

## Investigating Attitudes toward the City in Iranian Adolescent Poetry

Mahsa Momennasab, Ph.D. in Lyrical Literature; Shiraz University.

[momennasab.m@gmail.com](mailto:momennasab.m@gmail.com)

Mohammadhossein Karami, Ph.D.; Professor of Persian Language and  
Literature, Shiraz University

[mohamadhkarami@gmail.com](mailto:mohamadhkarami@gmail.com)

### Introduction

If we consider literature as an important tool in acculturation and interaction of human beings, and if we consider the city as the main context of human life in the contemporary era, we can detect the special role of literature in representing the facts and values of the contemporary urban societies in the works of poets and writers. Adolescent poetry as one of the achievements of contemporary literature can be a link between today's generation and the realities of today's world. The increasing expansion of mass communication devices, internet games, numerous social networks and countless satellite networks make the teenagers' lives and experiences wider and wider every day and expose them to a huge amount of colorful data in the shortest time.

Nowadays, over the course of a few years, we have experienced a generation gap equal to multiple generations in Iranian history; therefore,

the realities and the ideals of urban life should be presented in adolescent poetry as they are and as they should be in order to draw the readers' attention and make them familiar the world around them. Hence, it is important to investigate attitudes toward the city in adolescent poetry in order to identify poems with such contents and assess their correspondence with the perceptions of the readers.

### **Methodology and Review of Literature**

Using a statistical and descriptive-analytical approach along with library and documentary tools, this study deals with the approaches towards the city in adolescent poetry. From among the large number of children's and adolescents' poets, 15 poets who were most prolific and experienced and belonged to different generations were selected. Then, from among the works of each poet, one to five acclaimed poetry collections were selected. As a result, 63 poetry collections were selected based on the criteria of the time of their composition (from 1979 to 2012), the number of their reprints and the awards they received. Afterwards, notes were taken from signs that were somehow related with elements of urban life.

Apart from some short essays, there are only a few studies that focus on the relationship between the values of the contemporary life and children's and adolescents' literature; for example, some articles in volumes 45 and 46 of *The Journal of Children's and Adolescents' Literature*; as well as "The analysis of the urban environment and its

elements in children's and adolescents' fiction from 1991 to 2000" (Asadi & Hassanli, 2011: 33–60); and "Studying the urban environment and its elements in children's and adolescents' stories" (Pirsoufi & Hassanli, 2011: 1-30), in which urban elements are identified in a number of short and long stories of the 1970s. However, no articles or texts related to the subject of this study and focusing on the genre of poetry were found.

### **Discussion**

From among the 1026 poems in the 63 collections of adolescent poetry investigated in this study, 209 poems featured at least one element of the city or the urban life, either independently or in the form of comparison between urban and rural life, or in the combination of nature and the city.

Elements of the urban environment can be found more in the works of some poets, such as Abbas Tarbon (26 times), Erfan Nazar-Ahari (18 times), Rudabeh Hamzaei (13 times) and Boyouk Maleki (18 times).

The main theme is the bitterness toward the city and the obvious conflict between the city and the village and nature. There are several reasons for this conflict and alienation from the urban environment: differences in the structure of urban and rural life; the remembrance of sweet childhood memories in the village; the demolition of old buildings and houses in the city; the speed, the hustle and bustle, and the anxiety of urban environment.

The elements and the instruments of the contemporary society comprise some of the images of adolescent poetry. Some of these

instruments are technologies and machines with which we are constantly dealing in today's life; such as Pride (an Iranian brand of automobiles), Volkswagen and the highway (cf. Nazar-Ahari, 2007: 20), radio and news (cf. Mirzadeh, 2003: 60), bus (Tarbon, 2009B: 5-7; Lotf-Allah, 1995: 5-7; Mazinani, 1997), train (cf. Hamzei, 1997: 35), lights and electricity (Salehi, 1998: 26; Keshavarz, 1997B: 7; Kianoosh, 2000: 32-33) and cassette players (Shabani, 2001: 12).

Only a limited number of cities, from among numerous cities in Iran with diverse cultures, are mentioned in the poems; namely, Tehran (Shabani, 2001: 13), Ahvaz (Shabani, 1996: 20; Kianoosh, 2000: 100), Masouleh (Nazar-Ahari, 2008: 12-13), Khomein (Mirzadeh, 1995: 4) and Isfahan (Kianoosh, 1994: 162).

From among all the various occupations and organizations that are linked with the city, adolescent poets have paid attention only to a handful of persons: postman, street sweeper, potter, nurse, dentist, constructor, shoe-shiner, construction worker, factory worker, cigarette-seller, sugar-beet-seller dry-bread-gatherer, fruit- and vegetable-seller, peddler, teacher, florist and real estate agent.

### **Conclusion**

Findings show that in adolescent poetry, the city has been mainly associated with a negative attitude. Praising nature, despising the city and comparing the polluted atmosphere of the city with the natural beauties of the countryside are the main themes of the poems. These works narrate the

experiences of the poets' past lives with a stereotypically nostalgic view; therefore, they do not conform to the experiences of contemporary adolescents and cannot gain their attention.

Many modern urban elements are missing in the adolescent poetry of the AH 70s and AH 80s. Even if they are mentioned in some works by some poets, they do not display a change in their intellectual system of thought. With a few exceptions like Abbas Tarbon, Erfan Nazar-Ahari, Rudabeh Hamzaei, Iranian poets do not show a tendency toward a fresh look at urban life, and their innovations are limited to the level of language, without taking advantage of new expressive affordances of contemporary poetry.

**Keywords:** urban life, adolescent poetry, city and village, urban elements.

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