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Unit- I

**Topic- (i) History of Modern Persian Literature Prose in
Iran**

Online Class Materials

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History of Modern Persian Literature Prose

The Persian prose, although it has attracted less attention than Persian poetry, is not negligible. In its early development it was subject to certain limitations. After the Muslim conquest of Persia, the Arabic language enjoyed enormous prestige and scholars wrote their learned books in Arabic language.

The earliest specimen of prose works in Persian which have been hitherto known to us dated from the beginning of the 4th century A.H., even before that some Persian prose works are said to have existed in the second century A.H. for a few such works are mentioned by the Arab writers in Iran in their Arabic works. Thus for instance an inhabitant of Nishapur named Bah Afrin son of Mah Farvardin who before the establishment of the Abbasid dynasty in 122 A.H. had invented a new religion, wrote a book in Persian prose in which he had discussed the seven prayers (Haft Namaz). After that a physician of the same period called **Manka** translated into Persian a Sanskrit work on Astronomy entitled **Kitab-i-Shana** and **Abu-Hatim-Balkhi** wrote that book in Persian script for Yahya Barmaki between 170-177 A.H. Besides these two books no other instances are still found out, nor is there available any specimen of Persian Prose work belonging to third century A.H.

At the very outset of the nineteenth century the political and social contacts of Persia with the Western Europe especially Russia had its profound effects in stimulating the minds of progressive thinkers of Iran. They not only encouraged the movement of reforms in Persian prose literature but introduced a simple and easily intelligible Persian in their writings.

The first step in the modernization of prose-literature was taken up by the two of the greatest Prime-Ministers Qaim-Maqam Farahani (1779-1835) and Mirza Taqi Khan, the Amir Kabir who tried to simplify the style of official correspondence. As their position in political and literary circle was exalted, their writings soon set fashion for the younger generation. After these two distinguished ministers the famous innovator Malkom Khan is considered as the real fore-runner of modern Persian prose. He was a prolific essayist mostly on political and social issues. The ease and simplicity of his style stirred the readers of his time. A host of young progressive authors, especially journalists regarded his style as the model of effective writing.

By the last decade of the Nineteenth century a simple unadorned style of writing had established its place among the writers. It reached a fuller expression when political movements demanded some sort of mass media such as news papers and journals. These news papers particularly the weekly Akhter (1875-1897) founded by Agha Mohammad Tahir and Qanun (1890-93) edited by Mirza Molkam Khan contributed to the establishment of new style of writings. These and other papers along with a few journals published in simple everyday language perfected the new literary form and became the media for its further improvement.

In this connection it should be noted that the translation of books from European languages inspired another literary movement which contributed to the development of literary plot and themes in simple prose. Thus the writing of travel books, establishment of printing press and the translation of Western literary and scientific works prepared the language for the expression of social events, short stories and dramas. The novels *Siyahat Nama-yi Ibrahim Beg* (1888) by Haji Zainul Abedin of Maragha (d. 1910) *Kitab-i-Ahmad* by Abdur Rahim Najjarzada Talibuff written in simple Persian greatly influenced the later generation of prose writers. The authors have recorded the arbitrary power and evil practices of the courtiers of shah, ministers and senior officials, the backwardness of the country, absence of law, justice and order, deteriorating condition of education, disruption of commerce, lack of health services and so on, all in easy and everyday language. The purpose in writing these books was to awaken people's mind and to make them aware of their rights.

Mirza Habib of Isfahan was one of those Persian writers who dared to break away from the old traditional style of Ornate composition and to write in the simple medium of the spoken word. His book "Haji Baba" (the translation of the 'Adventures of Haji Baba of Isfahan') was one of the most successful experiments in the new trend of prose writing and it is acclaimed as one of the best compositions of the present century. "The writer" remarked Md Taqi Bahar, "is one of the most powerful, precise and realistic writers of this age". The book, socially and politically had also a great influence on the awakening of the people of Iran. The "Charand Parand" a series of satirical articles of Ali Akbar Dihkhuda (1879-1956) written in a lively colloquial language not only introduced a new model of writing which was enthusiastically adopted by the future writers.