the wealthy. In accordance with Ayatollah Khomeini's views, the polarity of the oppressed versus the oppressor was used during the war. The Shiites of Iraq were called 'the oppressed nation' (*mellat-e mazlum-e 'Arāq*) because they were living in the power of a tyrant: Saddam Hosein. The Iranian soldiers,

[46] *Seyed al-shohadā* is one of the titles of imam Hosein.

taking the role of the companions of the prophet and the followers of the Shiite imams, fought against the Iraqi power in the hope of making the oppressed free and establishing a just authority. For this goal, they offered their lives. The Iranian soldiers believed they were fighting to preserve the right of the oppressed lovers of the prophet's family (i.e. the Shiites of Iraq) and to rescue them from the tyrannies imposed upon them by Saddam Hosein.[47] In return, they would achieve spiritual progress, and rewards in the hereafter.

To identify the fight as a mystical journey, mystical words such as self-purification, self-mortification, patience, and resignation are used in the war poetry and the sermons of the leaders of the Islamic Republic. Those words found a new, political, meaning. For instance, the war with Iraq was presented as the final spiritual stage at which the soldier-lover is united with the Beloved. Iranians, even illiterate people, are familiar with mystical words and expressions, which transcend the borders of time and space. They came to believe that their participation in the battle and enduring hardships at the front would purify their souls and draw them close to God. Several verses in the Qur'ān ask a Muslim to remain patient when suffering affliction or misery. One of the verses (39:10) reads: "… the steadfast (*sāberun*) will be paid their wages in full, beyond counting."[48] Patient submission to God's will is one of the most important virtues of the Muslims. It shows one's willingness to accept what God has decreed.[49] The soldier's contentment with his fate positions him within the order that is identified by the divine law. As long as he patiently follows the path of obedience, and to the extent that he is satisfied with the portion God allots to him, he may meet the Beloved and unite with Him in the hereafter. On this assumption, the soldier accepts his fate, fights to offer his life and expects to achieve a spiritual elevation that will unite him with the Beloved.

The war poets used mystical motifs associated with the concept of love, such as the school of love, the pen of love and the prayer of love to assert that fighting on the military front and self-sacrifice is a spiritual path through which one may attain spiritual ascent into

[47] K. Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs; The Cultural Landscape of Early Modern Iran*, Cambridge, Mass: Distributed for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University by Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 141.
[48] D. Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, Cambridge, UK & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 128.
[49] Ibid.

union with the Beloved. When the metaphors are placed in a political context, they inspire the soldiers to compare themselves to a lover whose enthusiasm and devotion for attaining spiritual perfection leads him to lay down his life. On the battlefield, the Iraqi soldier is called the enemy of God, who is the Beloved, thus the soldier fights against the enemy to become an ideal lover: one who offers his life for the sake of the Beloved.

The war poets made many references to the Muslim mystics to introduce them as a spiritual model whose way of life should be emulated, and as heroes whose acts of self-sacrifice have to be imitated. In literary texts, mystics are compared to an ideal lover who denies the world, its desires and his own life. In fact it is not the mystic path that is celebrated in the war poetry, but the mystic's death, which is lauded to motivate the soldier to lay down his life. The life and death of the first mystic martyr of Islam, Mansur Hallāj is an especially common theme. He was executed at the order of the 'Abbāsid Caliph al-Moqtader (r. 908-932), who was Sunni, Arab, and based in Baghdad. In the years of the war it was said that Iraq is the enemy of the mystic Hallāj (representing Iranians). The soldier compares himself to the mystic who spends his whole life to achieve unity with the Beloved. The soldiers believed that, by comparison, the war offered a short cut to paradise.

ANTI-WESTERN POETIC RHETORIC AFTER THE REVOLUTION (1979)

After the Revolution, several issues emerged. Does Islamic theology meet the needs of modern Iran? Can it confront the "Western" schools of thought? Such questions led the victorious Revolutionaries to confront the secular intellectuals, mainly liberal and leftist, who had been the first groups to oppose the Pahlavi regime. The Islamic revolutionary leaders seized power from other parties who had been active before and during the revolution. The newly established Islamic Republic called such parties who demanded their share "westoxicated, alienated and imitating." Their presence was declared to be of no vital importance for the Islamic Revolution. However intellectuals who agreed with the political

and cultural stance of the Islamic revolutionaries were allowed to stay in Iran.[50] Soon after the Revolution, in 1980, Iran's neighbor, Iraq, attacked Iranian territory. This rallied the population in support of the revolution. At the beginning of the war, two new genres emerged in Persian literature. The first was the 'literature of resistance' (*adabiyyāt-e moqāvemat*), which glorifies death for the sake of Islam in what was called the 'Imposed War' (*jang-e tahmili*) against Iraq. The other genre was protest against "the excesses of the Revolution" which limited freedom of speech in the name of religion.[51] Some popular poems and works of fiction, such as Jalāl Āl-e Ahmad's fiction, may be classified as 'literature of resistance' because they had a major influence on the development of protests against the Pahlavi monarch, Mohammad Rezā Shāh.[52]

Although before the Revolution, poets and poetry conveyed anti-regime sentiments after the Revolution for a short period of time poetry was condemned. Later on, poetry was recognized as a tool that could influence the Iranians to lay down their lives for the cause of the Islamic Revolution. This shift in attitude toward poetry happened because the leaders of the Islamic Republic quickly realized that poetry has a prominent role in the life of Iranians. Writers committed to the Islamic Republic such as Hosein Razmju (b. 1932) and many others had claimed that writing poems is a valueless job. He asserts, "In addition to a handful of literary works which are epic, mystical and narrative masterpieces, there are others written to praise and glorify a selfish king, a proud ruler, those who hold wealth and the power of decision. The poets celebrate wine, wine drinking, and making love to women and male servants…, those poets use poetry as a means to legitimize the tyrant kings, and introduce them as lovers of literature and the arts…"[53] Hosein Razmju goes on to say, "… at this time, there is no one funnier, more useless, inefficacious, and malapropos, than

[50] M. Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996, p.157.
[51] I. Stumpel, "Religion in Contemporary Persian Prose," in *Religious Perspectives in Modern Muslim and Jews Literature*, eds. G. Abramson & H. Kilpatrick, New York: Rutledge, 2006, p. 416.
[52] H. Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, New York: New York University Press, 1993, p. 94.
[53] H. Razmju, *She'r-e kohan-e fārsi dar tarāzu-ye naqd-e akhlāq-e eslāmi*, vol. 1, Mashhad: Mo'assase-ye chāp va enteshārāt-e Āstān-e Qods-e Razavi, 1366/ 1988, p. 70.

poets."[54] In the sixth chapter of his *She'r-e kohan-e fārsi dar tarāzu-ye naqd-e akhlāq-e eslāmi* ('Classical Persian Literature Weighed against Islamic Morality'), Hosein Razmju elaborates on poetry from an Islamic point of view. He holds that in Islam, poetry is praised if the poet glorifies divine subjects (*omur-e khodā'i*), and combines them with the elements of commitment and eternity. To offer a new concept from poetry in line with Islamic traditions, the author gives several examples of the prophet Mohammad's attitude toward poetry. During the war, he asked the poets to make fun of the enemy, and recite their poems to motivate the fighters to break the enemy's resistance. According to Hosein Razmju, as a result, "because of the blessing they received from the Qur'ān and the tradition, among the prophet's companions, a group of poets defended Islam before his eyes."[55] On this basis, Hosein Razmju says that the leaders of the Islamic Republic use their influence on Iranians and ask poets to write about the war to inspire the crowd to support the soldiers on the battlefield.

In a collection of seminary lectures called *Seminār-e barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi* ('Seminar for Exploring the Literature of the Islamic Revolution') held in 1994 in Tehran, Hedayatollāh Behbudi (b. 1960) writes that there are several reasons for the development of the 'literature of resistance' during the war. The author asserts that the genre originates among the ordinary people. He points out that because Iran had been governed by autocratic regimes, this form of literature had not emerged previously. Behbudi holds that (1) Iranian revolutionaries, who overthrew the Pahlavi regime, founded this genre. (2) Social changes played an inevitable role in constructing the 'literature of resistance'. Among the social changes, Behbudi refers to Iran's Revolution, and Iraq's military attack on Iran (1980). (3) The intellectual leaders (*rahbarān-e fekri*) who influence a community are an important element because they participate in establishing the 'literature of resistance'. Conservatives such as Mohsen Makhmalbaf (b. 1957) who during the war as a filmmaker and fiction writer tried to propagate and export the principles prescribed by the Islamic Republic of Iran, but later changed his attitude toward the Islamic

[54] Ibid., p. 73.
[55] Ibid., pp. 86-87.

Revolution, have asserted that before the Revolution, the literature of Iran was controlled by the ideals of the Pahlavi monarch. Thus, poets propagated irreligious norms. For instance, they supported the official unveiling and treated veiling as a factor that hindered Iranians' progress and promoted cultural backwardness. In addition, the Western cultural influence that was perceived by many as an onslaught inspired Iranian poets. Thus, they followed Western patterns of poetry. Behbudi provides an example from Sādeq Hedāyat (1903-1951) who was unsuccessful in pursuing his education abroad. He became disappointed and after several years, he committed suicide. His literary works are dominated by disappointment and hopelessness.[56] Behbudi asserts that Hedāyat's negative view of life is inspired by Western culture. He disseminated negative attitudes of French writers such as the uselessness of life, and choosing suicide as a solution.[57] For Behbudi, the poetry of resistance, by contrast, originated from Iranian oral literature. He cites a slogan chanted by protesters against the Pahlavi regime:

ey Shāh-e khā'en āvāre gardi
khāk-e vatan rā virāne kardi
koshti javānān-e vatan, Allāh-o Akbar
kardi hezārān dar kafan, Allāh-o Akbar…[58]

O traitor king! May you be homeless
You have laid waste to the soil of the homeland
You have killed the youths of the homeland, God is the Greatest
You have wrapped thousands of youths in shrouds, God is the Greatest.

[56] About Sādeq Hedāyat and his literary works see: H. Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2002.

[57] M.K. Kohdu'i, "Barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e takhdiri, bihadaf va mote'ahed dar dowrān-e mo'āser va tahavvol-e ānhā dar dowre-ye enqelāb-e eslāmi" in *Majmu'e-ye maqālāt-e seminār-e barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi*, Tehran: Samt, 1373/1994, pp. 480-81.

[58] H. Behbudi, "Adabiyyāt-e enqelāb," in *Majmu'e-ye maqālāt-e seminār-e barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi*, Tehran: Samt, 1373/1994, p. 80.

This form of poetry was used in protests. After the Revolution, the 'literature of resistance' was recited at the end of congregational prayers. During the war years, the following slogan was used in this way: "God is the Greatest, God is the Greatest, Khomeini is the leader, death to 'those who are against the absolute supremacy and guardianship of the *jurisprudent'* (*velāyat-e faqih*), and praise be to the fighters for Islam, greetings to the martyrs, death to America, death to Israel."[59] Many slogans used during the war referred to the martyrdom of imam Hosein, linking the war with his fight against Yazid's troops. Imam Hosein, 'the master of martyrs', has a very high rank in Shiite Islam. For Iranians, the war was not conducted simply to repel the Iraqi invasion; they hoped to occupy Karbalā, the major holy city of the Shiites located in Iraq, and to avenge the blood of imam Hosein.

Another slogan that was popular during 1980s is:

jang jang tā piruzi
War, war until victory
mijangim, mimirim, sāzesh nemipazirim
We fight, we die, and we do not accept conformity
Hosein, Hosein sho'ār-e māst
Our slogan is Hosein, Hosein
Shahādat eftekhār-e mast[60]
Martyrdom is our pride.

In sum, Iranians' ideals are pictured in the 'literature of resistance'. On the one hand, the 'literature of resistance' reflects Iranians' desire to overthrow the Pahlavi Regime, and replace it with new power structures called 'revolutionary authority.' On the other hand, the

[59] Ibid. The concept of *velāyat-e faqih* was developed by Ayatollah Khomeini in his book *Islamic Government*. He asserts that to institutionalize the authority of the jurists, the leadership should be offered to a supreme jurist. Several leading Islamic scholars condemned the notion as 'innovation.' For further information see A. M. Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921: The Pahlavis and after*, London & New York: Longman, 2003, pp. 225-6.

[60] H. Behbudi, "Adabiyyāt-e enqelāb," p. 81.

literature illustrates Iranian's desire for self-sacrifice to rescue the country from the enemy's invasion. A scholar of Persian literature, Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak asserts that the 'literature of resistance' did not attract the attention of critics, but in the 1980s it was used as a political tool to restrict the influence of leftists, so that they could not gain power in the Islamic state.[61]

After the Islamic Revolution, writers who supported the Islamic state propagated its ideologies. In return, the state provided them with the opportunity to participate in social activities in regular and religious schools, Islamic associations, and mosques. These writers constructed a new body of literature called the 'literature of the Islamic Revolution' (*Adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi*) through which they showed Iranians' opposition to the Pahlavi regime, and the tragedies of the Iran-Iraq war. The poets and writers created revolutionary-Islamic motifs that drew parallels between the war and the concepts and motifs used by classical mystics to express their spiritual state. Among the poets who developed the mystical motifs in the war context were Teymur Gorgin, Musavi Garmārudi (b. 1941) and Tāhere Saffārzāde (b. 1936). Gholām-'Ali Haddād-'Ādel (b.1945), a member of the Islamic Republic Party who has served in many governmental posts, asserts that the 'literature of the Islamic Revolution' not only depicts the physical world it also concerns the metaphysical world. It deals with concepts such as 'the world of Unseen' ('*Ālam-e gheyb*) and 'the world of Witness' ('*Ālam-e shahādat*) and it is filled with mystical concepts. It is worth noting that mysticism in the 'literature of the Islamic Revolution' does not entail abandoning society, as one sees in mystical literature, rather it seeks to establish a better society.[62] Haddād-'Ādel combines the mystical concept of 'the world of Witness,' a reference to a mystic's encounter with God, with Iran's political situation. In medieval mystical treatises, the concept is only used to show one's spiritual progress without making any reference to one's social or political situation. During the war, these concepts were used to offer a spiritual dimension to the war. The soldiers came to believe that they were mystics who on their path to union had to be ready to offer their lives.

[61] K. Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran*, p. 134.

[62] Gh.'A. Haddād-'Ādel, "Sokhani pirāmun-e māhiyyat-e adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi," in *Majmu'e-ye maqālāt-e seminār-e barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi*, Tehran: Samt, 1373/1994, p. 348.

Haddād-ʻĀdel describes the path of mystics as quietist, whereas in the 'literature of the Islamic Revolution' genre, there is no room for solitude and mysticism. He implies that mystics are apathetic people who have no useful occupation, but benefit from other groups. During the war, the acts of prayer, fasting, contemplation in solitude and renouncing society were remodeled in anʻactive mysticism,' in which the 'mystic' is one who participates in the fight and offers his life. Another characteristic of this literary genre is that it is committed to moral and social values, and to defending oppressed groups. It reflects protest of the crowd against tyranny, and is people-oriented (*mardom-sālār*). Haddād-ʻĀdel adds that *Adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi* pays attention to man, but it is different from the Western concept of Humanism in which literary genre man is not the focal point. The higher truths are derived from the fountain of revelation and monotheism. God is the main goal of the poet who is committed to the principles of the Islamic Revolution. These poets choose their path to God through society and community (literally, the poets are leading the community to self-sacrifice through the path of religion. Thus, they will receive their rewards in the Hereafter).

Love is another characteristic of *Adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi* according to Haddād-ʻĀdel. He makes a distinction between love and sex, and refers to the latter as a characteristic of Western literature and Iran's pre-Revolutionary literature. He adds that the poets and writers of the period after the Islamic Revolution are world-oriented, and are not contaminated by Westoxication (*gharbzadegi*): they are aware of oppressed peoples such as Africans and Palestinians, and the hardships they endure. These poets and writers do not conform to Western literature. Although *Adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi* values masterpieces of Persian classical literature, such as the *Shāhnāme* ('Book of Kings', completed 1010) by Ferdowsi and the works of Saʻdi (ca. 1210-1292), "we" (Haddād-ʻĀdel refers to himself as a participant in the Cultural Revolution (e*nqelāb-e farhangi')*[63] "reserve the right to

[63] In 1980, after the Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini appointed a Council of the Cultural Revolution (*Komite-ye enqelāb-e farhangi*) to revise university books and diminish the non-Islamic content. This continued for three years, during which the universities were closed and many professors and students could never return to their work. See N. R. Keddie & Yann Richard, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2003, p. 250.

criticize these works from Islamic and moral perspectives."[64] The Cultural Revolution may be identified as a revolutionary movement in the arena of scholarship against any secular viewpoint, based on the norms and principles of the Islamic Revolution. For instance, any scholarship related to the fields of social sciences, or incorporating Western, nationalist, or colonialist viewpoints was considered irreligious. To control all political activity, the new Islamic Republic closed all universities, and fired many employees.[65]

Haddād-ʻĀdel says that the 'literature of the Islamic Revolution' is understandable for all Iranians and anyone who speaks Persian. This makes this literary genre different from pre-revolution literary works, which used a language ordinary people did not understand, setting the intellectuals apart from the rest of the society.[66]

Among the fiction writers of the post-revolutionary period are Mohammad Nurizade (b. 1949), Mehdi Shojāʻi, and Mohsen Makhmalbāf. An important aspect of the literary works of this period is the emphasis on the fundamental role of the clerics in guiding people and implementing Islamic faith in the community. Authors assert that the clergy are God's representatives, performing God's will on earth. God rewards good deeds, nourishes the poor and cures people's illnesses and when necessary He tests people's faith with severe hardships such as war. The state offered awards to those who wrote about Islamic art and culture, or established an institution to promote Islamic ideology, or introduced Islamic art and culture to other nations. All these activities were organized under the authority of the Council for Cultural Revolution of the Islamic Republic. To receive support from the Council, commitment to the revolution became an inevitable factor in the literary works of the time.[67]

The literary works of Makhmalbāf, a famous filmmaker, cultivated the principles of the Islamic state among Iranians, was among the supporters of the Islamic state. Several of

---

[64] Gh.ʻA. Haddād-ʻĀdel, "Sokhani pirāmun-e māhiyyat-e adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi," pp. 349-351.
[65] N. Fāzeli, *Politics of Culture in Iran: Anthropology, Politics, and Society in the Twentieth Century*, London & New York: Routledge, 2006, p.135.
[66] Gh.ʻA. Haddād-ʻĀdel, "Sokhani pirāmun-e māhiyyat-e adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi," pp. 351-52.
[67] K. Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran*, pp. 111-112. For further information about fiction in Persian literature see S. Behbahānī and EIr, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Fiction, ii (a) Historical Background of Modern Fiction.

his works of fiction, such as *Bāgh-e bolur* ('The Crystal Garden') and *Ma rā bebus* ('Kiss me'), define the ideology of the Islamic state.[68] In *Bāgh-e bolur* he illustrates the hardships that martyrs' families were enduring while supporting the Revolution and its values. In this work there are references to a young man disabled by war. The characters of the work are living in a large house belonging to a wealthy man who left the country after the Revolution. Now, the wealthy man has returned and wants to keep his home.[69] Lāye, a woman whose husband is martyred in the Iran-Iraq war, gives birth to a child several months later. Suri, also a war widow, is living with her husband's parents. Despite the bereavement they share, they argue over everything. Makhmalbāf illustrates their disagreement with references to religious characters. For instance, while they are arguing, Suri's mother in law of 'Āliye says to Suri "do you think you are the afflicted Zeynab or the oppressed Zahrā, or a prisoner in the hands of Hend, the liver eater."[70] These names (i.e. Zeynab and Zahrā) refer to famous Muslim figures. After imam Hosein's death, his sister Zeynab was taken to Damascus as a prisoner where she protested before the 'Umayyad caliph, Yazid. Zahrā is the title of Fāteme, the prophet's daughter and the wife of the first Shiite imam, 'Ali. Hend is Abu Sofyān's wife. In the battle of Badr, Hend prompted a slave to kill Hamze, the prophet's uncle. Then she asked the slave to cut open his chest so that Hend could eat his liver. Makhmalbāf makes Suri an example for widows: her martyred husband was her supporter, and her hope in life. Another family living in the same home is Malihe and her husband, Hamid. He is *jānbāz* (literally means 'soul gambler' or 'gambling with the soul') a war disabled. Malihe married him in the hope of a reward in the hereafter. On the one hand, Makhmalbāf has tried to illustrate the difficulties that the martyrs' families endure, and their struggle to earn a living. On the other hand, he asserts that Iranians are responsible to support these families and in return they will be rewarded in heaven.

---

[68] Ibid., p. 6.

[69] After the Islamic Revolution, people connected to the Pahlavi regime left the country and their properties was taken by the revolutionaries. Later an organization named Bonyād mostaz'afān took them and gave them to needy people to live in.

[70] M. Makhmalbāf, *Bāgh-e bolur*, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Barg, 1365/1986, p. 48.

Commitment to the 'values of the Revolution' (*arzeshhā-ye enqelāb*) was emphasized in literary seminars. The 'literature of the Revolution' was called 'divine culture' (*farhang-e elāhi*). The term implies that the Islamic Revolution originates with God and aims to develop religious principles. The implication was that anyone who did not agree with the values prescribed by the leaders of the Revolution was opposed to God's will and religious doctrine. The leaders of the Islamic Revolution claimed that they were God's representatives on earth. In this way, they encouraged the masses to participate in the fight to preserve the Islamic Revolution and its values. Iranians sacrificed their children too so that the 'divine culture' would supplant the Western culture propagated in Pahlavi period. Ahmad Ahmadi compares the pre-revolutionary poets, influenced by secularist culture and its literature, whose works are of no literary or religious value, to the post-revolutionary and war poets. The latter, he says, were raised in the school of the Shiite imams and nurtured from Islamic culture.[71] Ahmad Ahmadi cites Tondguyān's death in prison in Iraq, and says that we [Iranians] are responsible for preserving this culture (of martyrdom), in order to preserve the principles of the Islamic Republic.[72]

Manuchehr Akbari has also explained the characteristics of the 'literature of Revolution':

> "The poetry of revolution reflects anger, revolt, resistance and confrontation. It is the poetry of protest, of crying out, the poetry of life and chivalry; it is the poetry of compassion and enmity… the poetry of revolution is built with love, mysticism and epic…. In the poetry of revolution, mysticism is inscribed with protest against the idol (*tāghut*) in the field of fire, flowers, bullets and blood; on the trenches and the battlefields of light against darkness, by the mystics [alludes to the soldiers] of the path who knowingly have chosen it. They register their names in a battalion waiting for martyrdom, or in groups who strive for martyrdom. They run on the minefields … The mystics of the poetry of revolution are the youth such as Fahmide… they are

[71] A. Ahmadi, "Khāstgāh-e adabiyyāt-e qabl va ba'd az enqelāb," in *Majmu'e-ye maqālāt-e seminār-e barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi*, Tehran: Samt, 1373/1994, pp. 4-6.
[72] Ibid., p. 7.

another manifestation of the victory of blood over sword."[73]

Akbari links the 'literature of Revolution' to love, mysticism, protest, and martyrdom. These concepts are frequently used in the war poetry. Akbari draws an analogy between the soldier and a mystic who strives to sacrifice his worldly desires on the path to spiritual perfection.

The literary works produced immediately after the Islamic Revolution often refer to the events of Karbalā. The death of Hosein, the third Shiite imam, is given a cosmic significance; Karbalā is a place where miracles happen. The motif of Karbalā is associated with a sort of divine aura. Writers and poets committed to the ideology of the state used the motif to foster loyalty to the Islamic state, and to motivate the people to support the war and sacrifice their lives as imam Hosein had, and thereby to enter paradise. This is also reflected in the memoirs that many soldiers wrote, describing their experiences on the battlefield.[74] The poets referred to the Muslims of the early centuries of Islam and their experiences on the battlefield, or praised them and the martyrs.[75] They are introduced as archetypes of piety. In a poem entitled *az nasl-e sorkh-e Sarbedārān* ('The Offspring from the Red, i.e. Bloody, Generation of *Sarbedārān'*), the poet Seyed Hasan Hoseini praises the soldiers died martyr's death, and compares them to a river (*rud*), which flows towards God. He holds that they are the companions of the messenger [Ayatollah Khomeini] of their time. He draws an analogy between the youth martyred during the war and the first companions of the prophet, al-'Ammār Ebn Yāser (d. 657), al-Abuzar Ghaffāri (d. 652) and Heydar (d. 661), a title of the first Shiite imam, 'Ali Ebn Abi Tāleb.[76]

Another literary genre used to support Iran's revolutionary state is known as

---

[73] M. Akbari, "Negāhi be she'r-e enqlāb-e nur," in *Majmu'e-ye maqālāt-e seminār-e barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi*, Tehran: Samt, 1373/1994, pp.18-19; for another explanation of the literature of Revolution see S. Kāshāni, "Adabiyyāt-e enqlāb-e eslāmi va mobāreze bā estekbār," in *Majmu'a-ye maqālāt-e seminār-e barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi*, Tehran: Samt, 1373/1994, pp. 401-410.

[74] K. Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran,* pp. 114-5. For further information about fiction written in this period and a comparison between the Islamic activists and pre-revolutionary fiction writers see Ibid., pp. 116-124.

[75] Ibid., p. 124.

[76] See S. H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Sure-ye Mehr, 1387/2008, p. 41.

maktabi literature. The word *maktabi* became popular in Iran after the Islamic Revolution. A *maktab* is a traditional Islamic school. Maktabi literature refers to Islamic ideologically-oriented literature, produced by a group of revolutionary authors faithful to the principles of the Islamic Republic. The Islamic regime used the term to refer to individuals who wholeheartedly supported Ayatollah Khomeini's ideology. Before the Islamic Revolution, the revolutionary ideologue 'Ali Shari'ati had used the word in his works to refer to what he considered to be "the very spirit of Islam: its ideology."[77] He sought to offer a new ideology based on the Islamic heritage but free of the old Islamic sciences, which were the preserve of the *'olamā*. Shari'ati explains *maktab* as:

> …a harmonious and well-proportioned set of philosophical perspectives, religious beliefs, ethical principles, and methods of action which in a relation of cause and effect with each other constitute an active, meaningful, goal-oriented body which is alive, and in which all its various organs are fed by the same blood and are alive by the same spirit."[78]

Since the Islamic Revolution, the word *maktabi* has been applied to Islamic principles attuned to the Revolution, and to people who serve the oppressed. The Revolution was called the revolution of the oppressed, and the needs of the oppressed who live in clay houses (*kukh-neshinān*) were given priority over the needs of those who live in palaces (*kākh-neshinān*).[79] Manuchehr Akbari calls the poets who addressed Islamic values in their poems *Shā'er-e ahl-e velāyat*, which literally means 'the poets faithful to the prophet and the twelve Shiite imams.' He asserts that these poets supported the Islamic Republic, and followed the principles prescribed by the leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini. Manuchehr Akbari adds that the poets gave a positive answer to the

[77] H. Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent,* p. 128.
[78] Ibid. For further information about Shari'ati's views on *maktab* see 'A. Shari'ati, *Eslāmshenāsi: tarh-e asāsi-ye maktab*, Āmrikā va Kānādā: Anjoman-e eslāmi-ye dānishjuyān dar Āmrikā va Kānādā, 1355 /1976, pp. 1-37.
[79] Z. Mostafavi, "Barrasi-ye naqsh-e adabiyyāt-e enqlāb-e eslāmi dar mobāreze bā refāh-talabi," in *Majmu'e-ye maqālāt-e seminār-e barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi*, Tehran: Samt, 1373/1994, p. 568.

imam of lovers and the old sage, meaning Ayatollah Khomeini. These poets employed Islamic and religious motifs and concepts such as the garment of imamate or leadership (*redāy emāmat*), the religion of love (*mazhab-e 'eshq*), and the perfume of 'God is the Greatest' (*'atr-e takbir*).[80] These motifs are important for the supporters of the Islamic Republic because the garment of imamate refers to the succession of the twelve imams who are regarded as the prophet's heirs, and the belief that their right of succession is handed down to the leader or leaders of the Islamic Republic. The religion of love motif relates to self-sacrifice for the principles of the Islamic Revolution. The perfume of 'God is great' points to the important role of this slogan during the Revolution (1978), when Iranians began their opposition to the Pahlavi regime by going to the roof tops at night and crying "God is great." The slogan was also used during the war when Iranians attacked Iraqi soldiers, running on the Iraqi minefields toward the enemy,[81] or when they gained a victory. In the war poetry the main motifs and metaphors were those related to the war and to martyrdom. The war poets used these concepts to support the ideology of the state, and to justify the war. Their poetry was an effective tool to inspire the Iranian population to support the Islamic Republic, and to participate in the fight.

The use of religious motifs in the war poetry can be illustrated using 'Lyric of Tulip-Faces' (*ghazal-e lāle-rokhān*) by 'Ali-Rezā Qazve:

ānān ke halq-e teshne be khanjar seporde-and
āb-e hayāt az lab-e shamshir khorde-and
tā dar bahār-e bāresh-e khun bārvar shavad
nakhli neshānde-and-o be yārān seporde-and
bār-e amānati ke falak barnatāftash
bar dush-e jān nahāde dar in rāh borde-and
in bishomār lāle-rokhān dar havā-ye yār

[80] M. Akbari, "Negāhi be she'r-e enqlāb-e nur," pp. 11-14.
[81] R. Baer, *The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower*, New York: Crown Publishers, 2008, p. 3.

tā ruz-e vasl thāniye-hā rā shemorde-and
har-chand shākhe-hā-ye ze tufān shekaste-and
har-chand sho'lehā-ye be zāher fesorde-and
ruzi-khorān-e sofre-ye 'eshq-and tā abad
ey zendegān-e khāk maguid morde-and[82]

Those who have entrusted their thirsty throats to the blade,
Have drunk the Water of Life from the edge of the sword.
That it may grow in the spring, when blood is being shed
They have planted a palm tree and entrusted it to the companions.
The Burden of Trust that the sky could not carry
They have carried on the shoulders of their souls.
These countless tulip-faced [lovers], in their desire for union with the Friend
Have counted the moments till the day of union.
Although they are like branches broken by typhoons,
Although they appear as a fire grown cold,
They are nourishing from the table of love for ever.
O you who live in clay, do not say they are dead.

In this poem, the martyrs of the war are compared to the prophet Khezr who drank from the Water of Life and gained eternal life.[83] The compound 'to entrust one's throats to the blade' (*halq be khanjar sepordan*) implies the act of self-sacrifice. The poet holds that the soldiers, who passionately go the battlefield simply to be killed, will survive eternally; like the prophet Khezr. In the fourth line there is a reference to the palm, a tree that is mentioned in the Qur'ān several times (2:266; 59:5; 80:29). The Qur'ān refers to palm trees in paradise, and the tree in the physical world is a sign of it (6:99). The tree is a source of nutrition for Mary, who shakes the trunk and eats the dates that fall upon her (19:25). In the fourth line,

[82] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, pp. 19-20.
[83] In the Islamic tradition, the prophet Khezr is living eternally because he found the Water of Life in the darkness and drank from the Water.

the poet uses the Qur'ānic image of the palm tree, saying that the martyr has planted a tree and left it to his companions, who are responsible for nurturing it. The tree grows when blood rains down. The poet is comparing preserving the principles of the Islamic Republic to protecting the tree, which entails emulating the martyrs and sacrificing one's life.

In the fifth and sixth lines there is a reference to the Qur'ānic concept of the Burden of Trust (*amānat*). This refers to the primordial covenant (7:171) when God confirmed man's duty to obey by asking the seed in the loins of Adam: "Am I not Your Lord," to which they answered: "Yes we witness it." According to the Qur'ān "the heavens and the earth and the mountains refused to carry [the burden of trust] and were afraid of it; but man took it up." (33:72). Martyrs carried the Burden of Trust by sacrificing their lives on the military front, according to the poet. Thus, they are true to the promise that Adam's progeny made in the Primordial time.

In the seventh line, the martyrs are said to be tulip-faced. A red tulip or rose symbolizes martyrdom, or the blood that is shed.[84] The potential martyrs on the battlefield are counting the moments to the time of union. In Persian literature, the compound *shemordan-e thāniye*, counting the moments, shows a lover's impatience and enthusiasm to unite with the Beloved. The poet draws an analogy between the soldiers and lovers; both are prepared to lay down their lives in the path of the Beloved. In the last lines, the poet refers to a Qur'ānic verse (3:169) to assert the martyrs' high rank in the hereafter. The verse says that God feeds the martyrs. The final reference to those who live in clay (*zendegān-e khāk*, literally, 'livings on earth') highlights the difference between the martyrs who live but not in this world and ordinary people who are bound by their daily needs.

IMPLEMENTING ISLAMIC IDEOLOGY (1982-83)

It was essential for the post-revolutionary Iran to implement Islamic teaching in order to

[84] U. Marzolph, "The Martyr's Way of Paradise: Shiite Mural Art in the Urban Context," in *Sleepers, Moles and Martyrs: Secret Identifications, Social Integration and the Differing Meanings of Freedom*, eds. R. Bendix & J. Bendix, Copenhagen: Musum Tusculanum Press &University of Copenhagen, 2004, p. 90.

stabilize the state's authority and power. After the Revolution, all key legislative, executive and judicial posts were occupied by clerics or people loyal to the teachings of Ayatollah Khomeini, who were called *maktabi*, or bound to ideology. The state started to develop the groundwork for an Islamic ideology and law. The first step was the Islamization of education. After transforming the primary and secondary schools, the state focused on Islamizing the universities, from the autumn of 1980. The idea was to counter the influence that the superpowers, notably the United States of America, had had on education under Pahlavi rule. In December 1982, Ayatollah Khomeini stated, "In contrast to the old universities, which had made their students backward and dependent [on the Western education and culture], a pure Islamic system would lead to progress and independence.[85] The Islamic state went one step further by institutionalizing revolutionary organs. The Coordination of the Revolutionary Guards was established in December 1981, and followed by the Ministry of Revolutionary Guards in November 1982. The formation of the organs, named above, leaded to better coordination between the parties who supported the state. The organs played the major role in implementing ideological ideas in 1983. In this period, new foundations were established as perpetual trusts to implement the principles and ideologies of the state, to assist the families of the martyrs, or to reconstruct the destroyed cities.[86] Among these foundations were the local *Komite*s, or local militant groups. Komites consisted of young, idealistic and radical men or women who gained their positions almost overnight, thanks to political upheavals. Some of them had been active in overthrowing the Pahlavi monarchy, and some others, possessed weapons. They confiscated the weapons when they attacked the army barracks. Thus, in many cases, they acted without receiving orders from their leaders, whether Marxist, Islamic-Marxist, or Islamic.[87] These foundations performed several duties such as propagating Islamic and moral values. Foundations such as the Foundation of the Dispossessed (*bonyād-e mostaz'afān*), the Foundation for the Martyrs (*bonyād-e shahid*), the Housing Foundation (*bonyād-e maskan*),

[85] D. Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution*, New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1990, p. 274.
[86] Ibid., p. 265.
[87] A.M. Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921*, p. 213. See also D. Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution,* pp. 82-3.

and the Reconstruction Foundation (*bonyād-e sāzandegi*) were so important for revolutionary Iran that the prime minister, Mir-Hosein Musavi, said: "If we lose these organs we lose the Revolution."[88] From 1983, the state focused on relatively marginal issues intended to reinforce Islamic tenets: Persian words replaced Western equivalents, Iranizing commercial names, and orienting the tourist industry to Islamic sites rather than Iran's pre-Islamic and cultural monuments.[89]

In 1985, five years after the Islamic revolution, an influential literary movement took shape. A group of students headed by Ahmad Zāre'i in the city of Mashhad, in the province of Khorāsān in northeastern Iran, started a movement that sought to disseminate revolutionary and Islamic values such as self-sacrifice and acts of bravery. One year later, in 1986, a poets' gathering took place in the southern city of Ahvaz, with the support of the Basij organization, the volunteer forces of the army. In 1990, the gathering was called the Congress of the Poetry of the Armed Forces. Two years later this cultural organization was renamed the Congress of the Poetry of Sacred Defense. It has been supported by the Organization for the Preservation and Propagation of Sacred Literature and Values. Over the years, the Organization has focused on drawing the attention of both those poets who were supported by university students and the intelligentsia, and of poets who did not want to become active involved members of the Congress.[90] The war poets who participated in the annual Congress, produced various forms of poetry such as lyrics (*ghazal*), panegyric (*qaside*), narrative poems (*mathnavi*), quatrains (*robā'i*), and the 'new poetry' (*she'r-e now*). The war poets followed in the footsteps of classic poets in poetic forms, and drew on classical Persian love literature in which the superiority of love over reason is proven. The ubiquity of the theme of love in classical Persian mystical poetry gave the war poets a wide range of classical love themes and motifs to draw on, such as the academy of love (*madrase-ye 'eshq*), the book of love (*ketāb-e 'eshq*), and the *ka'be* (sacred destination) of love (*ka'be-ye 'eshq*). In addition to mystical motifs, the war poets also drew on religious

[88] D. Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution*, p. 265.
[89] Ibid., p. 262.
[90] N. Farzad,"Qeysar Aminpur and the Persian Poetry of Sacred Defense," in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 34:3, 2007, pp. 353-4.

motifs to legitimize Iran's war against Iraq. For example, imam Hosein's death on the plain of Karbalā is presented as a symbol of altruistic self-sacrifice. They used motifs related to the event of *'Āshurā* such as the book of *'Āshurā* (*ketāb-e 'Āshurā*), and the path of Hosein (*rāh-e Hosein*).

A focal concept in the poetry of the Sacred Defense was honoring the youth martyred in the fight against Iraq. Because they knowingly sacrificed their lives to revive the principles of the Revolution, a war poet should not fail to praise their sacrifice. His poem should embody loyalty to the martyrs' goals.

The Organization for the Preservation and Propagation of Sacred Literature and Values has two central aims. Firstly, to deliver the message of the martyrs to the community. Secondly, to disseminate the main ideas and values that inspire the poetry of revolution.[91] The martyrs' message to the community is that they should support the Islamic state and follow the principles of the leader of the Islamic Republic. In addition, the martyrs ask Iranians to emulate imam Hosein's self-sacrifice. By employing those notions, the war poets promoted the core ideas of the Revolution and mobilized the Iranian population to fight and offer their lives for the cause of the Revolution.

Qeysar Aminpur was one of the poets who participated in establishing the Literary Movement of Sacred Defense. In his poems, Aminpur portrays the destruction of the Iran-Iraq war and encourages the soldiers to fight. In 'A Poem for War' (*She'ri barāy-e jang*), he says that in a time of war, the pen is not adequate to show opposition: one has to take up weapons. The poet portrays a war scene, in which a man's severed head is found on a roof far from his home, and a bloody doll shows where a child has been killed. The poet uses these heartbreaking scenes to inspire the community to support the soldiers, and he emphasizes that they are victorious because they are following the orders of their imam, Ayatollah Khomeini, who calls for resistance and self-sacrifice. Aminpur tells the soldiers that they should continue to offer their lives until the throats of their mothers burn from mourning.[92]

---

[91] Ibid., pp. 358-9.

[92] *Gozide-ye she'r-e jang va defā'-e moqaddas*, selection, notes and explanation of the context by S. H.

Many poets honor the martyrs of the war and the eight years of sacred defense, with different levels of eloquence and strength. I will refer briefly to the poems by Simin Behbahāni, known as "one of Iran's highest-ranked contemporary poets" and " Iran's national poet."[93] Before the Revolution, she used poetry to show her opposition to the Pahlavi regime. She wrote against oppression and injustice imposed by the Pahlavi regime, and demanded a change in the political system, using the metaphors and codes used by pre-revolutionary writers. For instance, to refer to the dictatorship, she uses metaphors of fruitlessness, cold and silence, while the Revolution is referred to with metaphors of spring and the rainbow.[94] Iranians are victims of social injustice. Their lives are a struggle for a loaf of bread, security, honor and freedom from pain and poverty, according to Behbahāni.[95] In a poem entitled 'The Angel of Freedom' (*fereshte-ye āzādi*), Behbahāni addresses an oncoming revolution. She says that a demon (*div*) is drinking the blood of the youth, and enchains the angel of freedom. Furious, noble souls sacrifice their lives, draw their blades, and kill the demon.[96] Some of her war poems present painful scenes of the war. 'Write it Down, Write it Down' (*Benevis, Benevis*) illustrates a war scene in which defenseless Iranian civilians are killed. She praises the soldiers killed in defending the country, and refers to them as those who have chosen death and won honor.[97]

My discussion of another poem by Behbahāni, 'I Will Rebuild you, O my Homeland' (*Dobāre misāzamat vatan*) draws on Kamran Talattof's discussion of this work. The poet says:

dobāre misāzamat vatan, agarche bā khesht-e jān-e khish
sotun be saqf-e to mizanam agarche bā ostokhān-e khish

Hoseini, Tehran: Sure-ye Mehr, 1381/2002, pp. 111-17.

[93] K. Talattof, "I Will Rebuild you, Oh my Homeland': Simin Behbahāni's Work and Sociopolitical Discourse," in *Iranian Studies*, 41:1, 19-36, 2008, p. 20; for further discussion of Behbahāni's style see R. Sandler, "Simin Behbahāni's Poetic Conversations," in *Iranian Studies*, 41:1, 2008.

[94] K. Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran,* pp. 106-7.

[95] S. Behbahāni, *Jāy-e pā*, Tehran: Zavvār, 1350/1971, pp. 77-80.

[96] Ibid., pp. 81-3.

[97] S. Behbahāni, *Majmu'e-ye ash'ār-e Simin Behbahāni Jāy-e pā tā āzādi*, Tehran, Enteshārāt-e Nilufar, 1377/ 1998, pp. 460-1.

dobāre mibuyam az to gol be meyl-e nasl-e javān-e to
dobāre mishuyam az to khun be seyl-e ashk-e ravān-e khish
dobare yek ruz-e ashenā siyāhi az khāne miravad
be she' r-e khod rang mizanam ze ābi-ye asemān-e khish
agarche sad sāle morde-am be gur-e khod khāham istād
ke bardaram qalb-e ahreman ze na're-ye ānchonān-e khish…[98]

Again, O my home land! I will rebuild you, though it be with the brick of my soul
I will construct a column under your roof, though it be made of my bone
Again, I will smell your flower's scent, as your youth desire,
Again, I will wash the blood off you[r body] with my flowing tears
Again, on a familiar day darkness will leave the house
I will color my poem using my own blue sky
Although, I have been dead for a hundred years, I will stand on my grave
To tear apart the heart of evil with my [strong] cry out...

The poem was composed in 1981, one year after the beginning of the war. In this poem, the poet inspires the young men to reconstruct the ruined places with the bricks of their souls. This will not be possible unless they sacrifice their lives to stop the enemy's attacks. In the second line, Iran is likened to a home whose roof will be supported by columns made of the youths' bones. In the third line, the poet says 'I will smell your flower's scent, as the desires of your youth,' to assert that the wish of the young generation will come true when they win the fight. To clean the blood from the land's body, the poet uses the stream of her tears. She mourns not for the dead land, but perhaps cries in happiness to revive the country. The motif 'to wash the body with tears' is repeatedly used in Persian classical literature. Nizāmi uses the image of washing the lover's body with tears in his epic romance *Leyli and*

[98] This is my literal translation using the translation of the poem by K. Talattof, "I Will Rebuild you, Oh my Homeland: Simin Behbahāni's Work and Sociopolitical Discourse," in *Iranian Studies,* p. 25. K. Talattof has offered various readings of the poem, but they are not a part of the present discussion. For further information see Ibid.

Majnun. Shortly after hearing the news of Leyli's death, Majnun dies over her tomb, and "the mourners burst into tears/ they rained tears over him / washed him completely with the water of the eye (i.e. tears) / gave him, who was felt on the soil, to the soil" (*dar gerye shodand sugvārān/ kardand bar u sereshk bārān/ shostand be āb-e dide pākash/ dādand ze khāk ham be khākash*).[99] Considering that Behbahāni composed her poem during the war, the reference to the day when darkness (*siyāhi*) will leave the house must be a reference to the day the war ends. The poet's reference to 'tearing the heart of evil apart with a strong shout' may be explained as the soldiers' crying 'God is the Greatest' (*Allāh-o Akbar*) as they go into action.[100]

Here, I refer to a poem by Hamid-Rezā Akbari to show a different level of literacy. He illustrates a war scene, the soldier's death on the front line:

…
va tofangam tekkiye dāde be marg
dar in shomāreshi ke āsmānash
kutāh miāyad
tā kenār-e jenāzehā-i ke tond tond ettefāq mioftad
ke in hame zendegi bi-khod migozarad
hanuz ham yek taraf-e divār sālem nist.[101]
…
And my weapon leans back on death
In this counting, when the sky goes down near the bodies
that quickly die
….
Because life is beyond uselessness

[99] N. Ganjavi, *Leyli va Majnun*, ed. B. Zanjāni, Tehran: Mo'asesse-ye enteshārāt va chāp-e dāneshgāh-e Tehran, 1369/1990, no. 4453-54, p.174.

[100] For further information about S. Behbahāni's war poetry see F. Milāni, "Simin Behbahāni: Iran's National Poet," in *Iranian Studies,* 41:1, 2008.

[101] *Ravāyat-e chahārdahom: Majmu'e-ye ash'ār-e chahārdahomin kongere-ye sarāsari-ye she'r-e defā'e moqaddas*, by 'A. R. Qazve, Tehran: Nashr-e Lowh-e Zarrin & Nashr-e Sarir, 1384/2005, pp. 54-5; also see Ibid. pp. 29-31; pp. 43-4.

Now neither side of the wall is safe (i.e. the wall is completely destroyed)

In this poem, although the poet uses imagery to describe a battle scene and the death of numerous soldiers, he has not given a cohesive image of a battlefield. So many soldiers are being killed that even the all-seeing sky cannot count the number. In the fourth line, the poet points to the uselessness of ordinary life by saying '*zendegi bi-khod migozarad'*. The compound *bi-khod* literally means 'beyond himself in ecstasy, useless and nonsense'. The meaning may be that one who offers his life makes it serve a purpose.

Several female poets participated in propagating the principles prescribed by the Islamic Republic. They have written about the Islamic Revolution and the war: I will refer to Sepide Kāshāni because several of her poems have been broadcast in the media.

be khun gar keshi khāk-e man doshman-e man
bejushad gol andar gol az golshan-e man
mosalmānam-o ārmānam shahādat
tajalli-ye hastiest jān kandan-e man
konun rud-e khalq ast daryā-ye jushān
hame khushe-ye khashm shod kherman-e man
man āzāde az khāk-e āzādegānam
gol-e sabr miparvarad dāman-e man
joz az jām-e towhid hargez nanusham
zani gar be tigh-e setam garden-e man[102]

O my enemy! If you fill my soil (i.e. country) with blood
From my flower garden, roses will boil (i.e. raise or grow up) from roses,
I am Muslim and my ideal is martyrdom
The agony of my death is the splendor of existence
Now the river of the crowd is (moving) like an angry sea

[102] K. Kohdu'i, "Barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e takhdiri," p. 492.

All my harvest is a bunch of anger.
I am a freeman from the land of freemen
My leap makes the flower of patience grow
I will never drink from any cup but the cup of Oneness
Even if you sever my neck with the dagger of oppression.

In this poem, Kāshāni talks to the enemy (i.e. Iraq), asserting that if you cover my soil, or my country, with blood, roses will grow from it. Roses and tulips symbolize martyrdom. She says that a Muslim strives from martyrdom, because it is his ideal. The poet compares the Iranian public to an angry sea: just as no one can stop a flood from happening, no one can stop the Iranian nation from fighting the enemy. She says that she would not abandon her religious beliefs even if the enemy cut off her head.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I aimed to explain how poetry has been used to inspire Iranian public in various historical periods from Constitutional Revolution to time of the war between Iran and Iraq. During the Constitutional Revolution poets used non-poetic themes such as criticism of the Persian monarchical system, absolute power in order to establish. The poets employed mystical motifs such as the martyr of love to praise individuals who offered their lives during the Constitutional Revolution for freedom. During Mohammad Rezā Shāh's reign, poetry was used to unify the Iranians and give them a national identity. For this purpose the epic Shāhnāma by Ferdowsi was introduced as an Iranian's national icon. Later, during 1970s poetry was used as a political tool to establish solidarity between Iranians against Pahlavi dynasty. The poets used religious metaphors to motivate Iranians to protest against the Shāh and the influence of Western culture. They were convinced that Islam should be revived in order to rescue people from the tyrannies imposed upon them all over the world. After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, many poets were condemned by the

supporters of the Revolution, but later, the Islamic Republic used poetry to propagate the ideals of the Revolution. A new type of literature appeared during the Iran-Iraq war, called the Literature of Resistance. Another genre that emerged after the Revolution was the literature of the Islamic Revolution. The poets and writers employed the same motifs used by the classical mystics to link self-sacrifice for the ideals of the Revolution to a mystic's spiritual progress. The poets used revolutionary-Islamic motifs to draw parallels between the war, the Revolution and the events of Karbalā. Committed literature was another literary genre that supported the Revolution. This genre refers to the ideologically-oriented literature. A group of authors faithful to the principles of the Revolution created this genre, using the mystical motifs such as the religion of love to assert that following the principles of the Islamic Republic is the same as following the path of love, and obeying the principles prescribed by the Shiite authorities.

This poetry was supported in various ways. A meeting of poets, later called the Congress of the Poetry of Sacred Defense, which was held in Ahvaz in 1986, was supported by the Organization for the Preservation and Propagating of Sacred Literature and Values. The Organization aimed to support the poets and the university students who supported the Revolution. These poets imitated the poetry of classical poets in form and content, writing ghazals, panegyric, narrative poems, and quatrains. A number of these poets also composed poetry in new poetic forms. In their metaphor and imagery, these poets extensively draw on the motifs of mystical love such as the book of love, the school of love and the Ka'be of love, connecting the path of war with spiritual progress of a mystic. In addition, they used religious motifs such as the book of *'Āshurā*, and the path of Hosein linking the war to the events at Karbalā, legitimizing the war against the Iraqi soldiers. In this poetry, martyrdom is venerated and all soldiers who are killed are called martyrs. This was a conscious way of giving meaning to death and mobilizing people to offer their lives for a sacred cause.