



## Expressive-social analysis of Haj Sayyah's travelogue to Farang

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### Abstract

Travelogues are one of the well-known literary genres in the literature of nations. From their formal emergence in the Persian language with Naser Khosrow's travelogue (394-481 AH) until the Safavid period, they did not play a significant role in the realm of literary creation due to the lack of conditions for their emergence in pre-Safavid society. As a means of reflecting some of the thoughts and social currents of ancient Iranian society, they were largely ineffective. Before the Safavid era, what existed as independent travelogues—of which there are very few—and non-independent travelogues, mostly found in the form of anecdotes and biographies within literary works in both prose and poetry, were often report-like narratives that did not engage in critical reflection on what the authors saw and heard. A prominent example of this can be found in Naser Khosrow's travelogue. The Safavid period marked a rebirth of travelogue writing in Iran and introduced a new era characterized by critical perspectives in these works. However, the Qajar period holds special significance regarding the growth and prevalence of travelogue writing in Persian. On one hand, it played a crucial role in encouraging society to recognize the need for transformation and reduce the gap with Western societies. The inherent characteristics of this literary genre attracted readers' interest, leading to a much greater impact than other literary forms in persuading readers to accept the need for transformation and change in the intellectual and material foundations of Iranian society. Among these characteristics are the appeal derived from the narrative style of travelogues and the reader's imaginary journey alongside the author's firsthand experiences. During the Qajar era, the writings of Iranian travelers about their observations of foreign lands were important factors in shaping modernist thoughts and mindsets, reinforcing the understanding of the concept of "the other." In this period, various segments of Iranian society, from Qajar kings and political figures to students sent to Europe and even ordinary people, engaged in writing travelogues. By documenting their observations of advancements in the modern world, they laid the groundwork for modernism and a shift away from tradition in Iranian society. Despite the significant role these travelogues played in shaping transformation within Iranian society during the Qajar era, their function as historical documents has attracted attention from historians. However, in the realm of literary research,



travelogues—particularly those from the Qajar period—have not received the attention they deserve.

Therefore, since every historical work is written in a language and style of expression that significantly affects the ultimate impact of the text—either enhancing or diminishing it—analyzing the travelogues of the Qajar era from this perspective is of great importance. Thus, it is both possible and necessary to examine the travelogues of the Qajar period as one of the many points of intersection between history and literature from various linguistic, literary, and social dimensions, and to reveal the results in terms of the ultimate goal of all travelogues and their success in achieving this aim. Although the role of language and expression in these travelogues is not limited solely to historical achievements, the transformations that these travelogues have brought about in other areas, including literature itself, are also very significant. Numerous travelogues were written during the Qajar era, which can be categorized into three groups based on the conditions and positions of their authors: The first group includes travelogues written by individuals sent by the government to European countries. These travelogue writers include political agents and ambassadors such as Mirza Abolhasan Khan Ilchi, Hossein Khan Ajudanbashi, Khosrow Mirza Azododoleh, Farrokh Khan Amin-ol-Dowleh, and others, as well as those who went for educational purposes, such as Mirza Saleh Shirazi. The second group consists of the travelogues of Naser al-Din Shah and Mozaffar al-Din Shah, who were among the first to set foot in foreign lands and describe their observations. The third group includes travelogues written by individuals who traveled to those countries for tourism or trade, such as Hajj Sayyah, Hajj Pirzadeh, and Sahaf Bashi.

Based on the aforementioned classification, Hajj Sayyah's travelogue falls into the category of ordinary individuals and tourists, detailing the eighteen-month journey of its author to various parts of the world, particularly 19th-century Europe. This study will attempt to examine Hajj Sayyah's travelogue as the most detailed and longest travelogue among those from the Qajar period, highlighting it as a prominent example in terms of language, literature, and social aspects. Accordingly, the analysis of the linguistic, literary, and social dimensions of Hajj Sayyah's travelogue has been the focus of this research, leading to the following findings: From a linguistic and literary perspective, the author of the travelogue adheres to a simple writing style, which can be considered the beginning phase during the Qajar era. The sentences are straightforward, comprehensible, short, and unembellished, with the author's primary aim being to convey his concepts and observations in simple language. To infuse freshness into his travel narrative and prevent his account from becoming monotonous and purely reportorial, he strives throughout the text to create and evoke sensory and imaginative spaces using his somewhat limited literary resources. These artistic expressions are primarily imitative, lacking significant innovation, and are largely influenced by the prose style of Saadi's *Golestan*, to the extent that the author's affinity for Saadi is evident even in his inclusion of poetic examples. In our view, these linguistic and literary characteristics not only reflect some of the writing styles typical of travel literature in the Qajar era but also play a crucial role in attracting readers and aligning them with the author's perspective, ultimately having a significant impact on the



audience. Regarding social issues, it should be noted that Hajj Sayyah's primary objective in writing about his travels to Europe was mainly to report on the social and cultural advancements of those societies and to articulate the extent and depth of Iran's societal gap with them. Among the social issues that garnered his attention most were freedom and just governance, women's rights, education and its quality, the level of attention to religion and the religious status of Western nations, as well as cultural and artistic matters such as the publication of newspapers and social relations. Given that Hajj Sayyah was himself a cleric with a predominant interest in cultural, religious, and educational issues, these matters are more prominently reflected in his travelogue. Of course, he also reports on other topics such as factories and industries, railroads, telegraphs, and prisons. Hajj Sayyah does not shy away from expressing astonishment at Western advancements; however, he is not a completely self-effacing individual enamored with everything Western. He consistently defends the religious and Islamic values of his homeland with conviction and remains committed to them. In response to any foreign aggression, he provides firm rebuttals and even critiques certain aspects of Western countries, such as the diminishing role of religion, lack of certain freedoms, and their moral conduct. At times, he serves as a voice for Eastern peoples against Western excesses and strongly criticizes Western expansionism and colonialism in several instances, although these critiques are expressed in a moderate, civilized manner rather than in a bigoted tone.

**Keywords:** Travelogue, Haj sayyah, literary and social analysis, Qajar period.

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