

**Makalah / Article**

## Historical Hegemony: Fractured Identity and Mono-vocalization in Sadegh Hedayat's *Blind Owl*

Hegemoni Sejarah: Rintihan Pencemaran Jati Diri dalam Novel *Blind Owl* Sadegh Hedayat

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ABSTRACT

*This article problematizes the issue of history through the symbolic analysis of the woman in Sadegh Hedayat's *Blind Owl* as a metaphorical depiction of Iran. This article attempts to show how the various historical invasions led to the identity dilemma that produced people with instable, fractured identity and nameless individuals, like the narrator of the story. It tries to reveal the lament of the author for the psycho-historic social and political changes which changed the cultural discourses in his society, from what he considers as a pure one represented in the ethereal girl to an impure and polluted one objectified in the configuration of the whore, due to the different invasions and occupation of Iran, in the previous ages as the sources of the lack of identity in his age.*

*Keywords: Ethereal, Lakateh, Rhages, Hedayat, odds-and-ends man*

ABSTRAK

*Dengan menganalisis secara simbolik watak wanita sebagai lakaran metafora negara Iran dalam karya Sadegh Hedayat berjudul *Blind Owl*, makalah ini mempersoalkan isu sejarah. Makalah ini menunjukkan bagaimana penaklukan yang pelbagai dalam sejarah Iran itu menyebabkan dilema identiti, yakni lahirnya manusia dengan identiti yang tidak stabil, retak dan juga individu tanpa nama seperti narator novel tersebut. Analisis mendedahkan rintihan novelis terhadap perubahan psiko-sejarah sosial dan politik yang menukarkan wacana budaya masyarakatnya daripada apa yang diperikan sebagai wacana murni seperti yang dilambangkan oleh gadis lembut-halus kepada wacana yang cemar dan kotor seperti yang dilambangkan oleh pelacur, yang semuanya disebabkan oleh penjajahan dan penaklukan Iran yang berlaku di era sebelumnya. Penaklukan tersebutlah penyebab langkanya identiti di era kini.*

*Kata kunci: Lembut-halus, Lakateh, Rhages, Hedayat, manusia-cebisan-beraneka*

INTRODUCTION

Sadegh Hedayat's *Blind Owl* is one of the most extraordinary literary works in Modern Persian literature, within which the influences of Poe, Kafka are traceable and it would not be an exaggeration if one says that it deals with problems that are central to any individual's consciousness of the world outside themselves. However, the novel is a difficult read because it is extremely rich in imagery and symbolism. Simin Karimi (2003) asserts that one of the characteristics that differentiates Hedayat from other Iranian writers is his symbolic works. His symbolic and metaphorical works particularly the *Blind Owl* is the reminiscent of Rilke (1875-1926), the famous German poet. Metaphorical classification of Iran in the two forms of glorious past and impure and 'rotten Present' (Ajoudani 2006) represented in the shapes of the ethereal girl and the whore that belong to two historical periods of Pre-

Islamic and Post-Islamic Iran are an outlook which is hardly taken into consideration. Iran, a feminine name metaphorically refers to a dualistic position, a symbol of the historical Iranian civilization of the past suggestive of a time of glory, purity, sanity and Zoroastrian identity and the present, contemporary Iran which is totally transformed into a deteriorated figure (Ajoudani 2006). Through the symbolic analysis of the woman as a metaphorical depiction of Iran, this article attempts to show how the various historical invasions led to the identity dilemma which produced people with instable identity and nameless individuals, like the narrator of the story, who by silencing the voice of the female character and hijacking her voice has imposed a double suppression on her. This way, the historical transformed woman of Present era is convicted into mistreatment from two sides, first, the foreign invaders, the Arabs and the Mongols and second, internal patriarchal split-identity male dominant society.

## IRANIAN SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL PREMISE

In 8000 B.C., according to Mackey (1996), Iranians created one of the first complicated and developed civilizations in the world. In the 6th century B.C. right around the time that Zoroastrian religion began to develop its roots in Iran, Cyrus the Great founded the Persian Empire, which was destroyed in 330 B.C. by Alexander the Great. In succeeding centuries, Persia was invaded by the Parthians, the Arabs, the Mongols and various Turkish dynasties. And these invasions brought a huge cultural and identity transformation to Iranians. After the Arab conquest in the middle of the 7th century, the ancient Persian religion of Zoroastrianism gave way to Islam. Between 61-750 A.D, according to some scholars Iran and Iranians began to undergo various cultural, linguistic and more significantly, a religious and identity transformation under the Arabs. The Presence of the Arabs and their cultural impacts on Iranians changed the Persian language to the new Arabic/Persian alphabet. Mackey (1996) describes the importance of language in the Iranian culture thus: "language led the Persian awakening. Paradoxically, it was a language revitalized by Arabic. In the aftermath of the Arabic invasion, Middle Persian, or Pahlavi, which was spoken in the Sassanid Empire, quickly gave way to Arabic. The change occurred rapidly partly because Pahlavi was the language of discredited Zoroastrianism." The second invasion which placed a huge damage and scar on Iran and the Iranians' psyche was brought by the Turks which intensified the depth of the wound on Iranian Psyche. Persia continued to be overrun by foreign powers for another thousand years. The Seljuk Turks arrived in the 11th century, followed by the Mongols under Genghis Khan and his grandson Hulagu Khan in the 13th century. According to Mackey (1996) "Beginning in 1219, the army of Genghis Khan swarmed toward the frontiers of Iran like a horde of locusts....The savage assault was cultural as well as Physical."

He destroyed the libraries and hospitals and slaughtered entire populations. Later Mongolian leaders devastated Iran with unimaginable cruelty for three more centuries. Mackey (1996) continues that the invasion of the Mongols burn deeply into the Iranians' psyche. In the 14th century, The Turks, under the ruling of Tamerlane (Timur) Invaded Iran and occupied it. Another Turkish dynasty, the Safavids, took control in the 16th century. The establishment of the Safavids in 1501, like the Arab conquest of Iran in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and the Mongol invasions of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, marks a turning point in the history of Iranians and Iran (Savory 1995). The Safavids belonged to a Sufi religious order and made Shiite Islam the official religion of Iran, undertaking a major conversion campaign of Iranian Muslims. Mackey (1996) asserts that "Shi'ism, in effect, gave Iran the specific territorial political identity that Iranians had been searching for since the Arab conquest." In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Qajars, who were also Turks, took the

power in Iran. The Qajar Dynasty was one of the weakest periods in Iran's History. This was also a vital point in the country's cultural identity because, as Shireen Hunter (1992) argues, the "harmony between Iran, Iranians and Islam ended when Iran came into contact with the west at beginning of the nineteenth century. For the Iranians, these first contacts were traumatic and undermined their confidence in their own society and culture." The Caucasus and central Asian provinces were lost to the Russians and Iran was forced to give up all the claims on the Afghanistan to the British.

Although Iran never became a colony of Russia or Britain in the traditional sense of the term, like India, in 1907 the country was actually divided into two parts: the North was controlled by Russia and the south and the east by the Britain. Mackey (1996) explains how the foreign influence affected Iran's independence: "when a country cannot manage its own affairs, and cannot keep order among its own affairs, and cannot keep order among its own people, it has already lost its independence; and in that sense Persia has long ceased to be an independent state." By the end of World War I in 1918, Iran was in a state of complete social, political, and economic chaos. Finally in 1921, Reza Khan, who was an officer of the army, staged a coup with British backing and "in December 1925, declared the foundation of the Pahlavi dynasty" (Keddie 1983). According to Ali Ansari (2003) Reza Shah is generally remembered as the Shah who was committed to dragging "Iran 'kicking and screaming' into the modern age." It is this perception – that the king uncritically mimicked aspects of European modernization – that has helped to foster popular attitude of ambivalence, insecurity, and even disdain for aspects of Iran's twentieth-century development.

Despising religious heritage, returning to pre-Islamic Iran and simultaneously being fascinated by the western outwards, had turned the life under Pahlavi regime into a contradictory form (Madani 1990). A sense of humiliation about the backwardness of Iran in contrast to western societies and civilization began to grow and turned itself into main concern of Iranian educated people which had begun following the waves of modernity from the Qajar era. On this basis, education, culture, industry and communications, military and law structure of the country were moving increasingly toward West. Cities were getting westernized and secular reforms were being conducted intensively. But what is necessary to mention here is that westernization was more based on emotion rather than rationality and reform process was not dominated too much by rationality (Katem 1972). Imitation and adaptation of the out shell of civilization of west, regardless of the historical developments and infrastructure of the west are the important features of this period (Basirmanesh 1997). Hedayat who was born in 1903 reached his own literary maturity during this period and was influenced by the current notion of the

time which was the recovery of ancient grandeur and purity. Having been affected by the Aryanised accounts of Iranian history, like many other Iranian nationalistic writers, Hedayat began to defame and blame the Arabs as the main source of Iranian's corruption, culturally and mentally (Tavakoli Tareghi 2007).

The first feature about Hedayat which were attracting any newly acquainted person significantly and making him contemplating deeply was Hedayat's extreme patriotism. Hedayat's patriotism was a type of ancient and emotional patriotism of which its roots date back to old Historical times (Khanlari 2003). Ajoudani (2006) asserts that Hedayat used to have a passionate love for his homeland. He projects a great disgust for the historical enemies of Iran and this concept is obvious in his works, especially in *Blind Owl* which is manifested in the two historical era materialised in the figure of the woman.

All these historical occurrences are significantly represented in Hedayat's *Blind Owl*. These historical happenings are intricately used in the metaphorical form, represented in the images of the ethereal girl and *lakateh*, the whore, the narrator's wife. These historical developments led into the construction of individuals belonging to nowhere, a complete Outcast, who have faith in nobody but his own shadow which is not able to judge him. This historical mobility is intricately incorporated in the story that will be discussed.

#### BLIND OWL – A SUMMARY

Sadegh Hedayat is regarded as one of the best Iranian writers; however there are some who consider him as the best Iranian writer (Southgate 1977). The *Blind Owl* was first written during the dynasty of Reza Shah (1925-1941), who was extremely autocratic. It was originally published during year-long stay by Hedayat in a limited edition in Bombay 1937, where he began to learn Phalavi language under the tutorial of Master Anklesaria. It first appeared in Iran in 1941. Roger Lescot's French translation of it was published in Paris in 1953 and was received with great enthusiasm. The English translation by D. P. Costello appeared in London and New York in 1957. Numerous essays and books have been published in Iran and abroad about Hedayat and especially The *Blind Owl*. The present collection proves that the interest in Hedayat is still alive. This paper will cite from 1957 and 1984 edition of *Blind Owl* translated by D.P. Costello and Iraj Bashiri.

The novel is into two parts which are formally connected by a few passages at the end of part I and at the end of part II. Part I begins when the narrator, a pen-box illustrator, is visited by an uncle from India he has never seen. In order to offer him some refreshments, he goes to bring the jug of wine on the recess when suddenly sees, through the crevice of the wall, the scene of the single and compulsive subject of all his illustrations. A

woman in black, extremely beautiful, exotic, with an unconscious smile on her face, as if she was thinking of an absent person. She was offering a bunch of flowers to an old man in an Indian outfit who is squatting on the other side of a stream under a cypress tree. It looks as if the woman tries, but fails, to jump across the stream 'which separated her from the old man'. And he bursts into laughter, 'a dry, chilling laughter which stood one's hair on end...' (Katouzian 2002).

He falls deeply in love with 'the ethereal woman', 'this girl, no, this angel' (Katouzian 2002) He embarks on a journey in search of the ethereal girl. He becomes convinced that she was not of this world, and she would 'wilt at the look of a stranger, an ordinary person' (Katouzian 2002). But upon returning he finds the girl sitting on the doorsteps. The mysterious girl enters his room and lie in his bed. It occurs to him that she might be hungry or thirsty so he goes and brings the flask of wine. He tiptoes to the bed. She was in deep sleep. He gently pours a cup of the wine which he inherited from his mother in which there was the poison of nag, the Indian serpent through her locked teeth into her mouth. This leads to the death of the Ethereal girl (Nafisi 2002). She is dead. Determined not to let any stranger set his eyes on her, he cuts up the body with a knife, and puts them in a trunk, and with help of the hunchbacked hearse driver- buries the trunk in a nearby small town on the site of the ancient city of *Ray*. While digging the ground they find an ancient vase from the old city of *Ray*, which the old man takes as wages, and later on hands over back to him. The painting on the antique vase is exactly the same as his illustrations on the pen-cases.

He begins to smoke opium and falls into a 'coma' and when he opens his eyes, he finds himself in a world that was perfectly familiar to him, so much that he feels more at home in it than in his previous surroundings and manner of life. "It was a different world but one in such perfect harmony with me that I felt as though I had returned to my natural surroundings. I had been born again in a world which was closer and more natural to me than the other" (Hedayat 1957). In the new world, he is married to a woman whom he calls whore. His wife bears a striking resemblance to the ethereal woman of part I. From the moment she marries him, she, the harlot, refuses to sleep with him, and instead sleeps with people whom the narrator calls the rabbles.

He gets sick and finds himself bedridden in a room with two small windows to the outside world. Through these small windows he can see a butcher and an odds-and-ends man out of whose mouth Arabic verses comes out. He recalls his past, his has left him and entrusted him to the care of his aunt. Having been obsessed with the thought that his life is entirely worthless, he decides to disguise himself as the odds-and-ends hunchback, takes the knife to kill the harlot, but gives up the idea for no apparent reason. Feeling the fangs of the death on his neck he decides to masquerades as the old odds-and ends man

and this time to sleep with the whore, his wife. She bites his lower lips so hard that - just like the old hunchback's - it splits open. In pain, he is struggling to free himself from his wife's entanglement when the knife accidentally hits her body kills her instantly. He runs out into his room, looks at himself in the mirror, and discovers that he has become the odds-and-ends man.

The force of terror brings him back from his previous existence to the present. He looks up and sees the hunchbacked old man running out of the room with the jug. He runs after him but the old man disappears in the fog. He comes back and once again, feels the weight of a dead body on his chest.

#### HEGEMONIC DOMINANCE AND TRANSFORMED IDENTITY

At the beginning of the story, the narrator wants to define himself for his own shadow not because he feels at peace with his own soul but because he lives in an historical environment which is invaded and occupied by foreigners on all sides so that he says, "I am in dire need to relate myself to a fairy being, to my own shadow - the ominous shadow bending at the wall before a tallow-burner and it seems as if it reads carefully and swallows what I am writing. This shadow may certainly understand better than I...Only this shadow can know me; certainly it understands" (Hedayat 1957).

The narrator, all his belongings invaded, is ensnared within his own house or he may be said to be driven into such a framework and he can only communicate with the world outside through only two ways. The narrator's room has two windows which connect him to the world of the rabble, one of them looking onto the courtyard and the other onto the street, "forming thereby a link between me" (Hedayat 1957).

There is the closet of the house which includes a window opening unto an historical past and which is simultaneously replete with pains. There is the Iranian woman, ethereal, sacred and innocent reminiscent of all magnificence of the Iranian historical past history and it is the Iranian woman who is not yet crushed under the aggressors' feet; therefore, the woman of the narrator's dreams is besieged in a physical world and; finally, it is his fairy woman. "Of my private world all that was left to me were my nurse and my bitch of a wife" (Hedayat 1957). The second way of communication with the world outside, the real world is occupied by the invaders it is the world in which the narrator should encounter the man through whose lips Arabic verses emit: "A little further away under an archway a strange old man is sitting with an assortment of wares spread out in front of him... On Thursday evenings he reads aloud from the Koran, revealing his yellow, gappy teeth as he does so. One might suppose that he earned his living by this Koran-reading for I have never seen anyone buy anything from him. It

seems to me that this man's face has figured in most of my nightmares" (Hedayat 1957).

Ajoudani (2006) acclaims the second part of *Blind Owl* is the narration of Iran during Islamic period. So we can infer that this man from whose mouth Arabic Quranic verses comes out is the symbolic representation of the Arabs who have crushed the Great Iran under their feet and who have taken it captive. The other destroyer of Iranian confidence and glory is the Mongols who are metaphorically objectified in the shape and figure of the butcher who is in want of blood and who is greatly comforted at the sight of blood; it is that very blood-thirsty Mongol who refrains from sleeping with married women because of his own traditions, customs and culture, but he kills their husband first and then rapes them. Most important of all, the narrator's wife is taken captive by these two aggressive factors; he is the other force of having the narrator's wife under his dominance, that's why, the woman who was once innocent and who symbolized Anahita, an Iranian Goddess, (<http://ancienthistory.about.com>) now is sleeping with these occupiers, and traces of such disrespect can be witnessed on the cheeks of the Iranian raped woman. As the narrator says "...I myself saw the trace of the old man's dirty, yellow and worm devoured teeth, through which Arabic verses emitted, on my wife's cheek" This makes the narrator, who lacks any social power to counterattack such powers, projects this hatred and anger towards "the whore", the very violated Iranian woman. Thus, not only has this defeated woman been violated by the aggressors but she is also severely punished by a man, symbolizing an Iranian man lacking a stable identity due to a great number of vital historical blows and providing the reader with such an image of this social and historical victim as if all faults and agonies of the narrator (the Iranian man whose identity is not known) rest upon this very violated woman.

#### FATHERLESSNESS AND IDENTITY BEWILDERMENT

The remarkable feature of the protagonist of the *Blind owl* is that it has no name, as if he has been brought to this world to leave no trace of himself. The first element determining a person's identity is his name. As far as inheritance is concerned, man, biologically, shares the same characteristic with animal; however, what distinguishes the two from each other is inheritance in its human and social sense; that is, the family name of a person decides his belonging to his family, and it assigns him a special position in the family system. It is obvious that the family name is transferred to next generations by the boys and men of the family and women have no specific share in the transference of inheritance (Movali 2009). The survival of a family name depends on the existence of the family's sons, of course, provided that these sons are promoted to the position of a father. In other

words, becoming a father means that a male person can inherit a name and transfer it to the next generation.

All over the story, the speaker of the story who is himself a male is identified as narrator and he lacks any specific name. As stated, the validity of a name results from having a specific father. Basically the narrator's father is not known since the narrator's father and uncle were involved in a tussle to possess the Indian woman, Bugam Dasi, the narrator's mother. The fight ended with a winner who remains unidentified. It should be pointed out that the narrator's mother leaves her child thinking that he is a disgrace and she refrains from assigning him a particular name. Having no definite father, as a result of years of historical despise incurred upon the Iranian father by the foreigners leads to the existence of a nameless narrator whose identity is quite unknown. Individuals like the narrator whose identities have been totally transformed through history "Whoever saw me yesterday saw a wasted, sickly young man. Today he would see a bent old man with white hair, burnt-out eyes and a hare-lip. I am afraid to look out of the window of my room or to look at myself in the mirror for everywhere I see my own shadow multiplied indefinitely" (Hedayat 1957).

One of the predominant characteristics of the narrator is his lack of trust in the people he meets and the things either happening around him or he has ever been told. According to Giddens (1991) the issue of trust forms an essential component in the development of individual's social life and it is pivotal in the comprehending the crucial role of other people for self-identity. He believes that developing a sense of trust is a needed feature of early life experience, and "trust established in early life is an essential basis for ontological security" (Giddens 1991). Trust in other people, Giddens (1991) argues "is at the origin of a stable external world and a coherent sense of self-identity." As far as the narrator is concerned, he is extremely doubtful and suspicious about the people and the things occurring around him. The narrator says "I do not yet know. I do not know where I am at this moment, whether the patch of sky above my head and these few spans of ground on which I am sitting belong to Nishapur or to Balkh\* or to Benares" (Hedayat 1957).

This uncertainty has caused him to fail to form a kind of protection against existential anxieties that could threaten his life, preventing him to build a safe and sound relationship with the people around himself including his wife. This uncertainty intensifies his mental instability so much that he becomes suspicious of everything, as he himself in part of the story says "I have seen so many contradictory things and have heard so many words of different sorts, my eyes have seen so much of the worn-out surface of various objects – the thin, tough rind behind which the spirit is hidden – that now I believe nothing. At this very moment I doubt the existence of tangible, solid things, I doubt clear, manifest truths" (Hedayat 1957) and

as Giddens (1991) asserts the Trust which is constructed in early life is a significant basis for Ontological security. This is what the narrator lacks. This pushes the narrator into a sense of identity bewilderment: "If I were to strike my hand against the stone mortar that stands in the corner of our courtyard and were to ask it, 'Are you real and solid?' and the mortar were to reply, 'Yes', I do not know whether I should take its word or not." "I do not know. But when I looked into the mirror a moment ago I did not recognise myself" (Hedayat 1957).

A person's social and identity value have a direct relation with his family name because these very name and family name which determine one's identity and are a sort of nominal identity. The nominal identity of the people of a society is based on either their nominal identity or their father's names. In brief, a person's or a society's social value stems from his or its honour. These two, namely, names and social value of a person – socially or psychologically - stem from one principle: one's father's name. That's why, simultaneous with biological birth, man is born once again. This latter kind of birth distinguishes him from other animals. This type of birth may be called nominal identity birth (Movalı 2009).

For this reason, the narrator seeks his own social value which is his own father through his own past. A father who, to protect his chastity, has changed his face and whose identity is kept secret from everyone. The pain, resulting from not having a father, has sunk deep in his soul. Such a person who is not responsible for protecting his chastity has come to know himself as a defeated individual and blames this innocent woman... who is herself a victim as well. Chastity, in the sense of close relatives, includes all women in a special family relationship with a man. This word is not used for men (Movalı 2009). A man's chastity is his own "realm" which should be protected against trespassers. A man's courage depends on the protection of this realm (Movalı 2009). A man's "dignity" lies in his protecting this "realm". Compliance with this principle is the first "legal right" or "natural chastity" of a man. A man only defends his own chastity on a battle field. A man's glory lies in his own "chastity". This significantly observable in the narrator when he begins to act as pimp for his wife as the narrator confesses "I ended up a sorry pimp mocked by fools" (Hedayat 1984).

As we said before, a man's courage lies in his ability to protect his chastity – the principle of defending close relatives. In case a man cannot do these religious or social duties for any reason, he obtains nothing but punishment (Molavi 2009). The narrator's story concerning a man with no name or identity regards a defeated Iranian man unable to protect his chastity. Therefore, he projects his own wrath toward the female victim rather than himself and calls her "whore" who is, like the narrator, nameless and she seemingly has a certain father; however, her real father is unknown. The narrator is upset because this woman has given herself up to him but once and because,

in the midst of the story, there are always some aggressors who continually violate his wife's chastity.

Besides, the narrator's inability, which is no more reminiscent of that outstanding past, leads to a sort of anger and hatred against this woman and results in his calling her a "whore" However the dramatic irony lies in the narrator playing the role of a pimp. "I desired at all costs to establish contact with her lovers – this is another thing that will seem incredible – and sought out everyone who I heard had caught her fancy. I put up with every sort of humiliation in order to strike up an acquaintance with them. I toadied to them, urged them to visit my wife, and even brought them to the house" (Hedayat 1957). To justify his historical self-abasement as a husband to defend his manhood and honour he says "The reason why I behaved like this was that I was afraid my wife might leave me" (Hedayat 1957). But how "I wanted my wife's lovers to teach me deportment, manners, the technique of seduction! ... However, as a pimp I was not a success" (Hedayat 1957). Throughout the story, "the whore" (what the narrator calls his wife) is silent and quite. He considers her a corrupted figure this is why he says "I call her 'the bitch' because no other name would suit her so well" (Hedayat 1957).

#### WOMEN DEPRIVATION OF SOCIAL IDENTITY

This wife represents Iranian women. we have two more female characters, the narrator's mother and the nanny who are both extremely resemble the whore or one may say they are the copying picture of the whore. The narrator's wife lacks any kind of social identity and the reader only gets to know her through the narrator. She is kept captive in the narrator's point of view as 'The whore', representing a beautiful woman with Turcoman eyes, has become a 'whore', but the narrator never asks who has led her to becoming a 'whore'. Such a question is not put since it is rooted in the patriarchal view of a society which has always lived a dual life. It is subject to the dark shadows and patriarchal boots which stem from historical and religious roots and it is unable to set itself free from these to obtain a modern view towards modernity and woman as proportionate to its western clothing and education. That's why no reader has so far tried to avenge the narrator's victim, the oppressed whore. In most of the analysis on *Blind Owl*, the critics focus on Hedayat's classification of women into two general categories, ethereal girls or evil ones, materialised in the figure of his wife, the whore, mentioning that Hedayat sees the women either in the shape of ethereal girls or evil ones. For example, Price (2009) asserts that Hedayat in his blind owl can make love to the female characters in the world of death, the ethereal woman and his murdered wife. Dead woman cannot be a threat and he is safe with them. As it is clear from the statement she does not rationalise why

she is treated so horribly or she does not try to refer to misogynistic characteristic of the narrator toward women.

This woman has always been depicted as an immoral figure because she is disobedient and gives herself up to everybody but her husband, the legitimate and lawful husband. In the male dominated society 'the whore' deserves to be victimized and this goes so far as our women cannot defend their own position represented by the 'whore' who fall victim to a man unable to protect his chastity-in particular his wife - against aggressors. Our women symbolically reprimand themselves since from patriarchal viewpoint which is dominant over such a society a decent woman is not expected to do what a 'whore' does.

The narrator, over and over, plans to kill his wife using a bone-handed knife but nobody ever accommodates the question why the narrator takes such an action. From his viewpoint, the narrator describes his own wife as such: "From the beginning of time I have called her 'the bitch', and the word has had a curious charm for me." He describes her as deceitful and imposter "If I married her it was because she made the first advances. She did so by design and fraud" (Hedayat 1957). A creature with no heart and true feeling for anybody and capricious who looks for man to quench her sensual desires, lust and Machismo "No, she had no kindness for me. A sensual creature who required one man to satisfy her lust, another to play the gallant and another to satisfy her need to inflict pain. Not that I think she restricted herself to this trinity, but at any rate I was the one she selected to torture" (Hedayat 1957).

He, finally, follows his wife in order to kill her in defence of his crushed manliness. He kills a woman who, in his view, sleeps with the Arabs, the Mongols, and other mean people whom he calls vulgar people who were the historical product of aggression on Iran and Iranian woman throughout the Iranian history. The narrator, through such an act, leaves out all Iranian women who do not deserve love-making. The Iranian woman whose respect and dignity has been violated is considered mean and debased in the narrator's view. The narrator issues a verdict as to his wife's murder since he considers her an adulterous and because she has brought upon him disrespect in view of the odds-and-ends man with whom she has had relations – the butcher and other vulgar people. So, as a patriarchal system requires, he should defend his wife's chastity by punishing her. Price (2009) says in the traditional society like Iran women are regarded as the property and honour (namous) of their husbands, so their exclusion from the public domain were sought to be the solution. Therefore, he kills her ignorant of the fact that he himself has been the cause to such disrespect.

A man whose grace has been crushed and who is captive in the hands of the Arabs, Mongols and so forth and who has voluntarily delivered his wife to them to

protect his own life and who is now unable to resist these foreigners projects all his anger towards his wife. The 'whore' is a name given her by the narrator. Why she deserves such a name is not known throughout the story. What we hear is the narrator's speech and the godly speech of a man who is himself historically a person defeated by the Arabs, Mongols, Turks, Afghans, English, Russians and finally Americans. A man who has become a play thing of contradictory cultures of such nations as the Arabs and other invaders is dressed in modern clothes but intellectually he still holds a knife in his hand and seeks his own salvation through punishing a woman who has come up with such a problem the cause of which is not known. From the narrator's viewpoint, the woman is seditious and she should be controlled as her mother was seditious. A woman who made a brother kills his own brother. A capricious dancer who has left her child to satisfy her sexual needs and the man should maintain his role as a controller because this legal and religious responsibility has been entrusted upon him.

#### HISTORICAL CLASSIFICATION OF WOMEN

The narrator, seemingly educated, appears unable to encounter such problems in order to maintain his mental balance. Under such circumstances, he is murdering his own wife, who is tainted and crushed. The narrator, tacking the ethereal woman, attempts murder and after a short search for the ethereal, finds her feeble and on the point of death, lying in bed. The woman is killed by the narrator. Basically, the ethereal woman, symbolizing the chaste woman of the Achaemenian dynasty or historical past of Iranians, (Ajoudani 2006) is noble and virgin and deserves to be accepted as a wife. According to Beard (1982) Hedayat constructs a sexualized geography which combines his anti-Islamic reading of history (the Arab Invasions as an undermining of Aryan purity) with the sense of horror which we find directed toward the world of generation on a domestic level in the *Blind Owl*. The father and uncle, merchants, the rabbles and the narrator himself when he transforms into different personalities continuously, all and all, are representatives of Islamicised Iran. All over the story it is made known why this ethereal woman deserves so elaborate physical description.

Nothing is known about her past life and the thing she has undergone; however, the narrator makes love with her. The narrator intends to make her warm with his body and as he says (Hedayat 1984) "hoping that in this way I could possibly blow my own soul into her body, I took off my clothes, climbed onto the bed and lay down beside her. We became stuck like the male and female mandrake" and since there is no sign of chastity in her anymore, he finds her deserving death, mutilation and burial. The narrator, defeated and run down, is bound by the past.

He endeavours to get back and keep what he has lost, e.g. Rhages vase, a relic of the glorious history of a brave nation which has disappeared. To get back this lost piece of history, the narrator sets forth towards the odds-and ends man but never catches him up: "The first thing I looked for was the flower-vase of Rhages which the old hearse-driver had given me in the cemetery, but it had gone" (Hedayat 1957). He tries to follow him but it is too late, historical glory is demolished and had been plundered. As a historical defeated individual, there remains only one way to compensate his trodden historical pride and chastity and that is to get the ancient vase of *Rhages*, the symbol of ancient Iran back but:

The moment that I made a move, he slipped out through the doorway. I got up quickly, intending to run after him and get the jar... but he was already a good way off. Down the street I could still see the old man's crouching figure. His shoulders were shaking with laughter and he held the bundle tucked under his arm. He was running with all his might and in the end he disappeared into the mist (Hedayat 1957).

Thus the narrator of the *Blind Owl* in the present time, in the Islamicised Iran, the country which is since 1400 years ago till now stays living, is still concerned about the Rhages vase which is the reminiscent of the ancient *Ray*, the reminiscent of his love and the suggestive of the greatness and the ancient glory of Iran. This symbol of Iranian glory is in hands of the Arab invader, the old odds-and ends man reciting Quranic verses, who gradually sways out of the vision (Ajoudani 2006). In the first part of the story, after the narrator buries the dismembered body of ethereal girl, they find an ancient vase, after entering his room; he cleans up the vase and sees a picture on it. He takes out the portrait of the ethereal girl he had painted and hid in the plate tin the night before and compares it with the painting on the jar.

There was not an atom of difference between my picture and that on the jar. The one might have been the reflection of the other in a mirror. The two were identical and were, it seemed obvious, the work of one man, one ill-fated decorator of pen cases. Perhaps the soul of the vase-painter had taken possession of me when I made my portrait and my hand had followed his guidance. It was impossible to tell the two apart, except that my picture was on paper while the painting on the vase was covered with an ancient transparent glaze which gave it a mysterious air, a strange, supernatural air (Hedayat 1957).

This sympathetic painter of antiquity had long before appeared as portraitist in '*Parvin, the Sassanid Girl*'. The narrator of the '*Blind Owl*' is akin to another portraitist in contemporary Iran with which still the portraitist's concerns of the Sassanid period is accompanied. Thus, production of a frightening similarity, the ethereal girl's portrait, the memory of the burning love of the narrator for the typical Iranian woman's face or for the Iranian beloved with the Rhages jar, a reminiscence of the ancient city of Ray and the glory and magnificence of ancient Iran all blend and become one. The Rhages jar which is reminiscent of the ancient city of Ray and whose weight,

which in the first part of the story, exerted the same pressure, as the weight of a dead body, replace the weight of the pieces of memory of the ethereal girl, surly depicts the ethereal girl herself since both are the same and both are created by the same unfortunate painter. The narrator's painful effort in cutting into pieces of this memory and in burying it in hole around Shah Abdolazim comes to nothing. The painful memory of this burning love for the ethereal girl and the ancient past continue to torture him: "Weren't the eyes of one person enough in my life? Now two people were looking at me. Two people were looking at me through her eyes. No, this was absolutely unbearable" (Hedayat 1984).

The ethereal woman belongs to the past, the very magnificent past which has been invaded through the force of sword of the old man and which is now considered part of his belonging and out of which he has made a 'whore' who deserves death, a death which, in the narrator's view, can be an ending factor to all his pains how the former ethereal woman was turned into a 'whore' is rooted in history. It is rooted in the consecutive defeats of a narrator as a result of the invasion of different invaders in the past. This resulted in the narrator's inability to protect what belonged to him. Therefore, a dual anger of narcissistic disgust of the narrator towards his wife grew in him. The narrator's love towards his wife is one contaminated with hatred and enmity and it lacks any kind of noble tendencies; it is one of an owner's love for his commodities since the narrator, throughout the story, complains why his wife sleeps with all, particularly with the Arab man reciting the Quran, but she shows no interest in making love with him. There is a sort of blind tendency for sexual desire of the narrator towards his wife: "If the bitch my wife had shown any interest in me I should never have let Nanny come near me in her presence, Or perhaps this bashfulness of mine was merely the result of my obsession" (Hedayat 1957).

His wife is the only woman who the narrator has had enough time to know since both had grown up in one environment and he had enough time to defend her as a wife against foreigners' invasion which robs him of his wife and his very courage. The narrator and his wife's relation is one of half brother and sister relationship because they have grown up together and they have shared the same grandma and she had fed both with her own milk. The narrator, who had left her as an adolescent, tries to compensate for her absence. That's why he marries his aunt's daughter: "Nanny also suckled my aunt's daughter, the bitch my wife. I grew up... in the same house as the bitch, her daughter. Ever since I can remember I looked upon my aunt as a mother and loved her deeply. I loved her so deeply that later on I married her daughter, my foster-sister, simply because she looked like her" (Hedayat 1957). The narrator is filled with so much desire for sexual intercourse with his wife. This desire, which is unrealized, produces a sort of mental depression

and strong hatred in the narrator towards his wife. Also, defeat against vulgar people invading his wife creates a kind of reaction which usually arises from defeated people. The narrator defames his wife not sensing the least sin for this notoriety.

He knows well that his wife is that very ethereal, visionary woman, dressed in silk clothes, knitted elaborately, and her smile. All these suggest that the ethereal woman is his very wife is invaded by aliens: "She had on a cloak of Tus material. Her eyebrows were plucked and were stained with indigo. She was wearing a beauty spot and her face was made up with rouge, ceruse and kohl. In a word she was turned out to perfection. She appeared to be well pleased with life. She was unconsciously holding the index-finger of her left hand to her lips. Was this the same graceful creature, was this the slim, ethereal girl who, in a black pleated dress, had played hide-and-seek with me on the bank of the Suran" (Hedayat 1957).

According to Katouzian (2008) the harlot, the narrator's wife, is the other side of that ethereal woman. She is the other side of the woman's face, and the ethereal woman's mirror image in the second part of the story. A contaminated woman who is acting as the devil's tool for torturing and degrading her husband in the eyes of the rabbles deserved to worst accusations. In this part, the narrator does not avoid anything to smear Iranian women in general and his wife's reputation and dignity in particular. "She was a fickle and inconstant woman who is just looking for man either to satisfy her sexual longings like a machine of sex or for torture. In the continuation, he adds that he is not even sure if this exhausts the list" (Katouzian 2008).

The narrator has an enmity mixed with love towards his wife which forces him to show a dual and at the same time contradictory reaction towards her while he loves her as his own wife, and since she sleeps with the aggressors and yields to such an action, he hates her. Thus, he defames her and avenges his wife through defaming and accusing her. In fact, the narrator, throughout the whole second part of the story the 'Blind Owl' is engaged in taking revenge and defaming his wife, the very corrupt ethereal woman. All those insults are intended to avenge her. He is avenging not only his wife but also the ethereal woman since he does not love his wife; he does not want her; he does not allow her to be in close relationship with him; he despises her and he drives her away from himself. Why? Basically, the reason lies in his inability to protect her against enemies and trespassers. A hatred of a man who finds his own redemption from all this historical disdain in taking refuge in beverage and opium-forgetting oneself and one's surroundings- in order that he might wipe out his disdain through a temporary escape from the real world (Hedayat 1957). This only led to the death of his wife, the ethereal woman and finally himself, a disdainful death.



## CONCLUSION

Basically Women in almost all of Hedayat's works, particularly in his psycho-fiction works are portrayed as a manifestation of evil and malevolent forces. Such portrayals of women as either a whore or an angel who is absent in this era but a shadow of her, because they belong to Iranian glorious historical past which had been contaminated by the invasion of different ethnic foreign groups, the Arabs, the Turks, the Mongols, the Afghans, and Later on the Russians, the British and finally the Americans, is the emergence of someone who is mentally suspicious and at large instable who consider himself as outcast and built a rift between himself and the other from the beginning of the story. "I have realized that a frightful chasm lies between others and me" (Hedayat 1984). Love is an illusionary phenomenon which occurs in the world of imagination to satisfy his desires. What is significantly obvious in Hedayat's works is his representation of the Iranian women as undeserving of love not because they lack the qualities of women, but because they are void of all the purity and glorious of Sassanid and Achaemenid women. In the narrator's view, to love a woman is to love an ideal image which belongs to the past and the only place where it can live is in the imagination. The real woman, no matter how beautiful and attractive she is, is bound to be contaminated by the invaders. It is why when the narrator faces the ethereal woman, he reacts contradictorily. On the one hand, he pours poisoned wine into the throat of the ethereal woman, and on the other hand, he is having sex with her corpse. The materialization of such notions in Hedayat's works, perhaps, is among the issues that concern the people of the upper classes of the time to whom Hedayat belongs.

The relationship in male dominant society, between male and female is the relationship between the appropriator and proprietary in which marriage is taken as a contract of possession (Morris 1966). It is fundamentally based on the notion of presence. Based on this contract the other party must always be present in our lives. In this case, the resulted relationship is a subject-object in which the owner takes as its own right to treat the object, in the case of the narrator, in any way he likes. As long as the woman consider herself as an object instead of a subject in this unequal relationship everything moves on without problem. The problem begins when the other party revolts against the male authority and disregards the marriage principles and its fundamental principle, the presence. In the case of the narrator, the woman's absence is a kind of objection against the man's inability to defend her wife against the invaders, especially, the odds-and-the ends, *Khanzar panzari*, the Arab, the main adulterer, the one whom the narrator disguises himself at end of the story to become able to enjoy her wife.

In this story Hedayat portrays his main character the woman whom he labels as *Lakateh*, harlot in a world of ignorance and inequalities and leaves no escape pathway and opening way for her. The violated and victimized woman is depicted as an isolated condemned being silent and showing no response at hearing the worst accusations. She does not have the slightest possibility and power to defend herself. To sum up, *Blind Owl* is the story of a male society which has imprisoned its wives within the house walls to hinder her of having access to anyplace or anything. Being afraid of the strangers to transgress their territory and bring what they take as their own property under their dominance through watching, they cast their covetous eyes on the other women in order to degrade them. They created harlots in every district to insult and at same time to enjoy. Since they knew themselves well, they came tougher to their women and they hide them from the eyes of the birds in the sky and the underground insects and since they had no trust in themselves they became more suspicious to their wives. The whole story of the *Blind Owl*, is the story of a defeated and impotent man who is not sure if he knows or does not know that his wife betrays him or not and he himself drives her toward betrayal and then murders her for this sin (Golamhosseini 2010).

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