



Extended Abstract

DOI: 10.22099/JCLS.2025.50461.2049

Sociological Analysis of Children and Childhood in Sadegh Hedayat's Fictional Works

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Introduction

The concept of childhood as a sociocultural construct has undergone significant transformations throughout history. In modern contexts, this concept is understood as varying across cultures, each defining childhood according to its own social and cultural conditions. Through his diverse literary styles, Sadegh Hedayat offers a nuanced portrayal of children and childhood during the Pahlavi era. This study adopts a sociological lens to examine Hedayat's representation of childhood, exploring its intersections with the social, political, and cultural realities of the time. This research aims to elucidate the sociocultural positioning of children during the Pahlavi period and analyze how Hedayat's narratives represent childhood. The study addresses the following questions: How is childhood represented in Hedayat's works? What sociological patterns of childhood are identifiable in his stories? And how do these representations align with the sociopolitical and cultural dynamics of the era?

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Article Info: Received: 2024-07-22, **Accepted:** 2025-01-27



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Methodology

This study approaches the concept of childhood as a sociocultural construct, drawing on sociological theories and contextualizing them within the unique conditions of the Pahlavi era. It identifies recurring patterns of childhood in Hedayat's stories, including victimized children, orphaned children, rebellious children, innocent children, child brides, children as tools for income generation, children as symbols of generational continuity, favored children, and psychologically distressed children.

The methodology combines qualitative content analysis with an inductive approach. A close reading of Hedayat's texts facilitates the extraction and categorization of childhood-related themes, which are then analyzed within the study's sociological framework.

Discussion

Hedayat's fiction frequently portrays children as victims of poverty, social inequities, superstitions, and cultural issues. Socioeconomic hardships are a recurring theme, particularly in depictions of victimized children. For instance, in *Alaviyeh Khanom* (1943), child characters endure destitution, hunger, and illness, while *Asking for Forgiveness* (1932) presents an infant victimized by societal stigma and maternal jealousy tied to infertility. Abandoned children are another common motif, as seen in *The Woman Whose Husband Disappeared* (1933), where poverty and social shame lead parents to abandon their child.

In *Changal [Fork]* (1932), a naturalistic narrative, Hedayat explores the plight of orphaned children. Their father, an alcoholic, suffocates their mother, leaving the children to endure neglect and abuse at the hands of a stepmother, despite his physical presence.

Child marriage, reflecting the sociocultural norms of the time, is critically examined in works like *Alaviyeh Khanom*, where Esmat-Sadat is married off three times before she is at the age of twelve due to economic constraints. Similarly, in *Mohallel* (1932), a girl as young as eight or nine is sold into marriage for a bag of nuts and three tomans, symbolizing the commodification of childhood.

The instrumentalization of children for economic gain is another prevalent theme. In *Alaviyeh Khanom*, children are depicted as tools for eliciting sympathy and generating income. Hedayat also examines the intergenerational transmission of violence, as in *Changal*, where Ahmad replicates his father's actions by strangling his sister, reflecting naturalistic themes of hereditary determinism.

The theme of the "unlived childhood" appears in *The Blind Owl*, where a child dies before experiencing the full spectrum of childhood. The "favored child" archetype, characterized by excessive parental affection, is portrayed in *Haji Agha* (1945). Meanwhile, the rebellious child is explored in *The Blind Owl* and *Laleh*, and the archetype of the innocent child appears in *Whirlpool* (1932).

Conclusion

Hedayat's realist, naturalist, and surrealist narratives collectively portray childhood as a locus of vulnerability and suffering, often marked by systemic oppression and societal neglect. Even middle-class children, such as those in *Whirlpool*, are not exempt from this suffering, as they often meet tragic ends. Through his stories, Hedayat critiques the sociopolitical and cultural failings of his time, exposing the enduring inequalities that undermine children's development and well-being.

While Hedayat's representations align with established sociological patterns of childhood –such as victimized, orphaned, rebellious, and innocent children– his work also introduces culturally specific archetypes. These include child brides, economically instrumentalized children, children as symbols of generational continuity, and psychologically troubled children. Ultimately, Hedayat's narratives serve as a critique of modernization's shortcomings, highlighting the persistent marginalization of children, particularly from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Keywords: Sociological patterns, childhood studies, fiction, Sadegh Hedayat

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