

# Mountain Landscape in Persian New Poetry\* From Lighting Supply to Creating an Artistic Text

Babak Dariush\*<sup>1</sup>

1. Ph.D candidate of Architecture, NAZAR research center & university of Geneva, Tehran, Iran.

Mohammad Atashinbar<sup>2</sup>

2. École pratique des hautes études and NAZAR research center, Tehran, Iran.

**Abstract** | Mountains have received much attention from Iranian people since the ancient times. In the pre-Islamic period, they were admired as place the Anahita Goddess and for their mythical features. Many other myths have become eternal since they have been closely tied up with the mountains. For this reason, the character of the mountains is also of particular value and has been influential in the creation of Iranian architectural, urban and artistic works. Monuments, tombs, paintings, miniatures, as well as the spatial organization of cities are among the works whose formation has been substantially influenced by the mountains.

Nowadays, these values have changed throughout the history, and the features of the mountains have been transformed. This article seeks to analyze the dimensions of the mountain landscape and show the changes in contemporary Iranian thoughts. To this end, we have attempted to classify the conceptual evolution of the term mountain (Kooch in Persian) in the modern poetry, as one of the manifestations of contemporary thoughts.

**Keywords** | Iran; New Poetry; Mountain Landscape; Myth.

**Introduction** | The mountains were an important phenomenon in the eyes of the ancients for their special features: the height, the echoes, the magnificence, and the overwhelming feeling created either by being close to or by observing them. The mountains on the Iranian plateau are freshwater sources because of the geographical features of this region. Given that water is the most important factor contributing to civilizations, most of the villages in western Iran and many large cities are formed in the foothill areas. In addition, in the past, the mountains had a defensive function and served as shelter against natural and human disasters for the foothill dwellers, they created pleasant climates around them and were the source of livelihood. The functions of the mountain have encouraged Iranians to create different meanings for the mountain (Atashinbar, 2009: 32-34). For example, Mount Sabalan, on the regional scale and Mount Damavand, on the national scale, have been recognized for their symbolic and mythical functions. The buildings on the mountains, especially the great and special mountains, were also sacred. Some examples are Dave's cradle in Shiraz, the castle

of the daughter in Kerman, the old tombs in Mount Khezr-e-Nabi Qom and Imamzadeh Isma'il in Firoozkouh. Though the buildings are located in different geographical areas, their special relationships with the mountain have made them holy.

In the contemporary period, with the advent of modernity, many people started their life up the mountains, peoples' attitude towards the mountain changed, and technology made it possible for people to conquer the mountains (Dariush, 2017: 47). A tangible example is the relationship between the Alborz mountains - the geographically and mythically important mountains in Iran - and the city of Tehran - the largest city in Iran - (Dariush & Taghavian, 2018). According to Sgard, the mountains in Tehran will not draw the attention of its visitors in the first two days, and what we see for the first time is a large city featured with trees everywhere and commercial centers throughout the city. The mountains have long been there, it is the city that has approached it and invaded its privacy as though the city has swallowed villages around the foothills (Sgard, 2014: 66).

## Research question

How is the concept of mountain different from its concept in ancient times?

Corresponding Author: babak.dariush@gmail.com  
+9809125143797

## Hypothesis

The landscape of the mountain in contemporary thoughts seems to have changed from a mythical position to a symbolic element and its natural and romantic functions have been emphasized.

## Methodology

The new poetry presents the responses of the elite community to the ineffectiveness of classical poetry at the beginning of the modern Iranian era. It shows an important part of contemporary Iranian thoughts prevalent among the elite community as well as the public. Therefore, the study of these poems can present mountain function in contemporary Iranian thoughts. Nima Yoshij, Sohrab Sepehri, Mehdi Akhavan Saleh, Hooshang Ebtehaj and Forough Farrokhzad are poets whose works portray nature and include their literary responses to the mountains<sup>3</sup>. We selected the poems based on the three criteria including reputation, influence, and frequency of words of the mountain then analyzed them qualitatively.

## Mountain as a mythical landscape

According to ancient beliefs, the mountain accommodates the ghosts of the gods and is the place where the earth and sky are connected (Pigott, 1994: 96). Life on the mountain means being detached from the world affairs or it means adhering to the mystical world, it also symbolizes the humility of humankind against its creator (Rashed Mohassel et al., 2012: 120). Zoroaster had a revelation from God at the top of the mountain (Afifi, 1995: 592), and Moses saw a theophany of God on the Mount Sinai (Qur'an, Surah al-Muhammad); the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was assigned the prophethood in the cave of Hara (Quran, Sura Alaq). In the mythology of Greece and India, the mountain symbolizes the power of the gods (Ivens, 1994: 200 & Eliade, 1993: 106). The most important legend of the mountain was popular with the Aryan people; the primary man was created in the mountain; led a life there and the spirits of the dead people were judged at Cinhou bridge (Mousavi Haji, 2008: 162). In ancient, Mountains presented the myths or were the places they resided in. Based on the beliefs, the architecture in relation to the mountains was shaped. Morteza Ali's well is one of the historical works of Shiraz, located on the summit of Kuhu-e-Taftnan, and the people believe that the name of this place is taken from a person known as Ascetic Ali who adopted severe austerities at this place and his tomb is at the bottom of the stairs in the basement leading to water. This stone building is a Chartaghi (four barrel vaults and a dome) which by virtue of its spatial arrangement is a sanctuary. In Rey, the Bibi's tomb which is built on a Sassanid building represents the holy buildings of ancient times. Both of these buildings have been influenced by the ancient beliefs and still present a sacred place in the Iranian mind (Fig. 1).

The sacred view of the mountain is also reflected in Iranian classical literary texts. The mountain is the place where the sun rises. It is the nest site for Phoenix, especially the Alborz fights

the devil and it is free from darkness, coldness, warmth, disease, death. It is free from all impurity associated with devils.

*Cho meshkin jaade shab ra shane kardand  
Cheragh-e rooz ra parvane kardand  
Sar az **alborz** barzad ghors-e khorshid  
Jahan ra taze kard ayeen-e Jamshid  
(Nezami, Khosrow and Shirin)*

*Forood Amad az abr simorgh-o chang  
Bezad bargereftash az aan garm sang  
Bebordash daman ta be alborz **kooh**  
Ke boodash bedan ja konam-o goroooh*

The mountain in ancient Iran is the symbol of seeking help from the sky, a sacred place to be connected with the holy place. In the Iranian mindset, the mountain has a mythical role and contributes to the formation of Iranian civilization and culture, and is so powerful to challenge other myths (Fig. 2). These aspects show that mountain meanings are not limited to the body and can be considered a landscape. For example, the Alborz has the same meaning for all Iranians reflecting their experience in relation to the mountain.

## Mountain landscape in new poetry

Given that the subjective and perceptual aspects of the landscape and its objective aspect are formed simultaneously, it



Fig. 1: The old tree near Mortaz Ali's Chartaghi and the water running along. All form the Iranian Triple elements (Javadi, 2007, p. 20) and represent the sanctity of this space. Photo: Mohammad Atashinbar, 2018.

is not surprising that landscape is greatly influenced by different disciplines. Among the disciplines, the influence of literature is so much so that it can help to understand the evolution of society better.

The social changes of the modern period of Iran in the late Qajar and early Pahlavi changed Iranian classical poetry. Such changes are reflected in new poetry; the poets started holding an objective view of human beings and their perceptions of nature became individualized. This caused the poetry to be associated with the language of the people in the streets and markets, and native and local elements enter into poetry (Younesi Rostami et al., 2014: 140). Although many believe the emergence of new poetry coincided with Abibat Abu-l-Qasim Lahooti, the new poetry gained its popularity because of Nima Yushij's poetry. Unlike classical poetry, the new poetry influenced nature than being affected by it and was tied up with the daily lives of people.

### Nima Yushij

To present his social and humanistic perspectives in his poetry, he attempted to highlight the subjective affairs and use nature in its artistic and literary forms (Mohammadi & Panahi, 2009: 92). In his view, man is a part of nature (Youshij, p. 570). The



Fig. 2: A convoy sees Zal on the mountain, where Phoenix takes care of him. Frame No. 8 from the original handwritten version of the Shahnameh. Metropolitan Museum of New York.

mountain inspires Nima to develop the content of poetry. It also helps him to generate ideas for the form of poetry. Though Nima uses the symbolic meaning of the mountain, he refers to the actual and objective functions of the mountain:

*Ab mighorrad dar makhzan-e **koo**h*

***Koo**h-ha ghamnakand*

*Abr mipichad, damanash tar*

*Vaz faraz-e darre, ooja-ye javan bim avarde bar afrashte sar*

(Anke migeryad)

### Sohrab Sepehri

Sohrab can be considered a modern mystic. According to him, the path to God is through his creatures. The whole nature is a sign of his Creator. His speculative look encourages him to look for a fault-free and beautiful world like nature of human beings (Ghazizadeh, 2004: 54). Sohrab has a verse –based approach to the mountain and this can be considered as a way to know the world.

*Va be anan goftam*

*Sang arayesh-e **koo**hestan nist*

*Hamchenani ke felez, zivari nist be andam-e kolang*

*Dar kaf-e dast-e zamin gohar-e napeidaest*

*Ke rasoolan hame az tabesh-e an khire shodand*

*Pey-e gohar bashid*

(Sura Tamasha)

### Mahdi Akhavan Sales

To express its purpose, Akhavan describes nature and his living environment in his poems using figures of speech and rhetorical devices (Anabestani, 2017: 5). He is a poet who plays a very significant role in the creation of words using native and climatic elements in his work; Kuh Mikh (this Persian word means fastened to the mountain in English) is one of these words. For Akhavan, the mountain is an intermediary element for communication.

*Ze bas ba sad hezaran **koo**h mikhash hardei setvar*

*Na mi-oftad na mikhizad*

*Ze to porsam ey ahooramazda, ey ahooramazda*

*Ke ra in sobh*

*Khosh ast-o khoob-o farkhonde*

(Sobh)

### Hooshang Ebtehaj

In Ebtehaj's sonnet, rarely can the influence of local and climatic elements be seen and mainly show the long-standing literary tradition of Iran (Kazemi, 2015: 1661). In most sonnets, nature is used for expressing mental concepts. He also portrays his own effects by depicting nature (Eghbali & Rasoulzadeh, 2010: 28). The mountain in the poetry of Ebtehaj presents pristine nature. The mountain and other natural elements form an emotional image.

*Posht-e in **koo**he-e boland*

*Lab-e darya-ye kabood*

*Dokhtari bood ke man*

*Sakht mikhastamash*



*Va to gooyee ke gali*  
(Divar)

### Forough Farrokhzad

Forough also emphasizes the emotional aspect of nature. She loves nature and is concerned about its destruction in a modern and industrialized world (Sadeghi, Karimi, & Karimi, 2012: 93). Forough's perception of the mountain the same as her perception of nature; the individual's relationship with nature shaped by her own personal experience.

*Sar bekoobam be sang-e koohestan*  
*Tan bekoobam be moj-e darya-ha*  
*Bas ke labrizam az to mikham*  
*chon ghobari az khod foroo rizam*  
(Az doost dashtan)

### Endnote

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