Studying the status and effect of *Tarasol* (letter writing) in Persian literature

Zahra Iranmanesh
Doctorate of Persian literature, Farhangian university of Kerman, Iran
iranmanesh.zahra@yahoo.com

Abstract

The present research aims to study the status and effect of letter writing in Persian literature, the importance of letters from past to present, efforts of Iranian ancestors for becoming perfect in art of letter writing and historical trend of letter writing in Persian language. The research method is descriptive-analytic and information was gathered from the library. Results show that the signs of writing in Iran dated back to 600 years BC during Achaemenid dynasty but formulation of Persian letter writing was started in Ghaznavid period and it became perfect in Seljukian age and it became more stable in Safavid period by going beyond national borders in India and Asia Minor. In Qajar dynasty, it was seen several times in commands, treaties, and correspondences. Letter writing in Iran was very prevalent before Islam and according to old researchers and historians; this type of writing was very famous due to its special condition and technical codes such that it was simulated in Islamic period via translation and played special role in development of Arab correspondence.

Keywords: status of letter writing, effect of letter writing, Persian literature.
Introduction
Letter writing is one of the oldest writing techniques and it is seen in forms of verse and prose or combination of prose and verse in Persian language. The word Tarasol has been said to mean “writing letters and having information about its usage in courts” (Anvari, 2002, P 1697). Tarasol is one of parts of composition science in which the status of the writer and the receiver of the letter are mentioned. One of manifestations of technical prose is Tarasol and letter writing. Courtly secretaries were wise people who were famous in Arabic language and literature and they used their knowledge perfectly in correspondence. Courtly letters were in form of rhythmic prose in Samanid period and people such as Bounasr Moshkan and Beihaghi wrote letters in form of rhythmic prose but secretaries in Seljukian and Khwrazmshahi ages tended to technical prose. Writing letter in technical prose was artistic so letters of the famous secretaries were collected as a book in order to be used by future writers. The meaning of letter is placed in this range as well. It means correspondence and letters and its root was originated from the word composition that means verbiage. In courtly words, it means what secretaries wrote in form of draft and agenda (encyclopedia of Persian literature, 1997, P 1278). Monsaht is an Arabic word and it means secretarial writings and in fact it is the technique and art of writing. In past it was called Tarasol and today it is known as letter writing. The range of the word “Tarasol” as an art is very extensive such that it is very important in official and courtly organizations. It can be said that letters such as Sultaniat or Akhavaniat are literal masterpieces due to literal and linguistic aspects, writing technique and historical documents and correspondences. An important part of literal and historical books and even in mystic, scientific, and lecture books is letters (written in Dari language in history of Iranian culture such as letters included in Ferdowsi Shahnnameh and Khamseh of Nezami Ganjavi) and many secretarial methods have been stated artistically in such letters. The present research aims to answer following questions to understand the effect of letters in Persian literature: 1- what was the importance of letters from past to present time? And to what extent did Iranian ancestors try to complete art of letter writing? 2- What was the historical trend of letter writing in Persian literature?

Research method
The research method is descriptive-analytic and information was gathered by library

Results
Question 1: what was the importance of letters from past to present time? And to what extent did Iranian ancestors try to complete technique of letter writing?
Letter writing is very important in our culture and history such that accurate technique and grammar books have been written about it. Generally, letters are divided into official or formal and informal or friendly. Formal letters are those that are written by governmental and political agents or different classes of people about formal or official affairs. Informal letters are simple writings full of friendly emotions and feelings and they are written by public. Correspondences
are divided into Sultaniat and Akhavaniat. Sultaniat or Sultani correspondence was letters that were written by kings and friendly letters were known as Akhavaniat. In letters remained from Old Persian history, titles such as Manshour (prism), Toghi (signature), Fathnameh (announcement of a victory), Shekastnameh (letter of defeat), Ahdnameh (convention), and Sogand (promise) are seen among these letters. Courtly secretaries had to consider special rules and principles in order to write such letters (Persian literature encyclopedia, 1997). The signs of writing in Iran dated back to 600 years BC in Achaemenid period but formulation of Persian letters was started in Ghaznavid period and it became perfect in Seljukian age and it became more stable in Safavid period by going beyond national borders in India and Asia Minor. In Qajar dynasty, it was seen several times in commands, treaties, and correspondences. If Farahani and Amir Nezam Garousi did not try their best in this regard, the optimal result would not be reached. One of writers in this regard is Mirza Mehdi Ibn Mohammad Nasir, the secretary of Naser Aldin Shah and Mohammad Shah and he was famous in letter writing. Several ancient letters in Iran especially in Sassanian period were translated in Arabic language during Islamic period and gradually, Iranians started to translate it into Persian and Arabic languages. Ardeshir Promise was one of the oldest letters translated in Arabic and it has been included in “Tajarob Al’ Omam” (experiences of nations) written by Abouali Maskouyeh Razi (Emami, 1990, P 114). In this letter in which Ardeshir Babakan wrote to Persian followers (who governed on the city after his dynasty) and he advised them about government and wrote “you have to know that what you are going to be tested after me is what I was tested before you. You will rule over the government like me and you will observe happiness and suffer from where I have observed them (Daneshpajuh, 1998, P 11). Letter writing in Iran was very prevalent before Islam and according to old researchers and historians; this type of writing was very famous due to its special condition and technical codes such that it was simulated in Islamic period via translation and played special role in development of Arab correspondence. In tradition of letter writing where Sultaniat and Akhania have been considered as sources of history like personal reports and itineraries, letter writing has a special place in Persian prose. The background of such traditions in Iranian culture dated back to secretarial rules in ancient age and Pahlavid text known as “Andar Ayin Namak Nabeshtan” (the rules of writing letters) is an old pattern in this tradition and associates it to what is known as literature in Pahlavid culture. However, in letter writing in Dari prose, Akhavaniat was written against Sultaniat that are official and courtly letters. The book “the rules of writing letters” includes rules and traditions of letter writing for both letters in mentioned method such that didactic letter writing common among scientists and mystics in the letter from Tansor to Goshtasb Shah is an ancient pattern and unlike Akhavaniat and Sultaniat that are artificial in Persian classic prose and technical prose will lose its freshness in artful complexities, didactic writings especially those of mystics keep a simple and transparent language which commit the whole expression and problem solving of the reader and unlike in Tansor letter that its artificial writing (translated by Ibn Esfandyar) has reduced increasingly its freshness, such letters as seen in correspondences of mystics and patriarchs, include literal
interpretations even in verse language and Dari prose in this letters has been stated in form like verse. Letters and organizations of secretariat in Sassanian period that had an older tradition were imitated completely by Iranian secretaries and writers in the court then they were translated from Arabic to Persian and were used in Iranian courts after Islam. The oldest letters that are remained in form of prose are those that have been mentioned in Beihaghi history. He was disciple and assistant of Bounasr Moshkan, the owner of letters collection of Sultan Mahmoud and Masoud Ghaznavid. He wrote down courtly letters which their drafts were written by Bounasr Moshkan. He had a remarkable talent in this regard such that he became master of writers in fifth century and some believed that he was the most capable writer of Persian prose in old periods (Daneshpajuh, 1998, P 17). But it should not be thought that the letters were written down and recorded only in literal and historical texts specially those written by kings and great people. In those early days when Dari prose became stable in Iran, important and beautiful letters were written and the most famous one was letters of Ein AlGhozat Hamedani, a great mystic in Iran. Also letters of Ahmed Ghazali, a famous mystic, and his master, Hamedani and also some of correspondences of his famous brother, Emam Mohammad Ghazali and others (remained from the fifth century) are very amazing (the form is stable and the meanings are deep). Generally, regarding the prose of letters from early periods to fifth century, it can be said that sometimes meanings and concepts had a literal arrangement. However, in some letters of Akhavaniat, the tradition of brevity has yet been considered from Arabic correspondences in the first century (Khatibi, 1996, P 316). An important point about the dignity of secretaries in ancient Iran is that secretaries were ranked after priests and armies and the master of secretaries had a place similar to the owner of letters collection and he was called the head of secretaries and he was equal to ministers. In Altaval news, Dinvari named three secretaries who were responsible for secretary of army letters, secretary of tribute letters, and secretary of endowment letters in Yazdgerd dynasty. Among letters of Sultaniat and Akhavaniat attributed to courtly writers, little letters remained from Ghaznavid age (that has been brought in Beihaghi history) have rhythmic and fluent prose but in Seljukian age. Otebh Alkotobeh from letters of Montajeb Aldin Atabak Joveini is famous and in spite of moderate writing, there is no sign of real expressions in its elements that are beyond technical artifacts. This collection was collected by the writer in age of Sanjar with command of minister of Sultan and according to Ghazvini “it is a memory of routine writing in governmental offices of Seljukian age in middle 6th century (Ghažvini, 1934, 214/2). Some evidences show that courtly writers considered this work as a model for learning writing and when such book with stable composition and full of rhymes and verbiages became a pattern for writes, it is obvious that official writing in this age is different from simple official letters with its mildness and short signatures free from complexity in Gaznavid age. However, writing official and formal and Akhavan letters became gradually prevalent after Islam because the area of Iran country was expanded and caliphs, governors, and masters require those for distributing their beliefs so this trend was developed in a way that it was incredible in barbarism age. In these ages, two types of religious and political letters were increased and the lords of lectures and
letters were the same. In other words, letters were written lectures that include moral issues and encouragement to religious affairs and so on. By development of power and influence of Arabs in Islamic period, Arabic prose entered a new way and detailed prose became prevalent and Abdolhamid Ibn Yahya could enter Iranian writing tradition into Arabic prose such that he was known as “Alkatib” and “Bedat Alketabah Abd Al hamid”. All people know that he is head of all secretaries because he was the first person who formulated the principles and rules of writing and secretaries of this art learnt from him. After him, technique of secretaryship was followed by many innovations and writing was accompanied with many arrangements and it became a field for testing methods of expression, literal and non-literal arrays, and verbiage. Letters are full of different interpretations, exaggerations, words, and coordination between words and synonyms. In Abbasi period, letter writing was very prevalent and official letters, governmental charters and scientific and literal discussions were developed. In this age, writing not only belonged to governmental courts but also it was used to describe new civilizations. In Abbasi age, technique of writing was increased including Akhavani letters for appreciation, blame, condolence, salutation and propitiation and also scientific and literal compositions such as articles and discussions, contracts, narratives and positions.

**Letter writing, courtly correspondence of Persian Sultaniat and Akhavaniat:** correspondences are prose works that are rarely translated from one language to another due to lack of inclusion of special rational meanings that cannot be translated into another language. On the other hand, beauty of method has been more or less paid attention to. Each language depends on literal and non-literal meanings that cannot be kept their form when translating them into another language. In spite of popularity, artful aspects, and technical meanings, Persian correspondence in Pahlavid and Sassanian ages was such that in early Islamic periods, most of its parts were translated into Arabic as historical, religious, and scientific works. In addition to different types of correspondence in Iranian culture, the technique, and method of each of them, their traditions and education and also quality of their collection obtained their own ways. Books such as *Dastur Alkatib Fi Tayin Almarateb*, *Adab Alkatib* and *Otbeh* show that it is the most important type of writing in the fourth to ninth centuries followed by letter writing because firstly, most writers of the books were courtly and official secretaries and secondly the most important letters were official, courtly and sultan letters. Due to socio-political considerations, all aspects of the subject had to be written so we see that the oldest books of letter writing are those that include how to write letters not composition and writing in general form that include all types of writing. It is exactly against letter writing books in our age. Excellent and important collection of letters has been collected and formulated that can be seen some of them in all subjects, arts and sciences such as Persian correspondence of Ghazali, Almokhtarat Men Al Resael, Altavasol Ela Altrasol, letters of Khaghani, letters of Rashid Aldin Vatavat, Sanaee correspondence, writings of Jalal Aldin, correspondence of Abdollah Ghotb Shirazi, letters of Farhad Mirza, Lataef Alensha, Sahifeh Aakhiras, Badayeh Alensha, Esrshad Altalebin, letter of
Mansouri. In periods close to our age, letters of Farahani are very important. By looking at other references and sources, it is not needed to explain about extensive range of letter writing and its importance and complexity as an art during history of Persian language. The oldest source that has been written about letter writing is “Four articles” of Nezami.

It should not be thought that only poets accepted rules of verse, prosodics, meanings, and expression with several methods, rules and tricks and stages of art and knowledge have been sporadic in the verse. From past to a period close to modern age, prosers had to be trained in all types of prose such as letter writing and they had to learn arts and techniques. They wrote letters for different positions with various styles. Letters were full of points which were chosen based on the position of that person. Literal and non-literal arrays and face and content methods were trained. Even having good hand writing was important and they had to know different types of paper, sheets and their quality and also different types of inks, inkwell, and calligraphic pens. Most of literati and prosers were aware of these methods and use them in the writing. This issue is not specific to Persian language and all literati chose such approach. For example, Imam Ali who is considered as the pioneer of writers and prosers in Arabic literature and a collection of the deepest and the most eloquent letters is available in Nahjolbalagheh and his other works talked about such rules and arts.

**Question 2: What was the historical trend of letter writing in Persian literature?**

Imam Ali believed that written book and culture show human intellect. He talked about writing and books in the age when verbal culture in Arab tribes was appreciated. He believed that writing was more expressive than verbal speech (Ghorar Alhekam and Dorar Alhekam, P 97). The writing of a person shows his intellect and the reason of his knowledge (the same, P 20635, the same, P 365). On this basis, the writings of scholars can show the amount of their intellect. Imam Ali was very interested in writing and its culture such that he stated some statements about the quality of writing in addition to focuses on general value of writing and appreciation of the book and in fact he trained us the tradition of writing both artfully and courtly. He also stated: “put Ligheh (what is placed in the ink such as wool) in your ink and write letters in row so that your handwriting become beautiful” (Hor Amoli, 1391 (lunar year), P 299). This speech has been expressed in terms of beauty of writing with focus on form of writing but in other words, he addressed his agents regarding house of money and consideration of public properties and rights and described some special points about the form and content of the writing as follows: scrape your calligraphic pens thinly, reduce the distance between lines, prevent from verbiage, pay attention to meaning because Moslems could not tolerate to lose their properties” (Majlesi, 1403 (lunar year), P 105). Persian prose has been in hand of Iranians since Samanian and Ghaznavid ages and governmental secretaries imitated Arabic literature. In letters of Khorasan, Ghazneh and Mavara Alnahr, Balami, Mosabi and Abolfath Basti were skillful in Arabic literature and language and they were affected by Arabic literal prose. In addition, official relationship between the courts of Khorasan and Baghdad affected the prose of Iranian secretaries. The third issue is
that aristocratic taste entered into the poem and prose in these ages and gave Khorasani style features appropriate with the taste and education of courtly secretaries and this is aristocratic taste in Iran that keeps literature from banality. The oldest Persian book about secretarial art has been written by Mohammad Ibn Abdolkhalegh Mahini who was one of secretaries and authors in the fifth century. The book is known as secretarial grammar that was published by attempts of Sadegh Arzi in 1962 in Ankara. It shows that scholars paid attention to correspondences in this age. The book includes a preface and two parts. The first part associates with ceremonies, traditions and preparation of secretarial arts and it is known as titles and the second part is about letters. In the first part, the compiler of the book has explained everything about preparation of secretarial work such as calligraphy pen, paper, letter writing, point, punctuation, and condition of writing and it has good information due to the tradition that was present in the time of the compiler and the history of this art. In the second part, the compiler himself has trained all traditions of writing and different types of Sultani and Akhavani letters, writing of lecturers, events, and evidences and he has written some examples for them (Safa, 1993, P 175). From establishment of Iranian governments to early fifth century, the letters were in Arabic language in courts of Iranian sultans and formal and courtly correspondence were written in Arabic language even the correspondence between kings and feoffees of the armies and ministers was written in Arabic form and we can see some examples in Othi history and its translation so called Yamini history written by Abolsharaf Naseh Jarfdeghani. In “four articles” written by Nezami Arouzi, he wrote in the article so called “secretarial nature” about two Arabic letters in Samanid period that were written by Eskafi, the secretary of Saman family. This trend continued until the age of Abolabbas Fazl Ibn Abbas Esfarayeni, the first owner of the great collection in Mahmoudi court and it has been translated from Arabic to Persian. Jarfdeghani wrote unpleasantly following sentences about this important event for Persian courtly prose: the minister, Abolabbas is not perfect in letter writing. Letters were written in Persian language in his time. Knowledge and elocution had no place in those days and scientist, foolish people, scholars and public became the same in position and when he became minister, he commanded the governmental writers not to write in Persian and continued writing in Arabic form except when the people were unable to understand the concepts in Arabic language (translation of Beihaghi history, Pp366-377). While translation of courtly prose into Persian language caused that principles and rules were formulated for writing Persian letters and writers faced with some limitations and conditions resulting in development of Persian pose, letter writers such as Bounasr Moshkan, Aboulfazl Beihaghi and so on were appeared and in Seljukian and Khwazmshahi periods, skillful secretaries such as Rashid Vatavat, Montajab Aldin Badi Joveini and Bahadin Baghdadi were appeared and also Persian translators (who knew Arabic language) were applied in courts of Baghdad. Two collections of courtly letters have been remained in correspondence of Rashid Aldin Vatavat and Baha‘adin Kharazmi, letter writers in dynasty of Khwrazmshah. The second collection is called Altavasol Ela Altarasol and some indications have been written about writing in its introduction. Both collections that have been remarkable
patterns in their own ages are representative of all arts and rhythmization with verbiage, prolongation, and complexity and if some historical information and indications related to official systems were not inferred from them, the reader would see a perfect model of pointless statements and corruption of composition. Although some historical documents are obtained from such collections and some other letters and they completed original texts and contracts, such documents have some advantages on their own and some socio-historical points can be clarified by deriving, formulating, and setting such collections. Writings of Rashidi attributed to Khajeh Rashid Aldin Fazlolah, famous minister of Mongolia, were collected by the command of his son, Ghiyas Aldin Mohammad and they include Sultani, Akhavani and personal letters and they are based on commemoration of scientists, mystics, needy people and they indicate his benevolence and ambition. In addition to historical advantages related to the events of that age, it is an interesting model of literal prose in Mongolian age. Also in writings of Jalal Aldin, the writer of Masnavi, although some part of it includes some personal things, approximately all of it is based on the prose of Altavasol Ela Altarasol and its Akhavaniat includes mystic and moral advantages. In Persian prose, titles of letters entered courtly letters and correspondence from the fifth century and they became very diverse in the sixth and seventh centuries. Single titles that were used mostly in the fifth century were replaced with long and rhythmic compounds and a special title was appeared for each courtly occupations and positions and they were derived from Arabic correspondence or they were combined and integrated like Arabic correspondence such that the first principle of correspondence was allocated to Sultaniat and even Akhavaniat. In late seventh century and early eighth century, it reached a place where most writings had their own titles. In Timurid period, Persian prose was collapsed and Turkish language became prevalent and literal centers in Khorasan and Iraq were lost. A change was occurred in historical trend of letter writing in Persian language in late seventh century and early eighth century. Titles and epithets were increasingly expanded that tightened the place of original things and they reduced speech’s charm and power of meaning (Khatibi, 2007, 323 and 324). This issue continued due to terrible events occurred in Iran. In Timurid period that was started from 782 (lunar year) and finished in 907, Persian prose was collapsed and literal centers and courts that supported Persian language were destroyed in Khorasan and Iraq. Masters of language and literature were destroyed and Persian prose lost its credit regarding language and thought. Among writers of this age, most of them used the old tradition and liked complex composition but others mostly paid attention to rhythmic prose and historical texts such as Zafarnamah of Sharf aldin Ali Yazdi were written by courtly secretaries. Regarding artificial letters in this age, the prefaces of the books should not be forgotten that were written by compilers in a different form and the best example is the preface of Habib Alseir. Even in this age, mystics were interested in rhythmic and good writings and the best example is Javaher Alasrar written by Kamal Aldin Hossein Khwarazmi. It is the illustration of Molana’s Masnavi and it is closed to rhythmic prose (Safa, 1992, Pp 468 and 469). In these periods, political and courtly affairs were done forcefully via sword not pens and courtly secretaries were only able to write threatening letters to insubordinates in different
regions or they wrote the command of government and sometimes friendly letters from Iranian kings to other Sultans. In these cases, meanings were short and phraseology was extensive. The style of courtly writing influenced in all affairs. Secretaries of local authorities tried to add titles and epithets and overtook from each other in verbiage (the first congress of Iranian writers, 1978, P 132). This status continued until Qajar dynasty. The features of prose in Safavid period was as same as Timurid period and in spite of changes occurred due to Vogho school, Isfahani school and Indian style in poetry, the prose of literal and historical books and letters was continued without any change even they were more verbose. Of course, there were some exceptions. For example, some writings remained from Shahrokh age were better due to interest of Timurid secretaries and ministers in Harat in the ninth century but the style was not dominant rather it occurred rarely.

Conclusion
the signs of writing in Iran dated back to 600 years BC during Achaemenid dynasty but formulation of Persian letter writing was started in Ghaznavid period and it became perfect in Seljukian age and it became more stable in Safavid period by going beyond national borders in India and Asia Minor. In Qajar dynasty, it was seen several times in commands, treaties, and correspondences. Letter writing in Iran was very prevalent before Islam and according to old researchers and historians; this type of writing was very famous due to its special condition and technical codes such that it was simulated in Islamic period via translation and played special role in development of Arab correspondence. From the establishment of Iranian governments to early fifth century, letters were written in Arabic language and formal and courtly correspondence was written in Arabic. This language even was used in correspondence between kings and heads of armies and ministers. Translation of courtly prose into Persian caused formulation of rules and principles for writing Persian letters and some conditions and limitations were determined for the writers resulting in development of Persian prose. Therefore letter writers such as Bounasr Moshkan, Abolfazl Beihaghi were appeared.
References

- Emami, Abolghasem (translator), 1990, translation of Tajarob Alomam maskouyeh Razi, Tehran, Sorosh publication
- Anvari, Hassan, 2002, the great culture of speech, Tehran, theird volume, Sokhan publication
- Hor Amoli, Mohammad Ibn Hassan, 1391 (lunar year), Vasa’el Alshitte, the research of Abdolrahim Rabani Shirazi, 12th volume, Beirut, Dorol Ahy Alatarath (the hadith is ours)
- Khatibi, Hossein, 2007, art of prose in Persian literature, second edition, Tehran, Zavar publication
- Khansari, Agha Jamal, corrected by Mirjalal Aldi Mohadeth Armavi, Ghorar Alhekam and Dorar Alhekam with Persian description, 1st volume, publication of Tehran university
- Encyclopedia of Persian literature, culture of Persian literature, 1997, supervised by Hassan Anousheh, publication organization of ministry of Islamic culture and guidance
- Daneshpajuh Manouchehr, 1998, trend of letter writing in Persian literature, publication of university of Allameh Tabatabaee
- Safa, Zabihollah, 1992, history of literature in Iran, five volumes, Tehran, Ferdowsi publications
- Safa, Zabihollah, 1993, treasure of speech, Tehran, Ghoghnous publication
- Allameh Majlesi, 1403 (lunar year), Bahar Alanvar, 41st volume, Dar Alkotob
- Ghazvini, Mohammad, 1934, 20 papers, Tehran
- the first congress of Iranina writers, July 1946, Bina, 1978
- Nezami Arouzi Samarghandi, corrected by Allameh Mohammad Ghazvini, 1996, Four articles