

Simin Behbahani

Prominent Iranian writer and poet



Simin Behbahani (Khalili) was born in 1927 in Tehran, Iran, of literary parents. Her father, Abbas Khalili, writer and newspaper editor, had tens of publications to his credit. Her mother, Fakhroozma Arghoon (Fakhro Adel Khalatbari), was a noted feminist, teacher, writer, newspaper editor, and a poet.

Simin began writing poetry at the age of fourteen and published her first poem at same age. She used the "Char Pareh" style of Nima, a renowned poet of Persian history, and subsequently, turns to "Ghazal", a free flowing, and

poetry style similar to the Western "Sonnet". She contributed to a historic development in the form of the "Ghazal", as she added theatrical subjects, and daily events and conversations into this style of poetry.

The Ghazals of Simin Behbahani are a unique style, which defines her as a one and only, and well distinguished in her style of poetry. Simin Behbahani has expanded the range of traditional Persian verse forms and produced some of the most significant works of Persian literature in the twentieth century.

She was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1997, She was also awarded a Human Rights Watch - Hellman / Hammet grant in 1998, and similarly, in 1999, the Carl von Ossietzky Medal, for her struggle for freedom of expression in Iran.

Simin has produced a copious body of work. Her first book, «Setar-e Shekaste» (Broken Setar) was published in 1951 when the poet was barely twenty-four. It was followed by «Jay-e Pa» (Footprint) 1956, «Chelcheraq» (Chandelier) 1957, «Marmar» (Marble) 1963, «Rastakhiz» (Resurrection) 1973, «Khatti ze Sor 'at-o az Atash» (A Trajectory of Speed and Fire) 1981, «Dasht-e Arzhan» (The Arzhan Plain) 1983, «Kaqaizin Jameh» (Paperthin Vestment) 1989, «An Mard, Mard-e Hamraham» (That Man, My Companion of the Way) 1990, «Kowli o Nameh o

Eshq» (The Gypsy, the Letter, and Love) 1994, «Asheqtar az Hamisheh Bekhan» (Sing More Lovingly than Ever) 1994, «Yek Daricheh be Azadi» (A Window to Freedom) 1995, «Ba Qalb-e khod che Kharidam?» (What Did I Buy with My Heart?) 1996, «Negareh-ye Golgun» (Rose-Colored Design) 1998, «Jay-e Pa ta Azadi» (From Footprints to Freedom) 1998, «Yad-e Ba 'zi Nafarat» (Remembering a Few) 1999, «Yeki Masalan Inkeh» (For Instance) 2000, and «Kelid-o-Khanjar» (Key and Dagger) 2000.

Gracefully she approached

Gracefully she approached,
in a dress of bright blue silk;
With an olive branch in her hand,
and many tales of sorrows in her eyes.
Running to her, I greeted her,
and took her hand in mine:
Pulses could still be felt in her veins;
warm was still her body with life.

"But you are dead, mother", I said;
"Oh, many years ago you died!"
Neither of embalmment she smelled,
Nor in a shroud was she wrapped.

I gave a glance at the olive branch;
she held it out to me,
And said with a smile,
"It is the sign of peace; take it."

I took it from her and said,
"Yes, it is the sign of...", when
My voice and peace were broken
by the violent arrival of a horseman.
He carried a dagger under his tunic
with which he shaped the olive branch
Into a rod and looking at it

he said to himself:
"Not too bad a cane
for punishing the sinners!"
A real image of a hellish pain!
Then, to hide the rod,
He opened his saddlebag.
in there, O God!
I saw a dead dove, with a string tied
round its broken neck.

My mother walked away with anger and sorrow;
my eyes followed her;
Like the mourners she wore
a dress of black silk.

Stop Throwing My Country To The Wind

If the flames of anger rise any higher in this land
Your name on your tombstone will be covered
with dirt.
You have become a babbling loudmouth. Your
insolent ranting, something to joke about.
The lies you have found, you have woven together.
The rope you have crafted, you will find around
your neck.
Pride has swollen your head, your faith has grown
blind. The elephant that falls will not rise.
Stop this extravagance, this reckless throwing of
my country to the wind. The grim-faced rising
cloud, will grovel at the swamp's feet.
Stop this screaming, mayhem, and blood shed.
Stop doing what makes God's creatures mourn
with tears.
My curses will not be upon you, as in their
fulfillment. My enemies' afflictions also cause me
pain.
You may wish to have me burned, or decide to
stone me. But in your hand match or stone will
lose their power to harm me.

Translated by Kaveh Safa and Farzaneh Milani
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