History of Literature in the 4th century

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Abstract

After Arabs‘ triumph against Iranian in the 21 A.H and the establishment of their culture and literature in Iran, enthusiasm was critically suppressed in Persian poetic and literature and on the other hand, Islamic Messages and divine aspects of Quran caused Iranian scholars’ activities to be spent on creating priceless works in Arab language and literature. However, Iranian by accepting the Holy Islam and sustaining Arabs’ government pressure, biasedly sought to maintain Persian language and culture which is the focus of this study. Qualification of Iranian scholars, their resistance against Arabs and obtaining gradual power and valuable effort for enhancement and maintenance of Persian language are honors for this country.

Ya'qublaith Saffari in 259 A.H was the precursor to maintain and revive the Persian language, Saffarid and Samanid empire caused its development and Sultan Mahmud encouraged poets to compose Persian poems. Scholars like Ferdowsi put their effort on nourishing and maintaining this language. This effort led the 4th century to gain stance in developing Persian language and culture. In this study we will find that if scientific, literary and cultural works of Iran had not been vanished away due to Arabs‘ invasion, and Holy Islam had been accepted by Iran empire by appropriate and peaceful policy, today, Iran would have been the greatest empire in the world that had Islam religion, cultural and scientific supremacy in its own qualified society.

Keywords: poem, Islam, Saffarid dynasty, Samanid Empire, the 4th century.
Introduction
In every period in history, poets and writers are the ones who record historical, social and literary situation of their society. Obviously, what has happened before and what is happening at their own age affect their works. As we can say, these works are reflexive images of each society’s culture and literature. This is why Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh is considered as an epic masterpiece which was originated from a noble man’s genius in Khorasan in Samanid empire (4th century) and was presented in Ghaznavid empire. So, for understanding the reasons of changes and milestones in the literature of a society, we have to essentially analyze events of different historical ages and political, religious, social and scientific situation of that society. Two great wars had significant impacts on Iran’s culture and caused a great change in Iran’s literature. First, Alexander of Maqduni’s invasion and second, Arab’s invasion for propagation of the Holy Islam. These two invasions, divided Iran’s culture and literature into three important era:

1- The ancient era
2- The middle era
3- The new era

Achaemenid Empire is the ancient era. This period collapsed by their failure against Alexander in 331 B.C. The middle era includes 331 B.C to the beginning of Ya’qub ibn al-Layth al-Saffar’s dominion (867 anno domini, equal to 259 A.H) which contains Alexander, Seleucid, Parthian, Sasanid, Arab and Tahirid semi-independent Empires. The new era of Iran contains the beginning of Ya’qub’s empire until the current age. Samanid dynasty defeated Saffarid and started governing in Iran in 279 A.H. They were overcome by Ghaznavid empire in 389 A.H. Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, the first Ghaznavid king, ruled from 389 to 420 A.H. Hence, the subject of this study, history of literature in the 4th century, is conducted over the effects and the government of Samanid and Ghaznavid dynasty.

Considering the point that literature in every period of time firstly is affected by and based on previous culture and literature, it seems necessary to look a brief glance at literature before the 4th century to become familiar with the foundation of past literature.

Literature in ancient Iran
About 5000 years B.C , in a region between south Russia and north Caucasus, there lived a nation whose language was Hindi and European. In the middle of the second millennium B.C , a group of people which called themselves Aryan and were consisted of two groups, Medes and Persis left this nation and occupied a land and named it Iran whose mythical description has remained in Pishdadian and Kianian dynasty part, in Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh.(Abolqasemi, 1378: 17)

In 550 B.C, Persis and Medes fought with each other and Medes were defeated. Cyrus who was the descendant of Persis, took the whole Iran and amalgamated Medes and Persis group and named himself The king of Iran and The King of Kings. Therefore, the great Empire of Iran named Achaemenid began from 550 B.C.(Zarrinkoob, 1378: 103-108)
Achaemenid’s religion and language were zoroasterian and Saka, Median, ancient Persian and Avestan. Since 539 B.C that Cyrus conquered Babylonia (Mesopotamia), Aramaic alphabet (Sumeria Cuneiform script) was chosen as their alphabet.(Abolqasemi, 1378: 19-22)

Poem in Achaemenid Empire

The most important poetic works of ancient Iran and Achaemenid empire are in Avesta. Avesta consists eight parts of which the first two parts are “Yasnha” and “Yashtha”. “Gatha” in Yasnha part contains Zaroaster’s poems which are the oldest poems in written works of ancient Iran. Poems in Yashtha parts praise The God of zoroasterian.(the same, 7-32)

Literature in the middle Iran era

In this era Alexander and Seleucid dynasty till 250 B.C ruled 10 and 62 years respectively. Greek alphabet and language became widely used. After Seleucid, Parthian Empire was established and continued about 475 years (from 247 B.C to 226 A.D). The commercial path between Iran and china named “Silk Road” was made accessible in this era.(Sobhani,1388:52-55) Also Avestan and Parthian language gradually became prevalent beside Greek language and Aramaic cuneiform alphabet was substituted by Parthian.(Abolqasemi,1378: 65-66)

Poem in Parthian empire

Drakht-i-Asurig is a conversation in verse form between a goat and date in Parthian Pahlavi language.(Abolqasemi,1383: 101)

After Parthian, Sasanid empire ascended the throne with Ardshir Babakan’s rise to power and established the greatest empire after Achaemenid and ruled from 224 to 651 A.D (21 A.H).(Sobhani,1388: 57-58)

Language in Sasanid empire was called Middle Persian or south Pahlavi or Sasanid Pahlavi which has its root in ancient Persian of in Achaemenid Empire.(Dehkhoda,1338: 570-571)

Alphabet in this era was Middle Persian which was originated from Aramaic.(Abolqasemi,1378: 72)

Poem In Sasanid era

In this period, poem of zaroasterians were similar to Ferdowsi’s and Saadi’s and poems of Manichaeisms were similar to Attar, Moulana and Hafiz poems.(Abolqasemi,1383: 165)

BahramGoor , one of the Sasanid kings (420-438 A.D.) , is known as the first Persian poet. This verse is cited to be his :

منم ان پیل دمان و منم ان شیر یله       نام من بهرام گور و کنیتم بوجیله

Nam man behram gor va konitem bojileh
Manam an pil daman o manam an shir yaleh
Name man Bahram e Goor o konyatam Bojabaleh(Safa,1392: 171)

I’m like an angry elephant and a free lion
My name is Baharam e Goor and my nickname is Bojabaleh

Arabs’ invasion

Arabs invaded Iran when Yazdegerd III was the king in 21 A.H equal to 651 A.D. Iranians defeated badly and surrendered to Islam.(Sobhani, 1388: 73)

Arab and Arabs war happened at several different times. The last one was the Battle of Nahavand where Yazgerdhad retreated. Victory in this war caused Muslim armies complete hegemony over Iran. Arabs called this "Victory of Victories". (Zarrinkoob,1378: 78)

The reason of Arabs’ victory against the great Sasanid empire

Iran was a wide and great country at the time of Arabs’ invasion. Although there was some turbulence in the governing system but its population was high. Also, Iran was military experienced and powerful. So, what caused their defeat against Arabs who were out of Iranians’ league?
The answer is in this war Iran was not confronted with Arab nation, but it was faced with an anti-class discrimination world view and ideology force. The holy prophet had said several times that I am a human like you and there is no difference between a black Habashi and a Gharashiseyyed but by continence and piety while Iran’s society was a strange hierarchical one that allocated welfare, education, development and status Only to lords and magus. For example, son of a shoemaker or a worker had no right of education and social growth. These problems led to people’s discontent and discouraged them to fight against Arabs. So, Islam attracted their hearts in a way that 4000 Daylamite soldiers decided to embrace Islam in the Battle of al-Qādisiyyah near the Caspian sea.(Motahhri,1362: 76-82)

Literature after Arabs victory until Ya'qubibn al-Layth al-Saffar empire

Beside Persian, Arabic language and literature became commonly used Since this period to the end of the middle era (the beginning of Ya'qubibn al-Layth al-Saffar empire). In the period between Sasanid downfall and Ya'qubLayth Empire, scientific language of Zaroasterian, Manichaeism and Muslim Iranian was middle Persian and Arabic respectively. The letter allowed lots of Arabic words to enter Persian.(Abolqasemi,1378: 103)
Arab literature had a great impact on Persian language and literature for two reasons. First, because of Arab rule and second Iranian found out that Arabic is not only language of a nation but also language of a divine book named Quran belonging to the world. Many scholars after profound studies found Holy Quran to be the source of literature beauties. So, Iranian scholars started to revive Arabic language, syntax and different rhetoric and literature meanings which Arabs didn’t do themselves (Motahari 1362, 90-93).

After Islam’s victory, its impact became greater. This increasing impact can be observed by comparison of Rudaki and Ferdowsi’s works with Mulana, Saadi, Nizami Ganjavi, Hafiz and Jami’s. Although Tahirid and Buyid dynasty sought Iran to be a politically independent country, they didn’t intended to revive Avesta. Reversely they tried to propagate Islamic truth. (the same, 83-83)

One of the most important reasons why Iranian were inclined toward Bani Hashim-whether of Abu Talib or of Abbas house- was that Bani Umayya was adversely against non-Arabs especially Iranian and this caused lots of wars. (Safa, 1392:12)

Bani Umayya’s tyranny led to Abu Muslim Khorasani’s rebellion that toppled their dynasty and help Abbasid to serve as Caliph who were the Messenger’s descendent (Sobhani, 1388:73).

Tahir Dhul-Yamnayn became the governor of all lands in the east of Baghdad and established the first semi-independent empire in Iran and continued to 259 A.H.. (the same, 76)

**Literature in new Iran era**

Iran became literary independent since Ya’qub Layth commanded poets to compose poem in Persian. This evolution was the initiator of Persian culture, language and literature independence. Iranian increased their independency while embracing the Holy Islam and its divine messages with their heart at the same time.

**Literature from Ya’qub Layth to Samanid empire (259-279 A.H)**

Ya’qub Layth was Áyyār who were warrior, brave, generous men and kind to inferior people. He conquered Khorasan after many years of repulsing enemies in 259 A.H.. Then, He defeated Muhammad ibn Tahir, the last of Tahirid dynasty, took the government of Khorasan, Tabaristan, Gorgan, Fars, Kerman, Send, India, Shorteh of Baghdad and established a very powerful empire in Iran. Ya’qub was in favor of Iranian customs, traditions and language and ordered poets to write about different subjects in Persian verse form. This caused Persian poem to become prevalent in eastern courts. The establishment of Saffarid empire and emphasis on Persian language revived the national language. This process continued to the next empire, Samanid dynasty, and maintained Iranian to have their original language among other Muslim nations. (Safa, 1392: 38-40)
According to History of Sistan, “poets composed poems in Arabic as Ya’qub became the king, but he was not a scholar and didn’t understand. He said why it must be said when I don’t understand? So, Muhamad Segsi, Ya’qub’s secretary, composed Persian poems. So, that was the beginning of revolution in Dari language. However, there is no proof which can show that Tahirid concerned about Dari literature.”(Bahar,1337: 234)

**Literature from the beginning of Samanid empire (279 A.H.) to the 4th century**

Samanid dynasty (874- 999 A.D.) chose Bukhara as their capital and widened their kingdom to the far south. Unlike Tahirid, they didn’t concern about their originality and were subjugated to Arabs. They didn’t disobeyed Arabs and Islamic instructions but on the other hand paid much attention to Persian language and literature. As they were opposed to Arabic works and were in favor of works which were written in Dari language. Hence, new Persian became popular and also smaller empires helped in its development at the same time.(Izadi, 1374: 178-179)

**Pahlavi literature:** as Muslims conquered Iran, Middle Persian (Pahlavi) remained as the formal, literary and religious dialect of Iranian and continued several centuries. Many books were written in this language translated to Arabic and Persian Dari.(Safa,1392: 131)

**Pahlavi books:** these books were written and available in the first three Hijri centuries, and also may still exist:
Denkard, Bundahishn, Dātastān ī dēnī, Book of Arda Viraf, Shikand-gumanic Vichar, Zat-sparam, Shāyast ne-Shāyast, Matikan Ebalish, Atorpat Marspandan (the same, 135-139)

Different dialects in Sasanid empire were used for many years. Khawrezmain and Sogdian were two important dialects in this period. Due to Arab’s illiteracy and unfamiliarity with financial and administrative techniques, Iranian coins were struck in middle Persian and with the same picture for about forth 25 years of the first century. Also accounting and office works were controlled and managed by using Middle Persian. Correspondence and Striking coins in Arabic began since Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan’s empire (65-86 A.H).(Bahar, 1337: 229)

At the beginning on Islam, there were Only 17 individuals who could read and write, In all over the Arabian Peninsula. Arabs had no alphabet and writing at that time.(Esfahani, 1378: 13)

**Persian Dari language**

Dari is the most popular dialect remained from Sasanid empire.
This dialect was the main and prevalent language in Sasanid empire. After Islam’s victory, Dari remained as current language beside Arabic with other names like Persian Dari, Persian or Farsi language.
Different poems have been composed in different dialects of Sasanid empire in first, second and third centuries:
Vers of Atashkadeh karkoy, Yazid ibn Mafarraq’s poem about Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad or Balkhian poem and poets like Mohammad ibn vaseif the secretary of ya'qub Layth and the other poets from 1,2 and 3 century like Hanzila Badghisi and the others. (Safa, 1393:140 -150)

The first Persian poets are BahramGor, Abul Abbas Marvazi, Ya’qubLayth’s son, Abu Hafaz sogadi and some others. (the same, 176)

Samanid empire defeated the great Safarid. It was the third mighty empire in Islamic age that conquered Balkh, Sistan, Khorasan, Gorgan, Tabaristan and Ray beside Transoxiana and ruled one hundred years (279-389 A.H). (sobhani, 1388: 87)

**History of literature in the 4th century A.H.**

The 4th century is part of new literature era of Iran. It began with Samanid empire in Transoxiana and Khorasan and ended with the domination of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni. Both empires considerably encouraged and supported poets and writers. Although this century was the initiation of the development of Persian poem and literature but contains lots of great poets like Rudaki, Ferdowsi, Unsuri with valuable poems. This point casts light on forgotten poets in the first, second and third centuries.

Eminent and great poets caused this century to be one of the most important literature era in Iran. Poets were considered as rich individuals for the prizes bestowed upon them. Ferdowsi was neglected by Sultan Mahmud because of social and political issues that cannot be explained here.

**History of Pahlavi language and alphabet in the 4th century**

It seems that Pahlavi language was being used until Mongol invasion and the early years of 7th century but since it was more complex than Arabic, unlike Dari, it gradually weakened. (Bahar, 1337:145-147)

**History of Dari language in different areas in the 4th century**

Dari language is in the same continuum of Pahlavi and ancient Persian which is derived directly from Avestan (Izadi: 1374, 34).

Dari was the language of court in Sasanid empire and was widely used beside Pahlavi. Because of its simplicity, expressiveness and easy articulating, It gradually became prevalent and spoken by ordinary people. So, Pahlavi which was more difficult gradually became abandoned.

In Khosrow Anushiravan Sasanid rule(531-579 A.D), Calila e Dimna was brought from India by Borzuuya and was translated from Sanskrit into Pahlavi. This shows the prevalence of pahlavi language at that time.

Jahez in Almahasen va alazdad quoted from Anushiravan:

"هَرَكْ رَوُذْ جَرَذُ ، وَ هَرَكْ خَسَنْخَوَابُ بِينَاً"

(Hark ravaz charaz, VA hark khospaz khab binaz.)
It seems to writers of essay:
Everyone who tries and make effort would see the desired result
And that one who sleeps and is lazy would earn nothing more than illusion
This is in Dari language which shows this language was used in court of Sasanid era and it is ancient language. And also Tabari history quoted from Ismael ibn Amer that who was one of the commanders of Khorasan followed Marvan ibn Mohammad the last Omavi Caliph and reached him in Egypt and Marvan was killed in that war and then Ismael told:
"يا اهل خراسان مردمان خانه بیابان هستید پرخزید"
Ya ahl e Khorasan Mardoman e Khaneh biaban hastid barkhizid
It seems to writers of essay:
Oh people of Khorasan! You are homeless and are living in desert.
Raise and make yourself ready.
This is also in dari and shows the prevalence of Dari language at that time.
Also the oldest verse like Hanzale badqeis's poem and the others and sorowd karkoy also the oldest books remained from Islamic age like Mansuri Shahname (before second half of the 4th century), Tabari History (352 A.H.) and Garshaspxname are written in Dari.(Bahar,1337:20-22)

History of empires in the 4th century

Considering Samanid empire(279-389 A.H), we can say in about 90% of the 4th century, Iran was under the control of Samanid empire and the remained 10% is for Sultan Mahmud’s empire.
According to what was said about Islam’s victory in Iran, it can be concluded that the 4th century is the time of Iranian empire. This era is the golden age of Islamic civilization, glories of Iranian dominations, appearance of prolific noble scholars and poets and their works.(Safa, 1392: 197)
Samani defeated Saffarid dynasty. It was the third mighty Iranian empire in Islamic age that conquered Balkh, Sistan, Khorasan, Gorgan, Tabaristan and Ray beside Transoxiana and ruled one hundred years(279-389 A.H.).(Sobhani,1388:87)
The 4th century was also the age of Abbasid dynasty’s failure and domination of Iranian and Turk servants. The domination of Turk servants began since Moatasim’s empire. As Abbasid caliphs became weaker, Iranian enhanced their independency.(Safa,1392:198)
Many historians believe that Samanid empire declined because of young kings, disagreements among ministers and Turk’s and women’s inferences in administrative tasks.(the same 206)
In last years of Samanid empire Sultan Mahmud rebelled in 389 A.H and defeated the Samanid empire and established Ghaznavid empire. Sultan Mahmud is one of the great Iran kings. He had several victories in India and Iran. He passed away in 420 A.H and his sons became new kings.(the same , 215-216)

Literary development in Samanid empire
Samanid kings were role models in training, encouraging and revering poets and writers and this was due to established discipline, stability and equilibrium. In Samanid court, there were several ministers that managed all of administrative tasks, ministers like Jihani, Bal'am and others were great scholars themselves. Their name have been cited laudably in the books. (Roushan, 1380:35)

Samanid dynasty is important in the history because they were originally Iranian and were interested in their nationality. They tried to maintain their customs and traditions and did much help to Persian language and literature. This caused rapid development of Persian literature appearance of noble scholars like Balkhi, Rudaki, Daghighi. However, later referred to be in Ghaznavid empire, Ferdousi’s Shahnameh was started in this time. (Sobhani, 1388:87-88)

Samanid empire was the initiation of literary development and is considered as one of the most important empires in Iran. Rudaki, Ferdowsi and Unsuri have lived in this age. Some of ministers in this dynasty were poets and writers like Bal’aami and Shams-al-Maa’li. (the same, 105).

The oldest texts have remained from this period like Abu Mansuri’s Shahnameh, translation of History of Tabari (356 A.H) and other books. (Bahar 1337:235-237)

Another point to be noted is the existence of different religion and sects. Different People like Shia, Sunni, zaroasterian and Christian lived in Samanid empire peacefully. (Sobhani, 1388:207)

Sultan Mahmud added some parts of India to his kingdom and thus Dari made its way to India. (Abolqasemi, 1386:104)

Muhammad Iqbal Lahuri, ideologically known as the founder of Pakistan, is one of the greatest Persian poets. Lots of Indian and Pakistani poets cite poem in Dari. This caused creation of language called Urdu which is Pakistan’s official language. (the same, 104)

**Persian literature in Sultan Mahmud Empire**

With Samanid empire’s collapse, ideological revolution of Persian literature declined. Samanid empire divided into Turk Ilak empire of Samarkand and Ghaznavid empire of Zabulistan. Although Sultan Mahmud encouraged poets to praise him in their poems, he was fanatic about religion and was not in favor of reviving ancient works. In the early years of Sultan Mahmud’s empire Farsi language was commonly used. But after his deposal, Persian written works were translated into Arabic. Inclination toward Arabic language started gradually. It seems if it hadn’t been the case, books of Avicenna, Zechariah, Al-Biruni and other scholars would have been written in Persian. However, some other works like Tarikh-i Bayhaqi, Sistan’s History, Qabusnama, Altafhim and other books were written in Persian. (the same, 168-169).
Features of Persian poem in the 4th century

Large number of poets, their virtuosity, abundance of poems,(Rudaki and Shahname are estimated to have about 1300 thousand and 60 thousand verses respectively), simplicity of writings, change in rhyme and rhythm, novelty of subjects, descriptions and similes, reflection of social, military and political situation and even narration of poets’ lives are some features of poems in this period.(Sobhani,1388:106-107)

Types and subjects of Persian poem and virtuosity of poets in 4th century

Poets in the 4th century cited poems in different forms like Masnavi, Qasida, Ghazal, Mosammat, refrain, Rubaei, Do-bayti and piece. Mosammat and refrain, were used in last years and its inventor was Manuchehri.(the same,107).
The 4th century is the most important one for epic writings. Ferdowsi, one of the best epic poets, lived in this period. Masudi Marvzi and Daqiqi’s Shahname were written in this century.(the same,107).
Masudi. Daqiqi and Ferdowsi’s Shahname were written in the early, middle and last years of 4th century.(safa,1392:366).
Rudaki and Shahidi are two popular poets of this century. Unsuri has appraised Rudaki’s Ghazals and Farrukhi believed that Shahidi’s ones are pleasant. Daqiqi is the first one that has successively written pleasant Ghazals. Actually Daqiqi and Rudaki were poets of Samanid court and Unsuri, Farrukhi and Manuchehri were great poets of Ghaznavid court. Poems of Unsuri and especiallyFarrukhi about Sultan Mahmud was similar to epic poems. Rudaki was the first one that wrote complete Qasida with prayer and appraise. Homiletics began with Kasai Marvzi. Narratives, storytelling, mentioning allegories were also prevalent in this century. Beside Calila e Dimna, the first allegorical book in this century, Rudaki wrote six other books in different rhythmic forms.(the same,366-369).
Yusuf and Zulaikha Masnavi is ascribed to Abu al Muayyad Balkhi And Aifarinnname to Abu Shakur Balkhi and the other masnavis are ascribed to Unsuri.

Names of some of poets of 4th century

These are the names of some poets of the 4th century:
1-Masudi Marvzi 2- Rudaki 3-Shahid Balkhi 4-Mosaa’bi

Result and conclusion

Subjects in this study which analyzed changes and developments of a society’s literature, language and empires and historical events shows that poem and literature which is a
written arts, emerges when the society’s situation is appropriate and receptive. Appearance of 57 renowned poets in the 4th century shows that certainly there were other great poets in the past centuries. They have not introduced themselves because of inappropriate situation. Being a poet is not a job but it’s an endowment. So it’s impossible to train so many poets in a century because poetics is an art and art is an innate gift not an acquired skill. So it’s obvious that in the first, second, third and also past centuries there were many poets but the society was not quite ready to receive their works. Even it seems incorrect to say Bahram Gor was the first Persian poet. The truth is that media were able to report and transfer the fact that Bahram was a poet and a Samanid king.

Poem has existed in all ages by advent of societies. Preparing proper situation can only encourage poets to create artworks but it has nothing to do with creating the talent of writing poem. This is true for art as a whole.

In the end, it can be concluded that if scientific, literary and cultural works of Iran had not been vanished away due to Arabs’ invasion and Holy Islam had been accepted by Iran empire by appropriate and peaceful policy, today, Iran would have been the greatest empire in the world that had Islam religion, cultural and scientific supremacy in its own qualified society.
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