

## The Emergence of the Political Subject and Prison Aesthetics with an Emphasis on Shamlou's Poetry

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### Abstract

*Habsiyeh*, a poem written in prison, is a kind in which the poet turns his experience of confinement and torture into artistic experience; however, the representation of the prison in *habsiyeh* is not the same in pre-modern and modern poetry. The pre-modern *habsiyeh*-poet is more of a fatalist and considers the current situation as predestined. Therefore, he identifies his agency with the situation he describes. Although *habsiyeh* is basically a type of protest literature, it is only in contemporary poetry that it is associated with the political subject. In contemporary poetry, the concept of prison has manifested itself in a different way with discursive implications and disjunctions. With the formation of the national state and the birth of the prison in the modern world, the concept of prison changes from a religious and individual matter to a political one. The history of the evolution of the institution of prison in the modern state is related to the discursive formation of the prison in contemporary poetry. The most important research hypothesis of the present paper is that the historical emergence of the political subject has led to the appearance of prison aesthetics. Therefore, using a genealogical approach, this article has followed two aims: The historical connection between the developments of the prison as an institution in modern Iran, and the representation of ideas and metaphors on the prison in Shamlou's poetry as an example of a dissident poet. As the institution of prison has become more widespread and complex in modern states, prison metaphors have been overflowed with *habsiyeh*-poetry in protest literature. In Shamlou's poetry, protest literature is related to the subjectivity of the poet. He does not limit the concept of prison to *habsiyeh*; rather, he connects prison metaphors to social symbolism. In other words, in Shamlou's poetry, the concept of liberty has, in a complex way, extended the prison metaphors to poems other than *habsiyeh* as well.

**Key Words:** Prison Literature, Subjectivity, Political Subject, Prison Aesthetics, Protest Literature, Ahmad Shamlou

### Extended Abstract

#### 1. Introduction

*Habsiyeh* (prison poetry) is a kind of poetry written in prison about the poet's experience of confinement and torture turned into a form of aesthetic

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experience. The representation of prison life is not the same in pre-modern and post-modern prison poetry. The concept of prison has a historical concept hidden in it, highlighting its metaphorical quality. The pre-modern poet Masoud Sa'd uses metaphors rooted in emotions that reveal the discursive structure of a period. His relationship with the world and power can be identified through these metaphors as he has created many images of his relationship with fate, luck, fortune and the like. He shows his agency through these descriptions.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The pre-modern poet believes in unchangeable structures; however, the modern poet understands prison poetry in a different way. While in the pre-modern world, prison poetry is mostly a kind of spiritual and psychological expression and projection, in the modern world it focuses on subjects such as freedom, homeland, oppression, resistance and the like. In the present study, Ahmad Shamlou's poetry is examined in order to explain the relationship between the emergence of the political subject in modern Persian poetry and the emergence of prison aesthetics.

## **3. Methodology**

The present study adopts the genealogical approach in order to examine the relationship between the subjectivity of the poet and prison aesthetics. In other words, the selection of symbols in prison poetry by modern poets is an expression of their subjectivity.

## **4. Discussion and Analysis**

Prison poetry, of whatever type, is a form of protest literature. However, in contemporary poetry, prison poetry is connected with political individuals, and the concept of prison develops through discursive significations and discursive discontinuities. Shamlou expresses his protest in different ways. He creates subjects and images against political constructs. He, moreover, challenges the prevalent constructs in Persian poetry. Shamlou's subjectivity has turned his poetry into a kind of social construct. He turns poetry into a kind of political action and turns the political action into an aesthetic experience by connecting prison symbols with social symbolism. The contrast between freedom and prison in his poetry is both a source for metaphors and a means of constructing a heroic language to describe subjects that stand against power.

## **5. Conclusion**

Historical changes and the physical and institutional growth of prison in the Pahlavi era in Iran show that there is an association between the birth of

prison in the modern times and the prison discourse in contemporary poetry. When poets gain a kind of political subjectivity, the prison institution gets more complicated. Shamlou's poetry, which has a close association with social and political changes in Iran, has adequately represented changes in prison discourse and the relationship between political subjectivity and prison aesthetics.

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