

Report of the International Seminar hosted by IIPS in Mumbai (17-18 Feb, 2015)

The Institute of Indo Persian Studies (IIPS) hosted an international seminar at CETTM, Powai, Mumbai on the occasion of the 112th birth anniversary of Sadiq Hedayat, titled, ‘ *Sadiq Hedayat: A Persian Phoenix in the Indian Island*. It was a tribute to the Persian literary luminary who twinkled brightly in the constellation of world famous writers. The two-day international seminar (17-18 Feb, 2015) consisted of an august gathering of scholars on Persian and Comparative Literature from across the world who illuminated and commented upon the exalted position of Sadeq Hedayat in the pantheon of notable Indo-Persian literary masters. The inaugural session started with the address of Prof. Chandra Shekhar (Head, Dept of Persian, University of Delhi) who reflected that literary criticism in Iran about Sadiq Hedayat had been very unsatisfactory and rudimentary. Hedayat’s contribution to the development of a modern Persian literary ethos has almost gone unnoticed and neglected. In India on the other hand, where a lot of grass root level research on the writer has already been triggered, the situation could be salvaged; this creative void would certainly be bridged and Hedayat’s literary legacy would in future see the light of the day.

Next, Dr Marta Simidchieva (Division of Humanities, York University, Toronto) spoke about Hedayat’s contribution to Persian literature as characteristically kaleidoscopic and holistic as well as aesthetically rewarding. She pointed out how to a new reader Hedayat might seem a miasma at first, because his writings were difficult to comprehend; only after repeated readings their inner significance would be filtered across to the readers. She mentioned her first teacher in Persian, Gulam Sotudeh, who introduced her to Persian literature and how in her readings of Hedayat, she felt that an entire milieu of pre-Islamic Iran synchronized amicably with the sensibility of modern Iran. She also called Hedayat’s writings as belonging to the genre of ‘Psycho-fiction’, and *The Blind Owl* specially is a quintessentially Western novel in the immense possibilities of interpretation that it initiates in the fabric of its story-line, narratology and symbolic tropes.

Prof. Syed Akhtar Husain (President, IIPS) stressed upon the need to facilitate the development of Persian language, literature and culture to a wider majority of students and an intellectually mobile audience in India. He compared Hedayat’s *The Blind Owl* to literary milestones like the *Diwan of Hafiz*, the *Gulestan of Saadi*, and to the magnanimity of writings by Iqbal, Mirza Ghalib and

Rabindranath Tagore; believing that the work has not been accorded the status that is due to it. He expected that in the near future more studies on Hedayat's works would open up newer avenues of research and analysis. Tracing the trajectory of Hedayat's travels through India and abroad, Prof. Husain said that not much information is available on Hedayat's stay at Mumbai for two years in 1936-37. Hedayat's interactions during this period with his immediate surroundings, intellectuals and litterateurs, as might have been obvious, still elude our grasp. Since there is no recorded account of this corpus of interaction, more research and probing into this territory is welcome. This is very important because as a Persian man of letters. Prof. Husain concluded by elucidating how Hedayat greatly refined the technique of narratology and showed a unique way of story-telling by manipulating language in its flow, depth and meaning, ushering a literary renaissance of sorts in the Persianate speaking societies.

Prof. Alim Ashraf Khan (Vice-President, IIPS) delivered the vote of thanks while elaborating the position of Persian as the lingua franca of India for centuries; and contested Persian as influencing and addressing wider discourses in astronomy, music, art, painting, anthropology and the natural sciences in as much as it launched a revolution in the realm of language, culture and literature. Prof Khan then narrated in Persian, excerpts from Hedayat's letters and stories and drew upon a lot of critical responses to Hedayat's writings. He thanked the sponsors for their monetary and material support to the IIPS to host the event.

The sessions began with well-researched and enlightened papers by international delegates like Ehteram Farrokhi (a famous writer of *Exile Stories*), Asieh Zabihnia Imran (Associate Professor, University of Payam e Nur, Yazd, Iran), Mehri Shahhosseini (a renowned Poetess of Iran), Dr Mandana Mangeli (Asst. Prof. Islamic Azad University, South Branch, Tehran), Mr Ali Dehbashi (a renowned litterateur and the Editor of *the Bokhara*), Dr Sadi Ayden of Mevlana University, Konya, Turkey and many more equally distinguished delegates from Bangladesh, Canada and India. In the six technical sessions for paper presentations, intense discussions and deliberations stimulated and opened up interesting vistas of research and analysis. Among the papers presented few delved on east-west encounters in Hedayat's works; Indian mythological and allegorical referencing with archetypal resonances, role of women, binary oppositions in Hedayat's fiction and reception of *Buf-e Kur* in Turkey, Bangladesh, Iran, India, the Arab nations

and many Indo-Western segments and communities around the world were the focus of many more papers. Quite a few interesting analyses of Hedayat's short stories and their thematic subtleties were handled with keen and succinct scholarly acumen.

In the final valedictory session, speeches by Prof. Syed Akhtar Husain, Prof. Chandra Shekhar, and Mr. Ali Dehbashi finally called it a day. Prof. Syed Akhtar Husain thanked all the delegates and close associates of the IIPS for their valuable and indispensable efforts in making the seminar a success; he also acknowledged the sponsors for the seminar without whom this grand event could never have materialized. He recognized the unflinching support of financiers and patrons like the ICCR; Pataka Group of Industries; The Global Institute of Technology and Management, Farrukhnagar, Gurgaon; The Luxe Café; Sahitya Akademi and Reza Library, Rampur for the IIPS seminar. Prof. Syed Akhtar Husain particularly thanked Janab Naseer Jamal Saheb, Managing Director, Citywalk Shoes and the owner of the Summer Queen wherein Hedayat lived from 1936-37 for hosting a sumptuous lunch in honor of the delegates. Dr. Chandra Sekhar commented that Hedayat studies through the aegis of the IIPS hoped to improve considerably in the coming years and more support programs in this regard were desirable to elevate the IIPS as a national level upcoming academic platform. Dr. Ali Dehbashi also praised the efforts of the IIPS in re-incarnating the lost legacy of the Persian Phoenix; the Phoenix, which in Prof. Husain's words was Hedayat himself, who will definitely rise above the ashes to affect novel critical perspectives in the Persian literary scenario. The two-day International conference indeed brought together admirers, critics and creative interpreters of Hedayat with a fraternity and understanding that were recognized with aplomb and appreciation by all. The seminar under the patronage of IIPS was a grand success and concluded with promises of many more commendable literary exercises in its wake, in the near future.

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