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Content Analysis of Cloudy Years Novel

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Abstract

In this study, we analyze the content of the “Cloudy Years” novel in order to introduce Iranian fictional literature, which its numerous dimensions are still unclear. Findings show that the socialism and belief in social commitment as the primary function of art and literature have led Ali Ashraf Darvishian -contemporary popular and committed author- to follow them in most of his works in order to consider the meaning related contents and contexts in his stories that. The main subject of cloudy years is political struggle and in terms of the theme it can be investigated from several political, social and historical aspects.

Keywords: Content Analysis, Theme, Ali Ashraf Darvishian, Cloudy Years.

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1. Introduction

In the past, poetry was the most important type of Iranian classical literature that had been used to convey internal concepts and was a source of fighting and festive narrations; therefore, some of the peaks of classical literature were versified stories of Shahnameh by Ferdowsi, Rumi's Masnavi, Nezami's Five Treasures (Panj Ghanj), etc. During this era, prose was mainly used for historiography and writing short tales to heed the teachings of moral or social criticisms and bringing up philosophical concepts; but in the years leading up to the Constitutional Revolution and the start of an unprecedented intellectual and social developments that pay attention to the modernization of Iranian society, major changes in form and content occurred in the Persian literature. Gradually, prose has lost its ability to meet the modern social and political needs and prose has tried to play the same role that poem had undertaken in the past, thus day by day by using different techniques prose has reached new frontiers. In its evolutionary and historical path, in terms of structure credit and subject-matter, prose reaches new perspectives and as novel, acquired different social and cultural performances in the modern man's mind and belief.

In the emergence of the first Persian novels, Iranians abroad and Western translators played an important role. Intellectuals living abroad, such as Fath Ali Khan Akhundzade, Zainolabedin Maraghaee, Abdolrahim Talbof wrote the first Persian novels and translators by writing introduction to the works, which they had translated, played a role in the formation and progression of this genre. It should be recognized, however, this type of literature -novel- did not have a background in the classical Persian literature. And as drama, literary criticism and short stories, novel is the product of current century and now after nearly a hundred years of new story writing and the emergence of three generations of authors, short and long stories have been left from them. It is a rich and valuable collection that can be investigated from different aspects.

1.1. Statement of Problem

Ali Ashraf Darvishian undoubtedly is one of the high peaks of contemporary Iranian story writing, with works such as *Cloudy Years* and the story collections such as "Abshooran", "From this province, *Az-in-Velayat*" and "The bread season, *Fasl-e-Nan*" and ... in various fields of fiction such as short stories, novels, stories for children has left behind valuable works. Darvishian is the messenger of sufferings and pains and impossible dreams and

thoughts of endless and abundant grief of a part of the contemporary memory of Iran. He “has experienced the subject of his stories while he was teaching and living in village and with a fluent prose he explicitly described catastrophic life of people in the western part of the country” (Mirabedini, 1998: 546). Therefore readers of these works will witness an important part of the social and literature history of their time and salute the simple and kind teacher whose life is widely flowing in his stories.

His cloudy years novel has portrayed the society of Kermanshah in the late thirties and early forties; this novel depicts the historical moment in Iran history that approximately encompasses the events of second Pahlavi era and its value is due to the different political, social, historical and cultural themes. Ali Ashraf by writing this novel, reflected the realities of people's lives, and gained a reputation in fictional literature. Such literature that Ali Ashraf step in did not have a background in Iran and had not spent more than a hundred years of its life. This emerging literature will not be recognized properly unless it can be assessed in different ways. One of the issues in this field that helps remarkably to assess stories is the content analysis of published works. On the one hand, their advantages and disadvantages will be recognized and on the other hand, the renowned authors and their writing streams will be discussed and critiqued that weaknesses and deficiencies can be removed and steps can be taken towards the development of literature.

1.2. Research Background

Not sufficient researches have been done regarding Ali Ashraf Darvishian and his works. There is limited research in this field and they have been conducted by domestic literary researchers. First, only some of Ali Ashraf's works have been taken into account, second, what has been indicated by these investigators along with other writers, have been mentioned generally and scattered in the story writing books. For example, in the book "One Hundred Years of Story Writing in Iran," written by Hassan Mirabedini (1998), which is one of the reference books in the field of contemporary literature, generally discuss this author's works in a few pages.

The only book that specifically addressed the Ali Ashraf's works is “Ali Ashraf Darvishian's Works in the Crucible of Criticism” written by Jaafar Kazerouni which was published in 1998 by the Neday-e-Farhag publication. This book has not examined some of the Darvishian's works, including "Cell 18", either.

Except the mentioned books and several other books, a few articles in literary magazines have been published about this author and his works criticism, among which we can mention the following cases.

- Dastgheyb, A. A., (1996). Cloudy Years written by Ali Ashraf Darvishian book review.
- Iranzadeh, N. & Sepidehvand, T. (2008). Ali Ashraf Darvishian Cloudy Years Novel Stylistic Analyzes.
- Kuchakyan, T. and Ghorbani, Kh. (2010). A Reflection of Society and Socialist Realism in the Cloudy Years.
- Aliakbari, N. and Kuchakyan. T. (2007). A New Look at Cloudy Years (autobiography-novel).

1.3. Method

In this study, library research and inductive reasoning methods were used. The collection and classification of data, analyzing and achieving findings and general conclusions constitute the basic structures of this research that is achieved by using books, magazines, journals, etc.

2. Discussion

The theme and subject matter of any fictional work are called the inner structure or the content. So the content analysis is the process of analyzing the literary work based on two elements of theme and topic. Of course some consider the inner structure as the theme and some only consider it as the subject of the literary work. While in fact, the content is a mixture of theme and topic and particular artistic style that is product of the artist's nature; therefore, it must be said that: the main theme and subject, are the building blocks of content analysis and every time we wanted to analyze the story content we must be careful about this issue.

2.1. Topic

As stated by Yunesi, "understanding the story, begins with the perception of most general aspects of the story that are theme and the subject of story" (1962: 30) and "includes phenomena and events that creates the story and image the essence, in other words the subject

is a realm where your creativity can demonstrate its theme" (Mirsadeghi, 2001: 217). Analyzing and investigating the *Cloudy Years* in this field indicates that the main theme of the novel is a political struggle; this content, however, is an effect that its cause is poverty and economic weakness. Throughout the novel, we can witness the story of people who try to earn money from morning to night but they can never settle their situation. Poverty and lack of hygiene cause various illnesses such as skin disease, baldness, parasites, trachoma, fever and death. Life of people like Zubaida Khanum who does not have money to buy match and sends his son to bring fire several times every night, the fate of Khaleh Cheshmeh and Bemanali who have been the victim of superstition, and capitalists who have got rich by unusual fraudulent ways, all of these are issues that portray the theme of the story and become a territory to parading the theme. In short, it must be said that the theme of this novel, involves issues such as poverty, economic weakness, disease, superstition, illiteracy, political struggles, violence and tyranny.

2.2. Theme (Subject matter)

A story can be a good story when its structure and composition, in its constituent elements, have unity and integrity with each other. Theme undertakes creating harmony and unity in the story, in other words, every good story shaped from themes and thinking or ideas governing the story and theme selects all the elements of the story and synchronizes the subject with other elements of the story. Theme has been defined as thoughts and ideas that are governing the stories that authors consider them in their story; According to Professor Mirsadeghi "message is not synonymous with theme". The theme of each work may be interpreted as a message of that work, has a positive and informative aspect and themes may or may not have these qualities, so it is wrong if we consider the theme same as the message that is the mission of the work, especially the theme of a limited number of fiction works has anti-message feature (Mirsadeghi, 2009: 177-176).

In addition, the subject should not be equaled to "topic" and we should not use these two interchangeably. Such a mistake leads to the reader's lack of understanding of the story and makes him confused. Theme is what creates the "topic", "the Theme is an outcome of story that focuses on the expansion and evolution of the story. In this sense, themes or subjects have been considered as the whole story. This thought or set of ideas strengthen the author's desired subject in the story and leads the story to the artistic unity. Usually the subject matter of a work should not be less than one sentence" (Ibid: 174).

Often the theme of any work can be recognized through the interpretation of the main character; writers, however, often avoid expressing directly theme of their works, instead they use a non-explicit manner of describing and conveying it; for example, incorporate the themes in the minds and emotions and fantasies of the story characters and the reader through the understanding of the interpretation of these thoughts and imagination and the outcome of the story will understand the theme of the story. If the theme of the story is subtler, its effect on the reader will be stronger.

Reflecting on the *Cloudy Years* indicates that the ideology of the author in this book constitutes its theme. Author by selecting characters from ordinary people, describing their life and putting them in the context of the fight against the ruling system, shows a river current that takes what is placed in its way, and it changes to a disastrous flood. The course of the struggle that begins from the workers is rooted in the past generations and this wave always has the poor and the low level of population in itself, and these are the same characters that we read their lives in the corners of the novel. This theme directs the reader throughout the novel and people at the beginning of the novel can be seen, finally, it will be introduced in what position they will fall. This wave will not take all of them by itself. Prone people such as Sharif, Morteza Agha, Mashy Ramezan, and Bemanali etc. will go with this wave and will stay till the end, and some of them refuse this wave. What strengthen the theme of the story is the love of the homeland and the nation. At the end of the novel, when Sharif writes a letter to his wife from prison, describes this love as:

Who can claim to loves his homeland and his people more than a political prisoner? Truly who can claim? A person who rests on the sofa with a fantasy life? A person who does not even prefer to drink water of this country? I think the one can love this land and sacrifices about its dignity and progress that with all his being and stay with his people and until the last moment stand against oppressors and mercenaries (Darvishian, 1997: 1615).

The theme of this novel can be investigated from political, social and historical aspects.

3. Political Theme

Darvishian by describing the dominant policies is depicting the history of a community. In addition to the direct reference to political events, sometimes by creating political debate

between the characters and expressing intellectual contradictions in their thinking, he plays an important role in influencing the readers' minds.

- a. The *political dimension* occurs symbolically from the beginning of the novel. "Sharif" from childhood sees himself against "Al" and he had no choice but to fight with him. "Mother," a symbol of "Homeland", is struggling with death. Sharif should defeat "Al" to save mother. On the other hand uncle Salim is praying on rooftop, and superstitious women, around the pregnant woman are doing something. Triangle of "religion, superstition and political struggle" begins from here and accompanied the reader until the end of the novel, also people who at the beginning of the novel somehow want to save the mother and each act on their opinion and during the novel different people in the community play roles similar to these people's roles. Sharif till the end remains a political activist. Some religious militants and others by accepting superstitious sayings about the fate of man, withdraw their practical work. Mother can be saved anyway, but her life will continue with misery.
- b. In Sharif's family, political persons such as Salim and Hamed emerged with different party orientation, and each express his views about politics.
 - Uncle Olfat believes that "If Mossadegh always be with Kashani, the nation will be saved. Otherwise everything will be destroyed" (ibid: 599).
 - Uncle Hamid expressed the reason of Dr. Baghaei's disagreement with Dr. Mossadegh and says: "This unashamed man, with these people's money went to France to study. But there he had fun and jovial. He returned with empty hand and empty brain and pretended that he is a doctor. While he is not a doctor. Earlier he was stuck to Dr. Mossadegh. In the hope that by deceiving him, he can prosper. But Mossadegh with its own cleverness recognized him and refused him" (Ibid: 688).
- c. In this novel Sharif, who acts as a spectator and narrator, tells names of political people, magazines, and parties from other characters' tongue and gives right and wrong definitions. Two famous parties that they have been named are "mass (Tudeh) party, *Hezb-e-Tudeh*" and "Pan Iranism".
 - **"Tudeh party, Hezb-e-Tudeh"**: Darvishian sometimes quoted events and conversations. And sometimes quoted parts of the newspaper that support this party. Uncle Salim is a member of Tudeh Party and brings the newspaper "To the future, *Be-soye-ayandeh*" to home and Sharif reads it for him. This newspaper opposes doctor Mossadegh and it is natural that its statements and news are against him (Ibid: 569).

- **Pan Iranism Population:** Pan Iranism population in this book is introduced as anti-worker party; however, direct and complete definition from parties, functions and political people and their real actions are not provided. For example, in a part of the novel, when the Dr. Mossadegh's message is broadcasting from radio, and the doctor in the message, calls for the Iranian people help to nationalize the oil industry; uncle Salim and uncle Olfat are disagree with this message, "Bibi says, seeks to God, we should not be hard on him. Let him do his job. He is a clever man. He studied abroad a couple of years. He has become a doctor. He is Patriot, he is with God."
 - Uncle Salim says that patriotism is not enough. He is inherently anti-worker...
 - Uncle Olfat said that he will give the country to the masses (ibid: 580)
- d. The political function of the novel has its own place and politics is the core of the novel. In this novel we can see: "those who somehow are in the way of consolidating or serving the Shah's regime, those who oppose and undermine and even ridicule them, are good and are placed in Sharif's heart. This is political choice of human beings" (Khandan, 2008: 750).
 - e. In the second chapter of the novel, World War II is about to happen and allied forces have reached the Iranian border towns. In August 1941, Reza-Khan's military forces did not do anything against the enemy; therefore, retreating command was sent to all the military forces and Kermanshah with no courageous resistance was occupied by the allied forces. The narrator with Bibi to follow Uncle Hamid who went to war in the region is heading to West Gilan and from there the narrator describes the war situation by his point of view, "The British military forces have reached the Qasr-e Shirin and Khosrawi up to Patagh. They have not been able to go further. But from West Gilan have reached to the outskirts of Ghalaje Mountain" (Darvishian, 1997: 53).
 - f. In June 1952, Dr. Mossadegh wants the Interior Ministry position from the Shah but the Shah refused to give him this position. Dr. Mossadegh resigns and Ghavam-ol-Saltaneh once again is assigned to form the government "Throughout the day, people are talking about the resignation of doctor Mossadegh. Garage has another situation. Casting and forging shops, tornachy (the place of a type of traditional play), accessories sales and bicycles instruments, all are engaged in discussion" (Ibid: 654 652).
Ghavam after being appointed as prime minister gives the message and says: "Woe to those who are sabotaging my efforts and cause obstacles in my road ahead or disrupt

public order... I warned the public that period of rebellion has been elapsed and the day of obeying the commandments has come. Another political policy is in order” (Ibid: 654-5).

After Ayatollah Kashani’s positioning and merchants’ sit-in, at July 21st, people pour into the streets and call for the overthrow of Ghavam.

- g. The July 21st uprising and killing people in the streets of the Kermanshah city is described from the perspective of the narrator. "On the sidewalk a few people have been shot and fallen in blood. Bibi is going toward the injured people. Gunshots do not interrupt for a moment. Houshang drags himself to the sidewalk. By his blood, writes on the closed of a store, Death or Mossadegh" (ibid: 665).
- h. The author portrays the atmosphere of Kermanshah in the run-up to the coup of August 19th 1953 very well; aggregation of people, slogans and parties speeches at street rallies, and finally Mossadegh’s government will be overthrown within a few hours and Major General Zahedi becomes prime minister. After the coup, many members of the Tudeh Party activists who were arrested, recanted and be released. A large group of them serve the coup regime and a number of their officers were executed. Uncle Salim, who is a member of the Tudeh Party after the collapse, commuted suicide by opium and the narrator, analyzes these actions. Dr. Mossadegh gets arrested and in a show trial sentenced to three years in prison (Ibid: 773).
- i. Fifth of June 1963 arrived, and narrator from the tongue of Hossein Dehghan and a regretful soldier rebuilds that day. The author also reflects government policies and events among the people in the story. "The evening of the fifth day of June 1963 Radio reports: In Tehran a bloody skirmish happened between some of the people and the armed forces and police officers in which some of them were killed and wounded. By broadcasting this news suddenly a dead silence takes place in the sergeants’ room "(ibid: 1169)
- j. On 10th April 1965 in the Marble Palace someone shoot at Shah but he was not killed or wounded. Shooter was a soldier named Reza Shams Abadi who was serving in the Imperial Guard and after killing two non-commissioned officers of the guard he was killed and Shah survived.
- k. Imprisonment, torture, arrests, SAVAK, heartbreaking executions and death under torture, constitute a large part of the story. The author portrays the comprehensive description and report on torture and atrocities committed by SAVAK in the Shah's prisons and fighters’ resistance against them.

"Blue eyed" with a black wire stands above me. Whenever I get tired and I want to put my feet on the ground he beats me on head and face with cable... out of the corner of my lip blood is pouring on my hands and chest... my wrist due to eroding with a sharp edge of handcuff is injured... He beats with fists to my face... the skin of my wrists are destroyed and they are shining just as two pieces of fresh red meat. Blue eyed... again puts the inquest sheet in front of me.

Q: Which group do you work with? To which foreign country you send the provided information? (Ibid: 1247)

1. The author of this story referred to some of the political issues that are:
 - Doctor Mossadegh's public support in Kermanshah (ibid: 689); Zahedi seizure by government (ibid: 689); Shah coup by Colonel Nasiri (ibid: 725-6); The British military forces attempts to bombarding the Kermanshah (ibid: 68-70); Teachers' strike in Tehran and other cities (ibid: 110); Launching the National Front by Dr. Mossadegh (ibid: 567); Protests against the Shah's regime (ibid.: 1182-6); Takhti's seventh day of death events (ibid: 1185); and Electoral conflicts (ibid: 391-3).

3.1. Historical Theme

The Cloudy Years cannot be considered as a historical novel; but portions of history and narrating the accidents bind it to the historical novels. "Historical novels have the achieved scenes. These novels are take place in the actual settings and contexts" (Mirsadeghi, 1981: 416). In the Cloudy Years, real historical events are quoted from children and teens that suffice to provide only a partial picture of history. In this novel, historical figures do not play an important role. Only a shadow of their actions is present in the novel. From the historical dimension of this novel, we should point out the historical instances, albeit they will be indirectly quoted. For instance the struggle and martyrdom of "Yar Mohammad Khan," according to the words of Uncle Ulfat (Darvishian, 1997: 77); or defining the famine in Ahmad Shah's era by Bibi and Uncle Ulfat (ibid: 111). Although these quotations are real and show a period of Iranian history but they are not documented. They are memories of old people that they tell of ancient times. The reader follows historic days of nationalization events, the 18th and 21st of July from the general public sayings and rarely refer the radio. But the value of author's work is in showing and consolidating of the heroism of ordinary people at those days. And also in the articulation of problems that occur in the company, clearly British colonial rule in the country, shows.

The other historic news of this novel are: Fawzia's divorcing by Shah (ibid: 384); workers strike (ibid: 178); and the unveiling (ibid: 163).

3.2. Social Theme

The social dimension of this novel is wider and more enlightening than the other two dimensions. In fact, the author by extensive descriptions of social issues is strengthening the political dimension of the novel. These common individuals and persons against them who have the simple social life, by all their beliefs and convictions in accordance with politics also act based on the same pattern. Thus, the poverty of any kind, whether material or cultural, is connected with the political issues.

Social aspects of this book are material poverty, cultural poverty (belief in superstitions and folk beliefs), and class difference and so on.

3.3. Material Poverty

One of the issues that we face in this book is working women and children. Poverty obliges women in home, along with their everyday tasks, to work in order to help the family expenses. Although in this novel most women were the only breadwinner of their family. Men are mostly unemployed or their income cannot support the family. The narrator's mother always is weaving or sewing. His grandmother is also a tailor. None of ordinary women of this novel are unemployed. Rarely we can find a woman like Saltanat Khanoom who has enough money to hire tutor for his children and she has workers, other women suffer from poverty. Children also since get the power to work are forced to work and not study. Uncle Salim, when was eleven years old, hired by the Oil Company. Earlier, in alleyways, he was selling cakes and lentil soup (ibid: 86).

Many families that Sharif becomes familiar with are very poor, and this poverty is the consequence of these people's beliefs and acts. For example, Sharif's father who is a hardworking man, works from morning till night; but he returns bare handed or he has spent all the money that he was earned. He lived a life by misery and displacement. And he leaves his wife and children in pressure. Once he had home and life but because of smartness of a Jew, who takes advantage of his simplicity and his superstitions, lost his home and living. His

belief in Fairies and that every home has Jin, becomes subject to this Jewish man. So he disguised as Fairies and ordered him to leave his home.

Other cases such as these take place that in which Sharif's father leaves his right simply and he never wants to struggle for his property. Uncle Ulfat has such character and even Sharif. However, poverty can be due to the ruling system. The government's wrong policies which result in the process that riches get richer and the poor get poorer, has not been widely studied, it is clear that there are the things behind the scene. Among poor families whom we see in the novel, there is a family of three, father works in salt grinding workshop and earns money for his wife and son. This man who has worked with rock salt all of his life, all members of his body are salty. It seems that salt has penetrated deep into his body. He dies of disease. After a lifetime work and effort he does not have asset or record. From then on, his wife must work instead of him.

3.3.1. Cultural Poverty

One of the reasons for the misery of the character of this novel is vulgar beliefs. Aunt Cheshme's tragic life is the consequence of these beliefs. Marrying the most beautiful girl of village with a spring which is drying up, seems idiotic, but in the culture of rural people who are living in material and cultural poverty, this is the only thing that they can do to rescue it. But actually it does not happen and fountain becomes dry. People scattered and sacrificed women, as a widow, remain single forever.

In such a society the belief in superstition (ibid: 271 and 18) and a belief in fairy invisible beings has penetrated the minds of people so much that some will believe anything about them. A man named "Osa Najaf" claims that he keeps Jin in his house and everyone believe. Whereas: "he has got a new wife and told his previous wife: This is a Jin and I have find it with many troubles that help you in doing housework "(ibid: 367).

3.3.2. Class Difference

Showing the class difference is of other items in the content of this book that attracts the attention. The narrator sees different people in the community that their life is not the same. One of the many families who were referred in this study was, "Mirza Poolad's" family, Uncle Ulfat's sister's husband. Sharif, compare Mirza's life with themselves. He sees their children that despite the financial comfort, do not study and those who are like Sharif, should work and find the needed money for their school (ibid: 149).

Ali Ashraf shows a society in which many people work and the less live comfortably. In a few cases in this novel rich people are taken into account. These are people who have taken the others' property or have got rich by chance and fortune or a trick has been at work. Those who have become rich through fraud and labors of others constitute the largest number of these people; masters, the employers, who are somehow cooperated with the government; like MPs, are of these people.

4. Conclusion

What is interesting in this story is the content and semantic field of the work. The author's original reliance in this work is the simple and unadorned narration of the theme. He narrates the poverty in a simple and sometimes childish language and talks about the pain and suffering of oppressed people. All of them –father, mother and children- live in a miserable condition. The main characters of this story are peasants, commoners and simple people, the workers and people who live in Halabi (tin) houses and themes such as poverty, ignorance and unemployment and its disastrous effects are of the dominant themes.

On the one hand this novel is the illustrator of delicate fabric of the human spirit and is the monitor of their relationship with each other and also is the illustrator of differences, expectations and aspirations, hopes and dreams, sorrows and joys and sufferings and deprivations of the people in society, on the other hand in terms of inclusion of sensitive political, social and historical realities of the country and addressing aspects of real life and attention to humanitarian issues and criticism of the anomalies that by not paying attention can lead to irreparable destructive and consequences is a remarkable novel.

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