

Introduction

هیچ می‌دانی مسلمانان به چیست؟
هم عبادت هم کلید زندگیست
یک مسلمان هست آن هم ارمنیست»

واعظی پرسید از فرزند خویش
صدق و بی‌آزاری و خدمت به خلق
گفت: «زین معیار اندر شهر ما

A preacher asked his own son:

‘Do you know what makes a person a Muslim?’

Truthfulness, harmlessness and serving people,

These are both pious works and the key to life’.

(The son) said: ‘There is only one Muslim who fulfils these values

in our city, and he is a (Christian) Armenian’.

This short poem, attributed to Parvīn I‘tīshāmī (d. 1941), appeared on social media during the Covid-19 pandemic, as Iran faced a dire shortage of vaccines. This shortage was aggravated by several problems, such as the back-breaking economic and political sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic, economic mismanagement, and corruption by the authorities. According to the BBC Persian news agency, the ambassador of Armenia responded to this crisis by telling the *Hamshahri* newspaper that starting on 15 June 2021, Iranians could travel to his country and get vaccinated if they stayed there for a period of ten days. Although the ambassador called this move a humanitarian initiative, some authorities in Iran tried to denigrate it by focusing on the economic benefits of these trips for Armenia.² The poem circulated on various online platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and Telegram following the news about vaccinations for Iranians in Armenia. These posts were shared and liked by many tens of thousands of people. Although the couplets are not really composed by Parvīn, attributing them to her shows her significant place in the living tradition of using poetry to voice the pain and suffering of Iranian people, and to protest against corruption by the religious and political authorities.

The central theme of this poem is religious controversy, as the moral virtues of Muslims and Christians are critically compared. A preacher asks his son how one can tell if somebody is a Muslim and is challenged by the answer he receives: a good Muslim is truthful, harmless and serves people. The only person who enjoys these traits is a Christian Armenian. The poem is also an explicit way of criticising the Islamic Republic of Iran that emphasises its Islamic character but in practice fails to protect the people against such a pandemic. About a century after Parvīn showed prowess in reviving debate poetry and using it as a safe space

for self-expression, anonymous Iranian poets still relate to her innovations. They adopt Parvīn's techniques to criticise the hypocrisy and corruption they see in the Iranian-Muslim society. Attributing the poem to Parvīn is the most recent example of her widespread popularity. It is a living case of taking refuge in Parvīn's personal style, to figuratively oppose oppression and express frustration at corrupt Islamic rulers, while hoping to avoid censorship and persecution.

This book investigates unexplored aspects of the literary identity and poetry of Parvīn Iṭīṣāmī, a woman who has enjoyed her nation's admiration for about a century. In accordance with traditional Iranian-Muslim gender norms, as Farzaneh Milani argues, Persian classical literature had for centuries promoted 'silence and immobility' as the ideal characteristics of femininity.³ In this patriarchal culture, where the right to have a public voice was monopolised by men, writing and publishing were regarded as masculine acts. A millennium of women's literary contributions was barely recorded in biographical anthologies, which were written by men. Although many women had written poetry, they were marginalised, neglected, and usually forgotten. Then in the early twentieth century, in the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911) and later re-establishment of monarchy by Rizā Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925–1941), Parvīn showed herself a master in composing poetry in the classical style, reviving the long-forgotten classical genre of *munāẓara* ('debate poetry'), which dates back to the pre-Islamic period.

Parvīn's poetry and her artistic talents were widely admired, while provoking long-standing controversies. When she was still a teenager, her father, Yūsuf Iṭīṣāmī (d. 1938), an intellectual and a man of letters, introduced her to a large public audience. He did so by publishing her poetry in *Bahār*, a monthly journal of literary, political, and social affairs that he co-founded and published in two periods, from April 1910 to October 1911 and from April 1921 to December 1922.⁴ Parvīn's poems showed such talent that many male readers expressed doubt or disbelief that a woman could have written them. Even the comments by Parvīn's admirers were tainted with gender-bias. Yet despite all the controversies about Parvīn's gender and authorship, she gained continuing, widespread popularity.

A plethora of books, academic articles in journals, newspaper articles, and in recent years diverse online materials have been written on Parvīn and her literary art. These studies praise Parvīn as a follower of the classical style of Persian poetry. She is generally known as a poet who is sensitive to the pain and suffering of humankind, but several scholars recognise her as a poet engaged in the contemporary socio-political issues of her time. The religious quality of her poetry has led scholars to see her as a mystic, comparing her to Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1207–1273). She is also praised for her revival of Persian debate poetry, the classical genre she used to compose most of her poems. However, few of the innumerable commentaries on her work have shown originality or applied critical analysis. Most

of them have been basically descriptive accounts, built upon previous work on her poetry. The huge body of material written on Parvīn is focused on the similarities that her work has with prominent poets of classical poetry and lacks analysis. I propose that analysis of Parvīn's poetry revises the established image of her as a classical poet by demonstrating characteristics that distinguish her work from being mere emulation of classical poetry by her forefathers. I further suggest that there is a distinctive element in Parvīn's poetry, and that is transgression. Parvīn's transgression of Iranian-Muslim gender norms plays a pivotal role in shaping her work and her identity as a Muslim woman poet in the patriarchal Persian culture. Failure to recognise transgression of gender norms in her work has reinforced a generally held belief that Parvīn's prominence in Persian literature is simply due to her emulation of her classical forefathers. This assumption obscures Parvīn's important achievements, which she gained by transgressing Iranian-Muslim gender boundaries in classical Persian literature.

In this book, I wish to bridge the gaps in previous research by analysing several of Parvīn's poems and studying them in their socio-political and historical context. In my investigation, I shall examine the following aspects of Parvīn's poetry and authorship, which have an element of transgression in them:

1. Parvīn transgressed the Iranian-Muslim gender norm of silence by composing and publishing fine poetry in the classical style. She crossed the patriarchal gender boundary of silence, entered the male-dominated space of the Persian literary tradition, and pioneered in claiming a literary identity for herself as a woman.
2. She revived the long-forgotten genre of classical Persian debate poetry, which was exploited by prominent male poets such as Asadī-yi Ṭūsī (d. 1072). My analysis of Parvīn's 'God's Weaver' in chapter two, for example, illuminates this particular aspect of her poetry.
3. Although Parvīn used terms such as *muḥtasib* ('morality police'), *mast* ('drunk'), *qāẓī* ('judge'), *vālī* ('ruler'), *masjid* ('mosque') in these poems, she used them to express her mystical predilection and criticise orthodox Islamic beliefs. For example, she contrasted the mystical motif of *dil* ('heart') as the true place of worship with Ka'ba. Describing Ka'ba as a building made out of *gil* ('mud'), she criticised the adherence of Muslims to the outward appearances while they are negligent of what they should truly revere.
4. By adopting the Ṣūfī attitude towards religious beliefs, Parvīn crossed the liminal boundaries of gender, which excluded women from the male-dominated realm of mysticism.
5. Parvīn introduced femininity into the realm of patriarchal Persian literature, and the genre of debate poetry in particular.

6. She engaged in the socio-political issues of her times.
7. Parvīn showed her finesse in composing didactic poetry, which is one of the important genres in classical Persian poetry.
8. Her poetry broke with the patriarchal gender norm of silence and seclusion, but paradoxically, it is still very much approved of in the patriarchal society of Iran.

A Historical-Cultural Context

Parvīn was born and raised in the traditional Iranian-Muslim culture, in which strict socio-cultural norms controlled femininity. For at least fourteen centuries, the female gender had been associated with shame, while its male counterpart was cherished as honourable. As Leila Ahmed put it, in Islamic Middle Eastern societies, the female body came to be considered shameful, and therefore needed to be concealed.⁵ In the Iranian-Muslim society, women's voices became associated with their gender. Like their bodies, women's voices became gendered. Hence, the female voice was considered shameful, and became subject to veiling. For a woman, having a voice became as transgressive an act as unveiling her body. Silence for Iranian-Muslim women was constructed as a religious requirement, although the Qur'ān does not demand it. In following this tradition, Persian authors, both traditional and modernist, and both major and minor, repeatedly praised women for silence, until it turned into the ideal of feminine charm and virtue.⁶ How were these women required to perform such femininity? What socio-cultural roles did Iranian-Muslim gender norms assign to women? What did it mean to be a woman in such a culture and society?

Historical sources, such as the books of ethics that were written by men for men, inform us about the roles assigned to women in the Iranian-Muslim culture. According to Afsaneh Najmabadi, women as wives were traditionally identified as *manzil* ('the house', or a 'halting place' on a road).⁷ Moulded into this domestic identity, women were to serve in the house 'to produce a perfect Muslim man, a man of God, of the household and of the polis'.⁸ The other role assigned to women was producing children, without having the right to decide how they should be raised. According to Najmabadi, the books of ethics reduced the mother's role to serving as a womb. The father was 'the head of the household and would manage everything, including the wives and children. It was the father who had the right and responsibility to choose names and wetnurses or nannies for children'.⁹ In the *Baḥr al-favā'id*, one of the books of ethics that offered advice to kings, the author advised kings to bar their children from spending time in the women's quarters. Endorsing fathers as responsible for the education of children according to the Sharī'a, this writer warned fathers to keep their children away from seven *afats* ('mortal sins')¹⁰. Companionship with women was one of those sins. The author's caveat was that if

children spent time with women, they would behave like women.¹¹ Such accounts recall numerous gender-biased Islamic stories in which women were regarded as incapable of making wise decisions. One example is the use of a *ḥadīth*- ('reported saying of Muḥammad') by the prominent Shi'ite theologian Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1699). In his view, 'Muḥammad said that if a man obeyed his wife, Allah would condemn him to Hell'. Majlisī used this *ḥadīth* to legitimise the curtailment of royal women's political agency at the Safavid court (1501-1722). He also claimed that Muḥammad consulted his wives, but always did the opposite of what they advised him to do.¹² Although these norms were deeply ingrained in the Iranian-Muslim culture, they were increasingly challenged by the end of the nineteenth century, as intellectuals in Persia responded to European ideas of social progress.¹³

Parvīn's literary career covered a critical period of Iran's history, which heralded fundamental transformations in the country. This period covered the momentous years between the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1911 and Rīzā Shah Pahlavī's reign from 1925 to 1941. The ideas leading to the Constitutional Revolution took shape as Persian intellectuals considered the growing economic, military, and cultural expansion of European powers in the late nineteenth century. Many Persian intellectuals theorised that the main reason for Persia's weakness in relation to Europe was the difference in status between Persian women and their European counterparts. Although Europe itself was only beginning to grant women basic rights and freedoms, both modernising and traditionalist Persians commonly viewed the problem of Persia's 'backwardness' as a gendered issue.

Many Persian intellectuals pinpointed the problematic differences between Persia and Europe as the Persian women's coveredness and their lack of modern education. To resolve these issues, they called on women to shed their traditional roles and identity. Women needed to get educated, dress differently, produce and educate patriotic citizens, and push the nation towards progress. As Najmabadi put it, women who were subject to the management of men, who were the head of the household, were now urged to transform themselves. From being 'the house', they were to become servants of society by managing the house.¹⁴ The traditional domestic roles of producing children and of serving men to produce perfect Muslim men of God had to be changed. Now, to serve the goal of national progress, women were urged to become educated teachers, who should learn the 'sciences' of housekeeping and family management.

The question of women's veiling provoked heated discussions and controversies among intellectuals. Modernists criticised the wearing of traditional veils or the *chādūr* ('the black loose-fitting cloth covering a woman's whole body'), which they directly associated with gender segregation and the 'backwardness' of Muslim nations. Some writers suggested a link between traditions of female veiling and sexual issues such as paedophilia and homosexuality among Persian men. The controversial

work *ʿĀrifnāma*, a long *maṣnavī* ('rhyming couplets') composed by the poet Īraj Mīrzā (d. 1926) is one of these examples. In this poem, Īraj Mīrzā used biting satire to blame *ḥijāb* (which literally means 'barrier', and serves as the symbol of strict gender segregation) as the reason for sexual issues in Persian society.¹⁵ Another example is *Maʿāyib al-rijāl: Vices of Men* (d. 1921), which is worth mentioning because it was written by a woman.¹⁶ Bibi Khānum Astarābādī wrote this book in response to *Taʿdīb al-nisvān* or *Disciplining Women*, in which the anonymous author 'wanted to educate' the upper-class women in Tehran 'on how to behave properly toward their husbands, but also to put them in their place'. Regurgitating traditional Islamic views about the role of women, the anonymous author had ten basic recommendations for women. According to these recommendations, a woman's role was 'a mere extension of her husband's pleasure in all respects'. Only women who behaved as was recommended, would be 'good' and might attain paradise.¹⁷ One of the vices Astarābādī blamed men for was their interest in homosexual behaviour instead of loving their wives. She recounted the terrible fate of a married man who preferred having sex with boys as an example of men's vices and their negative effects on marital relationships.¹⁸

The second historical turning point in Parvīn's brief lifetime and literary career was marked by unprecedented changes in conditions for women. After Rīzā Shah established the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925, he pursued the idea of remoulding traditional Iranian-Muslim gender norms as his solution to Persia's 'backwardness'. The improvement of women's lives was promoted as a central component of Rīzā Shah's modernisation agenda. The most radical change that Rīzā Shah made to the situation of women concerned their veiling. In 1936, he issued a royal decree to bar veiled women from appearing in public places, and the day of this royal decree came to be celebrated as 'Women's Liberation Day'. According to this order, women had to unveil if they wished to enter public spaces or engage in social activities. Police officers were appointed to implement the decree by forcefully unveiling women who wore traditional head-coverings in public. Against this historical-cultural background, Parvīn experienced a different cultural atmosphere. She was nurtured in a family that urged her to reject women's voicelessness, prized in the Iranian-Muslim tradition.

Parvīn Iʿtiṣāmī's Life

Parvīn (or Rakhshanda) Iʿtiṣāmī was born in Tabriz on 16 March, 1907,¹⁹ to a cultured, aristocratic family.²⁰ When she was still very young her family moved to Tehran, where she received her formal school education. She attended Iran Bethel, the American High School for Girls, and graduated in May 1924.²¹ She worked for a few years as a teacher at Iran Bethel after she graduated, and later as a librarian at the university library.²² In 1936, the Ministry of Culture awarded Parvīn a

third-class medal for her poetry, which she felt to be rather an offence and refused to accept.²³ She sent the medal back saying, 'There are many more who deserve it more than I do'.²⁴ In 1934 she married a cousin of her father,²⁵ a police officer and the marshal of Kermanshah,²⁶ but her husband showed no understanding of her world, her thoughts or reflective moods. After only two and a half months she left Kermanshah and announced her divorce later in Tehran. On 5 April 1941, three years and three months after her father's death, she died of typhoid fever and was buried next to her father in the premises of Qom's holy shrines.²⁷

Little is known about Parvīn's personal life. Part of what scholars continue to borrow from previous studies about Parvīn's life is probably hearsay that has turned into fact through repetition. One example of such a piece of information is the invitation that Parvīn received from the Pahlavi court. As Matini reports, in 1926, Parvīn was probably invited to become the private tutor to the queen at the newly founded Pahlavi court, but she declined the offer.²⁸ The reliable information that we have about Parvīn is what her brother, Abu'l-Faṭḥ I'tiṣāmī (d. 1978), has written about her personal life.

One year after Parvīn's death in 1941, Abu'l-Faṭḥ I'tiṣāmī published articles that were written to commemorate the occasion.²⁹ In this collection of articles, he published a two-page biographical sketch about Parvīn, in which the role of their father, Yūsuf I'tiṣāmī, stands out. As Abu'l-Faṭḥ I'tiṣāmī wrote, Parvīn had a very close relationship with her father, who took her on all his trips in Iran and abroad.³⁰ Parvīn's father was a man of letters, an author and a translator of several books into Persian.³¹ He was Parvīn's true teacher and mentor, who recognised her extraordinary talent and nurtured it.³² According to the poet laureate Muḥammad-Taqī Bahār (d. 1951), Parvīn started writing poetry when she was only eight.³³ She acquired knowledge of Arabic and learned Persian literature from her father, who befriended several poets of the time, and invited them to his house every Monday. Parvīn participated in these literary meetings and occasionally presented her own poems while she was still a schoolgirl.³⁴ Parvīn's father was the founder of *Bahār*, a journal of literary, scientific, political, and social affairs, which was published over two periods between 1910 and 1922.³⁵ It was Parvīn's father who provided her with the rare opportunity to have a public audience; when Parvīn was only thirteen, he published her poems in *Bahār*.³⁶

On Parvīn's place in her paternal family, Abu'l-Faṭḥ I'tiṣāmī wrote, 'In her entire life, Parvīn lacked nothing. In our quiet, unpretentious, and withdrawn family, the parents and brothers turned around Parvīn as moths do around a shining candle, full-heartedly trying to fulfil her wishes, even the unspoken ones. Perhaps hardly a girl may have enjoyed as much love, adoration, and respect from her own family members as did Parvīn'.³⁷ Based on what we know about Parvīn's life, it is not difficult to see the significant role that her father played in her literary career.³⁸

What is missing is the appreciation of the share that Parvīn's mother had in her daughter's phenomenal success. It was probably Parvīn's mother who provided her with the freedom at home to spend time on her literary aspirations. As a daughter, Parvīn was lovingly supported by both her parents to pursue her goals. In line with the improvement of the situation of women in her society, Parvīn criticised women's seclusion and expressed her thoughts about the role of mothers as educators of their children. However, Parvīn (in her poetry), and her brother (in Parvīn's brief biography) remained silent about the role of their mother. What prevented mention of Parvīn's mother's name was probably the grip of the deeply ingrained Iranian-Muslim traditions, which required women to remain veiled.

Parvīn I'tiṣāmī's Poetry

The publication history of Parvīn's *Dīvān* ('collected poetry') has not been examined yet. Her first publication consisted of twelve poems which appeared in the journal *Bahār* in 1920–1921. The composition dates of these twelve poems and a few others that she wrote for special occasions may be determined, but the rest of her poems bear no dates. The first edition of Parvīn's *Dīvān* comprised one hundred and fifty-eight poems and was composed between 1921 and 1935;³⁹ Bahār, the prominent poet, wrote an introduction to this edition.⁴⁰ A few months after her death, the second edition of her *Dīvān*, enlarged by fifty-three poems, was published.⁴¹ This edition comprised 5,606 couplets and was edited by Parvīn's brother, Abu'l-Faḥ I'tiṣāmī.⁴² There are controversies around a few of Parvīn's poems. One example is 'Women in Iran', which appears in the second edition of Parvīn's collected poetry and is omitted in the consequent reprints.⁴³ The numerous later issues of Parvīn's *Dīvān* are reprints of the second edition.⁴⁴ To examine how Parvīn's poetry has been studied by literary scholars and critics, it is essential to pinpoint the gaps in the body of scholarly material written on Parvīn. To survey the academic articles and book chapters written on Parvīn, I divide the chronological review of the material into two parts. I start with the sources produced outside Iran and written in English. Then I proceed to the second part, concerning those written in Persian inside Iran.

Literature Review

Research on Parvīn I'tiṣāmī outside Iran

The articles and book chapters published outside Iran are few in number, which are reviewed chronologically here. The first article on Parvīn and her poetry appears

in *Four Eminent Poetesses of Iran* by M. Ishaque, published in 1950.⁴⁵ Ishaque puts Parvīn on a par with her forebears: the tenth century poet, Rābiʿa bint Kaʿb al-Quzdārī,⁴⁶ Mahsatī of Ganja (d. 1159), and Ṭāhira Qurraṭ al-ʿAyn (d. 1852). In the fourth chapter of his book, Ishaque introduces Parvīn as one of his contemporary poets of Persian literature, who has successfully gained a literary reputation as a result of recent improvements in the status of women. The chapter comprises a short biography of Parvīn, information on the number of poems in the two editions of her *Dīvān*, and a description of the poetic forms that she uses in her poetry. Ishaque continues by presenting brief descriptions of the themes Parvīn deals with in several of her poems, such as the sufferings of the poor, the pain felt by orphans and the limitations on women’s roles in society. He accompanies his descriptions with quotes from the poems in Persian and their translations in English. Ishaque also describes the rhyme-scheme of her poems and points out some features of her poetry that he finds striking.

Ishaque believes that Parvīn used didactic themes in her poetry as effectively as Aesop used them in his fables. The next feature that he finds noteworthy is Parvīn’s use of *munāzara*, or the genre of debate poetry. He believes that Parvīn represents her talent admirably in several of her *munāzaras*, although he finds some of her other debate poems rather tedious and dull. Ishaque concludes that Parvīn never used her poetry to ameliorate the status of women, except in her poem *Ganj-i ʿiffat* (‘The Hidden Treasure of Chastity’).⁴⁷ This book chapter is important, because it is the first study about Parvīn as a prominent female Persian poet to be written and published outside Iran. It was published in India shortly after her unexpected death, which shows the scope of her success both in Iran and beyond. The article’s aim is not to offer any in-depth analyses of the poems. It is a descriptive work that provides the reader with useful introductory information about Parvīn and her art. It is worth mentioning that Ishaque is one of the few scholars who considers Parvīn as a modern poet. In his opinion, Parvīn adhered to the practice of classical forms, rhyme, and metre of Persian poetry. However, in terms of both her choice and treatment of subjects such as social suffering and ailments of the people in her society, she was a modern poet.

‘Parvīn’s Poems: A Cry in the Wilderness’ by Heshmat Moayyad (d. 2018), the influential Persian scholar, is the next article about Parvīn Iʿtiṣāmī’s poetry in English. The author opens his discussion with a short introduction to outstanding female poets in the history of Persian literature. Moayyad refers to the few existent fragments of poetry by female poets in the Middle Ages and asserts that there have been many talented Persian women whose poetry has unfortunately not survived, except for a few pieces. The writer attributes the lack of female presence in the world of poetry during the Islamic Middle Ages to an effect of the sociological conditions of the era. He continues with a brief biography of Parvīn and the significant incidents

in her life, mainly focusing on her divorce and the death of her father. Moayyad then deals with the poetic forms of *qaṣīda*, *qaṭʿa* and *maṣnavī* in Parvīn's poetry. He refers to the didactic themes in her work, the socio-political context in which she wrote her poems, and their publication by her brother, Abu'l-Faṭḥ Iṭīṣāmī.

Moayyad allocates a separate section of his introduction to Parvīn's *munāzarās* and her mastery in composing them. He refers to the structure of her *munāzarās*, which start with an expression of a thesis, then the anti-thesis and finally the judgement or conclusion, as he demonstrates in several examples of her *munāzarās*. He calls the readers' attention to the social criticism expressed in Parvīn's poems and how she brings the sufferings of the oppressed to the fore. He refers to her knowledge of classical poetry and how it shaped her work.⁴⁸ Published almost twenty-four years after Ishaque's book chapter on Parvīn Iṭīṣāmī and her poetry, Moayyad's article serves as one of the few first-hand sources of information about this female poet. Although the author does not provide any analysis of her poems, he gives a more detailed description of Parvīn's work than what is found in the book chapter by Ishaque. Moayyad also tackles a wider spectrum of features in her work, such as the different formal genres that she chooses, her talent in writing *munāzarās* and the major themes in her poetry. The article fulfils the important role of refreshing the minds of the international audience regarding talented modern female poets in Iran.

The preface to *A Nightingale's Lament: Selections from the Poems and Fables of Parvin Eṭesami (1907-41)* by Moayyad, which was published in 1994, presents almost the same material as his 1974 article.⁴⁹ Only a few new remarks are added. In his introduction he briefly informs the readers about the socio-political context in which Parvīn wrote her poetry. He refers to her times as a period of 'restricted literary creativity'. In Moayyad's view, the pioneer of modern poetry, Nīmā Yūshīj (d. 1960), gained almost no following until 1941, which was the year Parvīn died. Moreover, Parvīn's father and the literati in his circle of friends belonged to the conservative school of poetry, which 'adversely stood aloof to the modern trend'.⁵⁰ Therefore, Moayyad thinks that Parvīn was either unaware of the modern trends in poetry, or she adhered to the classical style of poetry by choice. In this book introduction, Moayyad provides the readers with a glimpse of the socio-political circumstances and provides context for a better comprehension of the poems. Parvīn's originality in using classical themes and motifs to speak about her contemporary issues seems to have escaped Moayyad's attention. Consequently, he evaluates Parvīn as a Persian poet who lived and wrote in the twentieth century but remained truly classical.

The same book contains a commentary on Parvīn's poetry by Alice Margaret Arent Madelung.⁵¹ This commentary mainly focuses on Parvīn's uses of fables, parables, and folktales to convey didactic messages to her audience. The importance of Madelung's commentary lies in its references to how Parvīn uses metaphorical

and allegorical means of communication. Throughout her commentary, Madelung gives examples of Parvīn's poems and highlights their social themes and connotations. Madelung shows a deep understanding of Parvīn's socio-political critique of society. She provides a political and socio-historical background that helps Western readers grasp Parvīn's critical views.

In *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (1992), Farzaneh Milani, a literary scholar and author, includes a chapter entitled 'Revealing and Concealing: Parvīn I'tiṣāmī', which primarily concerns the social environment in which Parvīn lived and wrote.⁵² Milani depicts what women experienced during Rizā Shah's period of forced unveiling in the early twentieth century. She believes that there is a pull and push between revealing and concealing in Parvīn's poetry, and that it parallels the veiling and unveiling of women in Iranian society. Milani tackles the reception of female figures such as Parvīn in the male-dominated literary atmosphere of Iran. She refers to the fact that the contributions of Iranian women to literature have been commonly eclipsed by focusing on their gender. To Milani, the critique of Parvīn as a 'manly' poet, or as a classical rather than a modern poet, shows attempts by Parvīn's commentators to mould her into specific preconceived structures. Milani refers to Parvīn's awareness of the need for education as the solution to the plight of women in Iran. She believes that Parvīn was the heir to a legacy of a thousand years of male-dominated Persian classical literature, and that she received her education in a patriarchal society. Nonetheless, Milani shows that Parvīn was a pioneer in both departing from liminal patriarchal traditions, and in composing poetry that was based on her own innovations. Milani analyses examples of the metaphorical language that Parvīn uses in her *Dīvān* and refers to how Parvīn represents femininity in her poetry. To Milani, evaluating Parvīn's poetry requires a deep understanding of her poetic style and the milieu in which she lived and composed poetry. Milani takes a feminist stance in analysing the gender-biased critique of Parvīn and sheds light on the understudied aspects of Parvīn's life and art as a female poet.

Once a Dewdrop: Essays on the Poetry of Parvīn I'tiṣāmī is the next book on Parvīn's poetry.⁵³ This book, which was published in 1994, is a collection of essays presented at a conference on Parvīn I'tiṣāmī held in March 1989 at the University of Chicago. The collection is edited by Moayyad, and it presents the various authors' viewpoints on different facets of Parvīn's life, character, and work. The first essay in this book is 'A Few Words on Parvīn I'tiṣāmī' by Jalal Matini. In this short paper, Matini categorises Parvīn's poems on the basis of three distinct chronological periods.⁵⁴ The first period covers the years before 1922, when she wrote eleven poems, starting at the age of seven or eight. In the second period, between the ages of fifteen and twenty-eight, Parvīn wrote the rest of her poems, which appeared in the first edition of her *Dīvān*. In the last period, between the age of twenty-eight

and thirty-four, Parvīn composed the poems that were added to the second edition of her collected poetry. Matini refers to Parvīn's emphasis on fate and destiny, her reaction to the social and political conditions of her society, and the importance of women's freedom.

The next essay in *Once a Dewdrop* is 'Parvīn I'tiṣāmī, The Magna Mater, and the Culture of the Patriarchs', by Leonardo Alishan. Alishan focuses on the femininity (or lack thereof) shown in Parvīn's world view, values, and verse.⁵⁵ He explores the process through which the mythical contrast between femininity and masculinity is born. As Alishan explains it, the philosophies of the various religions that have influenced Persian literature have associated femininity with the lowly Earth, the body and the ephemeral, evil material world. Masculinity has been associated with heaven, the soul, and eternity. Alishan refers to several poets such as Nāṣir-i Khusrow (d. 1088), Khāqānī (d. 1190), Rūmī (d. 1273), Sa'dī (d. 1291), and Ḥāfiẓ (d. 1390) as the poets who had the greatest influence on Parvīn. He mentions that the traditional negative attitudes toward the Earth and women are not limited to classical Persian poetry, as such attitudes remain common in the present century. He believes that Parvīn uses an anti-feminine, heavily masculine perspective in her *Dīvān*, and that she does so due to her traditional education and her commitment to composing traditional verse.

In the rest of his paper, Alishan uses examples from Parvīn's *Dīvān* to suggest a dominant patriarchal trend in her poetry. He concludes that Parvīn belonged to the masculine domain, which is why there is no trace of feminine tone or content in her poetry. He asserts that in a society like that of Iran, where the patriarchal Abrahamic religion of Islam and Shi'ism define the standards of 'being good' for women, even female poets have no opportunity to express their femininity and at the same time to qualify as 'good'. That is why Alishan thinks that Parvīn played the patripotestal 'game' and observed all the rules, but as a woman, she lost. Alishan's article introduces a novel attitude toward the impact patriarchal values and religious beliefs may have had on Parvīn's poetic expression as a female poet. Nevertheless, his assertion that Parvīn's poetry is devoid of any feminine tone or content can be contested. There are feminine qualities in Parvīn's poems, which can be unveiled through comprehensive analysis of her adroit methods of symbolic signification.

The following article in this collection is 'Of Poetics, Politics and Ethics: The Legacy of Parvīn I'tiṣāmī' by Hamid Dabashi, the prolific Persian author and literary scholar.⁵⁶ This author starts with an introductory context for Parvīn's biography and the political atmosphere of the decades in which she lived her brief life. He believes that Parvīn was a significant literary figure, who was politically and socially conscious of the current issues of her society. In his opinion, Parvīn expressed social concerns in her poetry, and was well received by her audience. In this essay, Dabashi tries to examine Parvīn's work and status as an influential female poet in the culture and history of Iran. He refers to the role that literature

and the literati played in the period of change under Rīzā Shah. Then, he refers to the role that Parvīn, among men of letters, played in the specific political culture of her times. To show Parvīn's influential role in this period of change and confusion in Iran, Dabashi examines her *Dīvān*. He describes the different forms, and key themes such as poverty, denunciation of tyranny, challenging legitimacy, advocacy of political education, and praising revolt in Parvīn's poetry. Dabashi elaborates on how Parvīn, as a Committed poet of her time, incorporates these themes into her didactic poetry. However, in seeking to show her political reflections and ideological views, Dabashi does little more than quote some couplets from her poems. The author hovers over the themes in Parvīn's poetry without delving into her work.

'Impersonality in Parvīn It'isāmī's Poetry' is Fereshteh Davaran's contribution to the collection of the essays.⁵⁷ She starts with an overview of the changing political context of Iran during Parvīn's life. She depicts cultural and literary parallels to the socio-political changes and highlights the roles of activist women in that period. Davaran describes Rīzā Shah's reforms and his mandatory unveiling of women as major turning points for Iran's 'second sex' but argues that Parvīn dedicated only a single line of her poetry to these events. Moreover, she believes that Parvīn's choice of classical style deserves critical scrutiny, because she had alternatives for becoming more relevant to her times. According to Davaran, many of Parvīn's contemporaries reflected the changes of society in their work through making literary innovations. However, Parvīn presumably ignored the artistic innovations of her time. Davaran concludes that Parvīn, whether consciously or unconsciously, 'chose the calm niche of traditional poetry'. As Davaran put it, instead of being innovative, Parvīn preferred to remain 'her father's daughter'.

Although Davaran asserts that Parvīn had exceptional talent, she thinks that the sage-like tone of Parvīn's rhetoric sounds 'awkward and ill-placed'. Taking a feminist stance, the author compares the environment in which Parvīn grew up and wrote poetry to the conditions that Virginia Woolf portrays for women who want to express themselves through writing. She also compares Parvīn's destiny to that of Shakespeare's imaginary sister in Woolf's book *A Room of One's Own*. Davaran criticises Parvīn's 'obedience' to her father and the patriarchal style of her classical poetry. She believes that Parvīn's father acted like the proprietor of her writing. It was only with his permission that Parvīn's work was published, which Davaran considers as an infringement of Parvīn's rights. In the author's opinion, Parvīn chose to live in the sanctuary of her father's house, which made her follow his taste in poetry. She thinks that there was no significant growth in Parvīn's work, except in the revival and enrichment of *munāẓara*. She implies that Parvīn chose to hide herself behind every character in her fables, because she was unable and unwilling to express her own fears. That, in this critic's opinion, is the reason why Parvīn adopted a style of impersonality in her poems. Davaran refers to the

recurrent themes of fearing *nafs* ('lower desires') in Parvīn's poetry as signs of a morbid shadow that, in her opinion, prevails in Parvīn's *Dīvān*. Davaran's critique indicates that she probably missed the fact that mystic-didactic genres, in which mystical themes such as *nafs* are dealt with, are inseparable elements of Persian poetry composed in the classical style. Moayyad's opinion in this regard can clarify the point. In his introduction to his selection of Parvīn's *munāzarās*, he explained that for Parvīn *nafs* was the temptations of the carnal soul. He pointed out that Parvīn, in harmony with the mediaeval Islamic tradition, holds these temptations 'responsible for degradation of our soul and its falling prey to worldly lust'.⁵⁸

Davaran closes her essay with the suggestion that Parvīn, the queen of Persian poetry, was admired by men of letters (such as Bahār and 'Alī-Akbar Dihkhudā (d. 1956)) mainly because she remained impersonal, and she sacrificed her 'identity and personality on the altar of public approval and respectability'. Davaran's feminist stance toward Parvīn and her work introduces an element of bias. When Davaran talks about the influence of Yūsuf I'tiṣāmī on his daughter, she neglects to describe their close relationship, about which we know through Parvīn's brother's words.⁵⁹ Instead, she depicts a patriarchal hierarchy in which he acts as the proprietor of Parvīn's poetry. Overlooking the socio-cultural milieu of early twentieth-century Iran, she draws a comparison between Virginia Woolf's views about female writers and Parvīn's choices in composing her poetry. Neglecting to examine the features of Parvīn's personal style, Davaran presumes that Parvīn's mode of impersonality was caused by fear of self-expression.

In 'Parvīn I'tiṣāmī and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Contrasts in Union', Faridoun Farrokh draws parallels between the two female poets of the title.⁶⁰ He sees these two literary figures as similar in that both show a strong mark of femininity in the configurations of form and content in their work. In comparing these two poets' lives and personalities, he finds they have completely different characteristics. However, the crucial commonality in their careers is the role of their fathers in their early development. Unlike Davaran, who considers the patriarchal influence of Parvīn's father on the publication of her work as an infringement of her rights, Farrokh believes that 'Yūsuf I'tiṣāmī deliberately refrained from assuming patriarchal authority over his daughter. In Farrokh's opinion, Parvīn's father was a role model for her, who inspired her to become an intellectual, and to express her understanding of human interaction through her poetry. Farrokh then compares Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Parvīn's views about the situation of women in their societies. He refers to the words that both of these literary figures expressed on how education can improve women's status and life. Another similarity that Farrokh finds between these two poets is their indifference to the public reception of their work, or to their degrees of fame. In Farrokh's view, both of these poets represented their time and society through their eloquent verse and did so with

moral courage. They rose to prominence and will continue to touch their readers' hearts and minds for generations to come. This article is a work of comparative literature, and therefore it helps to bridge the gap between the literary worlds of Iran and the West. It also serves to enhance the knowledge of contemporary Persian literature among a larger international audience.

'Parvīn I'tiṣāmī's Utopia', by M. R. Ghanoonparvar, presents an analysis of five poems from Parvīn's *Dīvān*, all entitled *Ārizūhā* ('Wishes').⁶¹ Ghanoonparvar aims to depict Parvīn's ideal world, her utopia. He believes that Parvīn's wishes, as they are expressed in these poems, indicate the nature of her ideal world. According to Ghanoonparvar, the central themes in Parvīn's utopian world are perfect and selfless love, knowledge, art, work, and joy. The author then refers to Parvīn's own life, which is secluded both physically (in her father's house) and spiritually (in the world that she creates in her poetry). In seeking to understand Parvīn's abstract and elevated concepts regarding her utopia, Ghanoonparvar tries to determine whether she chose her seclusion voluntarily or was forced into it. He concludes that Parvīn had no other choice but to live a secluded life. She was a 'sapling', taken care of by a protective and nurturing father, who offered her the opportunity to blossom and 'write most sensitively of what she knew' in a well-protected greenhouse. This article is Ghanoonparvar's attempt to untie the enigma of Parvīn's thoughts by closely examining the poems she named 'Wishes'. This approach provides a general overview of the recurrent themes in those poems, which leads the readers to a better understanding of Parvīn's values.

One of the most fruitful essays on Parvīn I'tiṣāmī's poetry is the contribution by Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak. In his article, 'The Unconventional Parvīn: An Analysis of Parvīn I'tiṣāmī's "*Jūlā-yi Khudā*" ('God's Weaver')', Karimi-Hakkak sheds light on several aspects of Parvīn I'tiṣāmī's poetry that are veiled by her classical style of writing.⁶² He draws the reader's attention to Parvīn's instrumental role in the development of Persian poetry. Unlike most scholars, who believe that Parvīn did not interact with the innovative Persian poets because she followed the classical school, Karimi-Hakkak points out the subtle undercurrent of modernity in her poetry, which changed the tradition and paved the way for the future generation of poets. To highlight her innovations, he focuses on one of Parvīn's debate poems, *Jūlā-yi Khudā* ('God's Weaver'). Through his acute analysis, Karimi-Hakkak introduces three indices of modernity in this poem that involve the deeper layers of signification and are not readily accessible to the reader. His first indicator is that Parvīn uses novel methods to formulate and express the moral lessons of her poetry. According to him, these methods are quite distinct from those used by the classical masters. The second indicator, which he introduces, is her use of innovative methods for expressing personal qualities or identities. The third indicator is Parvīn's introduction of a thoroughly novel relationship between the moral and the fable. In analysing

Jūlā-yi Khudā, Karimi-Hakkak demonstrates how Parvīn innovatively departs from tradition. He finds that Parvīn's conception of signification is very close to that of Nīmā Yūshij. He suggests that Parvīn uses the Nīmāic mode of expression, through which the central image in the poem portrays the speaker's own social or individual condition, and simultaneously exemplifies a general (moral or otherwise) message.

Farzaneh Milani, in her article 'Judith Shakespeare and Parvīz I'tiṣāmī', approaches Parvīn's situation in society from a feminist point of view.⁶³ She details the impediments that Parvīn faced in her career as a poet, merely because she was a woman. Milani explains the suspicions and doubts that many readers of her poems expressed about her being a woman. She argues that Parvīn's work has mainly been criticised by men and from a masculine point of view. She also believes that the masculine monopoly on literary criticism is the main reason why the unique aspects of Parvīn's poetry and her contributions to Persian literature have been overlooked. The next discriminatory viewpoint regarding Parvīn that Milani critiques concerns the way Parvīn was admired by men of letters in her time. One example that Milani points to is the title of an article by 'Abd al-Ḥoseyn Zarrīnkūb: 'Parvīn: A Manly Woman in the Arena of Poetry and Sufism'. She argues that Parvīn's status as a literary figure was shocking to her male counterparts. Parvīn was such a novelty that the men of letters were baffled and could only praise her by 'elevating' her status to that of a man. To them, writing good poetry could only be done by men. Milani refers to the salient features of Parvīn's poetry and her novel poetic language, which clearly represent the viewpoint of a woman. Milani believes that Parvīn has become a public storyteller who 'elevates women's vernacular storytelling to the status of a literary discourse'.⁶⁴

In the rest of her essay, Milani seeks to explain the difference between Parvīn's life and her poetry. To Milani, there is a pull and push between presence and absence, both in Parvīn's poetry and in her private life. She believes that Parvīn adheres to conventions and the patriarchal value system, while observing new values and making demands for women's rights, both in her life and her poetry. Milani believes that to understand and criticise a poem, the reader must consider the cultural conditions in which the poet lived and wrote that poem. Therefore, to criticise Parvīn and her poetry, one must be aware of Parvīn's predecessors, and the cultural situation in which she grew up, lived, and wrote her poetry. Milani's article provides the readers with a general overview of the social atmosphere of Parvīn's life and career as a female poet in Iran. By drawing attention to the prejudice directed against Parvīn and her work, she calls for a balance in criticising Parvīn's poetry. This article is an attempt to compensate for the previous lack of attention paid to Parvīn's novelty.

In 'Parvīn I'tiṣāmī's Niche in the Pantheon of Persian Poetry', Moayyad explores the reasons for Parvīn I'tiṣāmī's great appeal.⁶⁵ Moayyad starts by sketching a brief

background of Parvīn's life and the socio-political situation in Iran during her active years as a poet. He believes that Parvīn expressed her feelings of dissatisfaction and social protest in a disguised way. She created a fabulous world which symbolically represented the society of her time. In Moayyad's opinion, the reason for Parvīn's popularity with Iranians is her attention to their true needs. He postulates that Parvīn's concern with the timeless questions of human existence and her ability to deliver her messages through comprehensible and enjoyable images has kept her *Dīvān* alive for generation after generation. Moayyad continues his essay by showing examples of how Parvīn's poems deliver messages through a novel method of signification. He draws a comparison between Parvīn and other famous Persian poets such as Nāṣir-i Khusrow, Sanā'ī (d. ca. 1130), and Sa'dī. He suggests that in terms of the values of Iranian culture, and of the charm, beauty, and intellect of her allegorical debate poems and fables, Parvīn can rightly be deemed a true descendent of outstanding Persian classical poets.

Rivanne Sandler starts her essay, 'A New Perspective in Twentieth Century Persian Poetry', with a comparison between Furūq Farrukhzād (d. 1967), Aḥmad Shāmlū (d. 2000) and Parvīn I'tiṣāmī.⁶⁶ She believes that these three poets share the same sense of harsh realism. However, Parvīn's poetic response is significantly different from those of her counterparts, and particularly from Farrukhzād. Sandler compares Farrukhzād's and Parvīn's different views on life and its restrictions upon the individual. As she postulates, unlike Farrukhzād, who rails against the boundaries imposed upon the individual's freedom, Parvīn accepts those boundaries. Sandler gives examples from Parvīn's *Dīvān* to show her poetic responses to such restrictions. The article then compares and points out the differences in Farrukhzād's and Parvīn's poems regarding other central themes such as happiness, desire, death, and fate. Sandler brings her essay to an end with a comparison of what poetry means for various major poets of the twentieth century. She suggests that Nīmā Yūshij, Shāmlū and Suhrāb Sipihrī (d. 1980) all try to use poetry as a means of establishing a link with their audience, but Parvīn I'tiṣāmī maintains the respectful distance of the teacher from her readers. Sandler's comparison of various major Persian poets of the twentieth century broadens the reader's perspective regarding Parvīn's style of communication with her audience.

Parviz Brookshaw's article on Parvīn is a relatively recent text on Parvīn, which is included in a collection of studies on female poets called *Literature of the Early Twentieth Century: From the Constitutional Period to Reza Shah*.⁶⁷ The article starts with an overview of Parvīn's life and the publications of her poetry. In Brookshaw's view, Parvīn's poetry is humanistic, and mainly concerned with the pain and plight of society. It cannot be considered as merely women-focused, although Parvīn quietly pleads for women's emancipation. Brookshaw surveys the previous articles written about Parvīn and her poetry, and attests that she was rather introspective,

but still one of the most socially and morally sensitive poets of her time. In his view, Parvīn's relatively simple language made her poetry appealing to a wide audience. Brookshaw also refers to Parvīn's metaphorical language, which he believes she probably adopted due to the strict limits on freedom of speech during Rizā Shah's rule. He believes that many of Parvīn's poems have a tangibly archaic feel to them, and that Parvīn adopted old-fashioned content and language because she was influenced by classical Persian poets. However, Brookshaw believes that Parvīn's poems are unmistakably feminine; he highlights Parvīn's role in elevating the status of women within the literary sphere of the Persian language. He concludes his article with a reference to her poems that specifically tackle the issues of women, such as *Zan dar Iran* ('Women in Iran'). Brookshaw refers to Parvīn's mark on Persian literature as a female poet, her rich metaphorical language. Relying on previous studies on Parvīn, Brookshaw evaluates Parvīn's work as 'tangibly archaic' and 'old-fashioned'; he overlooks Parvīn's novelty, especially in the genre of *munāẓara*.

The next recent paper is "'Till the Gossamer Thread You Fling Catch Somewhere: Parvīn I'tiṣāmī's Creative Reception of Walt Whitman'.⁶⁸ In this paper, Behnam Fomeshi explores Parvīn's creativity by analysing her debate poem *Jūlā-yi Khudā* ('God's Weaver'). Fomeshi examines the relation between Parvīn's 'God's Weaver' and Walt Whitman's poem 'A Noiseless Patient Spider'. He explains how Parvīn creatively uses the interesting characteristics that she found in Walt Whitman's spider and develops a new character in her own poem. Fomeshi first explains the structure of 'God's Weaver' and 'A Noiseless Patient Spider', and then draws the connections between the two poems. One of the connections he sees is a set of similar features: being hard-working, isolated, and quiet. The next connection is the fact that in both poems, the spider represents the poet. Fomeshi also refers to the mystical characteristics that Parvīn's spider inherits from Persian classical poetry. Then he describes Parvīn's mastery in writing *munāẓara* and her creativity in introducing innovative characters such as her spider to this classical genre of literature. He closes his discussion by noting the differences between the two characters the spiders represent in these poems. In Walt Whitman's poem, the spider symbolises 'the male psyche of a pioneering American poet', but in Parvīn's 'God's Weaver' it stands for a female poet in a male-dominated literary tradition. The article by Fomeshi falls into the rare category of analytical studies about Parvīn's poetry. The comparative nature of the article gives the readers the opportunity to understand Parvīn's special talent. It demonstrates how Parvīn's creativity empowered her to remain original while being inspired by literary works from other traditions.

In another article, Fomeshi analyses the mystical aspects of *Jūlā-yi Khudā* ('God's Weaver'), postulating that Parvīn challenges gender boundaries in this poem. In this article, called 'The Female Rūmī and Feminine Mysticism: God's Weaver', Fomeshi introduces Parvīn's spider as a 'female mystic'. In this new reading of 'God's Weaver',

Parvīn is shown to have entered the realm of mystical poetry, which challenges the exclusivity of mysticism to men, and opens a space for women as mystics. The debate poem, according to this interpretation, takes place between the spider (representing Parvīn as a woman mystic) and the lazy person, symbolising ‘a lethargic male mystic’.⁶⁹ This article explains the mystical associations that Parvīn creates, and discusses how she develops the character of the spider into a female mystic. Fomeshi’s recent take on Parvīn’s ‘God Weaver’ opens a new perspective on the analysis of Parvīn’s multidimensional poetry to expose a spiritual dimension in her art.

Parvīn and her poetry are also discussed in the first chapter of a book of ethnographic research by the linguist Niloofar Haeri. In this book, Haeri studies how a group of educated, middle-class Iranian women discuss and debate religious matters. When writing about the role of classical Persian poetry in the lives of her interlocutors, Haeri finds that such poetry serves as a complex, multidimensional medium of education, which plays a similar didactic role to that of religious texts. Including Parvīn’s work in the category of classical poetry, Haeri cites a part of Parvīn’s poem ‘Journey of a Teardrop’ and refers to Parvīn’s outstanding reception and continuing popularity with her audience.⁷⁰ This discussion of Parvīn’s poetry does not involve close analysis of the poems, since Haeri’s work is not a literary study. However, it is worth mentioning here since it shows the significant role of Parvīn’s work, as classical poetry, in the lives of many Iranian women. Haeri’s study shows that these women used Parvīn’s mystic-didactic poetry as they would use the Qur’ān, as a source of religious/spiritual guidance in their lives. For them, this female poet’s work acted as a medium for communicating religious beliefs with each other in the powerful language of poetry. Haeri’s research hints at the significant place of Parvīn’s mystic-didactic poetry, particularly among women, in Iranian-Muslim society.

Studying Parvīn I’tiṣāmī in Iran

In the second part of this literature review, I focus on Persian scholarly material on Parvīn. Every year, numerous scholarly papers and book chapters are written on Parvīn in Iran. However, most of them are unfortunately poor in terms of the quality of research and lack originality. Among these articles are the proceedings of conferences held in veneration of this female poet by universities and other cultural centres in Iran.⁷¹ Although Parvīn’s audience in Iran has used her poetry as a medium to criticise their current situation,⁷² scholars in Iran continue to examine her poetry as didactic, classical fables. Taking into account the lack of freedom of speech in Iran and the dire consequences of criticising the status quo, it is understandable that scholars avoid contextualising Parvīn’s poetry in the current socio-political climate in Iran. However, studying Parvīn’s work as purely

classical poetry means overlooking novel aspects of her literary art. Without serious attempts to produce original material on Parvīn, the essential aspects of her contribution to Persian literary culture will remain obscured.

It is impossible to review all the publications on Parvīn. In what follows, I examine several academic articles that scholars and critics in Iran have produced on Parvīn. To identify changes in attitudes towards Parvīn's *Dīvān* among different generations of scholars and critics in Iran, I arrange the articles in chronological order. I skip reviewing the huge number of articles with repeated discussions; I shall work with a selection of the best research available to me.

The first Persian scholarly work is *Showq-i rahā'ī* ('Longing for Emancipation'), a book chapter in *Chashma-yi rowshan: Dīdārī bā shā'irān* by Ghulām-Ḥuseyn Yūsufī.⁷³ The author provides an evaluation of recurrent themes in Parvīn's *Dīvān*, and refers to her education, talent, and mastery in integrating didactic motifs in fables. He uses Moayyad and Madelung's contribution in *A Nightingale's Lament: Selections from the Poems and Fables of Parvīn I'tiṣāmī (1907–41)* to embark on the analysis of *Munāẓara* ('Debate'), one of Parvīn's debate poems. This article is among the rare attempts to examine one of Parvīn's poems in detail. Yūsufī gives his readers a general overview of the major themes and motifs in the poem and describes the structure of the debate, but he does not provide any analyses of Parvīn's metaphorical language or her innovations in the classical genre of debate poetry.

'Parvīn: A Manly Woman in the Arena of Poetry and Mysticism', by 'Abd al-Ḥuseyn Zarrīnkūb (d. 1999), is the next Persian article.⁷⁴ Zarrīnkūb refers to the teaching that Parvīn's father, Yūsuf I'tiṣāmī, gave to his daughter on classical Persian literature, and the impact this had on her thoughts and poetry. In referring to the similarities between some of Parvīn's poems and those of classical Persian poets, Zarrīnkūb suggests that great classical poets such as Niẓāmī Ganjavī (d. 1209), Rūmī, and Sa'ādī were her main sources of inspiration. However, he attests that Parvīn's mature, personalised way of composing poetry gives her poems such novelty that one can barely find any trace of adaptation from the classical sources. Zarrīnkūb describes the major themes in Parvīn's *Dīvān*, such as the suffering of the oppressed and certain moral didactic messages. In his view, Parvīn's ethical lessons draw upon sources in Islamic mysticism and in Platonic or gnostic teachings, which explains her emphasis on the soul and its salvation through renunciation of worldly attachments. Zarrīnkūb's article gives the readers a general description of Parvīn's talent, and her main themes and interests. He introduces the major characteristics of her poetry by drawing similarities between her work and that of the classical Persian poets. He is aware of her artistic characteristics and makes a few brief references to them. As one of the early scholarly sources on Parvīn's poetry, Zarrīnkūb's article is fruitful. However, the title of his article, 'Parvīn: A Manly Woman in the Arena of Poetry and Mysticism', was subjected to scrutiny by Farzaneh Milani in her article

reviewed above.⁷⁵ Milani characterises Zarrīnkūb's work as an example of how Parvīn and her poetry have been desexualised. Milani believes that 'manly' is a discriminatory remark, which seems to praise Parvīn for rising above femininity. Despite Milani's opinion about the title, the content of Zarrīnkūb's article neither incorporates nor implies any misogynistic attitudes toward Parvīn or her poetry.

Aṣghar Dādbih and ʿAlī Mīr-Anṣārī contributed an article under the entry 'Parvīn Iʿtiṣāmī' to the *Dāyirat al-maʿārif-i buzurġ-i islāmī* (*The Great Islamic Encyclopaedia*). They introduce Parvīn as a talented contemporary poet and offer a description of the socio-political atmosphere in which she lived and composed poetry. The authors deal with several aspects of her poetry, such as her recurrent themes, her classical style of composition, and didactic methods. Like the majority of the articles on Parvīn, this encyclopaedia entry provides a general description of the poet and her work. However, it fails to note her innovations in the genre of *munāẓara*, or her metaphoric language.⁷⁶

Akhtar-i charkh-i adab: Nibrās al-adab is a selected collection of essays presented at a conference to commemorate Parvīn Iʿtiṣāmī, held in March 2007 in Qatar. The book comprises twenty articles on different aspects of her life and poetry. The authors mainly focus on the recurrent social and moral themes in Parvīn's poems. They refer to the socio-political plight of Iran during her literary career and her awareness of the social issues of her times. In regard to her being a female poet, the authors limit themselves to noting that she could sympathise with the female characters of her poems because she was a woman. Several writers refer to her mastery in composing *munāẓara*, and a few of them examine this specific area of her expertise. However, they limit the scope of their investigations to making general descriptions of her poems, with some lines of poetry quoted as examples. None of these authors offer a detailed analysis of Parvīn's uses of language, metaphors, or imagery, nor do they provide any insight into her novelty in using classical forms and keywords to comment on topics such as Islamic piety and socio-political developments in Iran.⁷⁷

The next Persian source is Nasrollah Pourjavady's *Zabān-i ḥāl: dar ʿirfān-u adabiyyāt-i pārsī*.⁷⁸ Pourjavady allocates a few pages to examples from Parvīn's poems as he points out the recurrent motifs and themes in her poetry. He believes that none of her poems are 'complete' *munāẓaras*. He explains that Parvīn's poems and those of Ṣūfī poets have similar themes, but there is a major difference in that Parvīn does not reach the summit of wisdom in her poetry. Pourjavady does not clarify his criteria for making this evaluation. However, he is the first literary scholar to discuss Parvīn's literary device of allowing soulless objects to describe their own conditions in her debate poems. This is a notable contribution. In general, however, the section is too brief to accommodate an investigation of Parvīn's debate poetry and the novel features that she introduced into this classical genre.

The most recent scholarly reference to Parvīn Iṭīšāmī and her work appears under the entry of ‘munāzara’ in the *Dānishnāma-yi zabān-u adabiyāt-i farsī* (*Encyclopaedia of Persian Language and Literature*).⁷⁹ In a paragraph-long description, Majd al-Dīn Keyvānī outlines the major themes in some of Parvīn’s most popular poems. What is worthy of attention in this entry is its admiration of Parvīn as ‘one of the greatest *munāzara* composers of all times, if not the greatest’. This is a tribute to her mastery in composing more than half of her *Dīvān* in the literary genre of *munāzara*, and to her profound impact on Persian literature.

Gaps in Previous Studies

Literature on Parvīn discusses diverse aspects of her work. Literary scholars and critics praise Parvīn’s adherence to the classical style of poetry. They compare her to Nāṣir-i Khusrow and Sanāʿī for her art in developing sophisticated didactic concepts, and to Rūmī for composing fine mystical poems. They praise Parvīn’s revival of *munāzara*, and attest that her most outstanding talent was her mastery in using this genre to construct her poetry. They admire her art in composing fables and didactic stories and note her widespread popularity with the reading public. The literary critics also commend her for showing keen awareness of the socio-political issues of her times, and they commonly discuss her ways of expressing femininity. These various authors attempt to describe the effects that factors such as Parvīn’s upbringing, her education and the socio-political atmosphere of Iran have on her poetry. However, there are still significant gaps in the literature on Parvīn and her work, which I wish to bridge in this book.

The main shortcoming in the literature on Parvīn is that most critics and scholars have dismissed or ignored reading Parvīn’s poetry closely to investigate how her poetics differs from that of her forefathers and that of her contemporaries. Moreover, contextualisation of her poetry is missing in her scholarship. Paradoxically, in Iranian culture, where poetry is an integral part of life, close reading of poetry does not play an important role. One of the neglected aspects of Parvīn’s poetry, for example, is the element of transgression in her work. Transgression of Iranian-Muslim gender norms is a pivotal characteristic in Parvīn’s work and her literary identity as a woman. This central element has remained underexplored. The gender construct in the patriarchal Iranian-Muslim culture has associated femininity with silence and has branded self-expression as a transgressive act for women. In this male-oriented culture, writing and publishing were assumed to be masculine acts. Therefore, the first act of gender transgression in Parvīn’s case, which is overlooked in the literature, is her choice to compose and publish poetry. As a woman, she uses classical literary poetry as a means to voice her thoughts and emotions in a patriarchal culture and society.

Parvīn's work breaks away from silence as the ideal of femininity, as it is promoted in classical Persian literature. The fragmentary documentation of Persian women's literary endeavours shows that women have transgressed the patriarchal gender norm of silence and written poetry for a thousand years, although their works have been marginalised and ignored.⁸⁰ Parvīn's poetry in this male-dominated literary culture is a continuation of this transgressive act of writing. What distinguishes Parvīn's authorship from that of her foremothers, however, is that she had the opportunity of reaching a wide audience by publishing her poetry. Before Parvīn's *Dīvān* was published, with the encouragement and support of her father, she published poems in the literary journal *Bahār*, which was founded and edited by her father. This opportunity had already introduced her to a large audience. In her brief literary career of about two decades, her poetry brought her nation-wide fame, although her authorship provoked considerable controversy even among her admirers. Parvīn's popularity has been celebrated in the material written about her, but no study has focused on the controversies raised by her detractors. It remains largely unexplained how a woman's literary work could gain growing popularity for decades, while her challenge to patriarchal culture has been dismissed or ignored.

Parvīn's transgression of the Iranian-Muslim gender norms goes beyond the act of entering the masculine space of classical poetry. Parvīn's other act of transgression involves her prowess in producing fine classical poetry and introducing innovative changes into the tradition. Although considered an outsider, she left her mark on the male-dominated literary tradition as a woman. Branding Parvīn as a solemn follower of Persian classical style has obscured her significant departures from the classical literary tradition. If analysed critically, Parvīn's works, and particularly her revival of Persian *munāzara* ('debate poetry'), show characteristics that distinguish them from their classical forebears. Although scholars have highlighted her revival of the genre of debate poetry, few of them have analysed what she conveys in her debate poems, nor have they investigated the reasons for a female poet to revive this long-forgotten genre in the early decades of the twentieth century. Parvīn's debate poems have noteworthy differences from Persian classical poetry in terms of both their topics and structure. They differ substantially from the extant examples written by Asadī-yi Ṭūsī, the best-known representative of the genre.

In his debate poems, the prominent male poet Asadī used the formal genre of *qaṣīda* ('panegyric') and praised his powerful patrons. Although he used this genre to write about polemical topics such as political, religious, and ethnic discrimination, his debates were courtly and patronised by men of power. In her apparently classical poems, Parvīn used the panegyric *qaṣīda* alongside other classical formal genres such as *qaṭʿa* ('fragmentary' i.e., 'occasional poetry') and *maṣnavī* ('rhyming couplets'). She innovatively adopted this genre, and adjusted it to accommodate a diverse range

of topics in her *Divān*. She used this classical genre to write for and about her society's outcasts, and the oppressed. Omitting the element of praise for authorities, she composed her poems to criticise political and religious power-holders as the oppressors.

Parvīn introduced critical debate on the socio-political issues of her times into the genre. I have classified eighteen debate poems, out of one hundred and twenty-one in her *Divān*, as debates focused on socio-political problems. Except for a few poems written for specific occasions, we do not know the dates of Parvīn's compositions. Nevertheless, her socio-politically Committed poems harmonise with the demands raised by other intellectuals in the Constitutional era and later under Rizā Shah. These eighteen debate poems, and a number of other poems in her *Divān*, revolve around the nation's misery due to lack of progress, the situation of women, corruption perpetrated by the monarch, the misuse of power by religious and political authorities, or the marginalisation and oppression of the working class. Since Parvīn was engaged in the issues of her times, such as injustice, and promoted standing against oppression and subjugation, she can be regarded as a Committed poet. By commitment in Parvīn's poetry, I mean the criteria that Kamran Talattof suggests to describe Committed literature. This specific type of literature started to take shape after the Constitutional Revolution in Iran. According to him, Committed literature is the work of authors dedicated to beliefs and socio-political agendas. Committed authors make ideological and political efforts to promote reform in their societies.⁸¹ Since Parvīn used a metaphorical language and expressed her thoughts in the form of allegories, analytical methods such as close reading, and social, cultural, and historical contextualisation of her poetry are needed to analyse her socio-political engagement as one of her departures from classical Persian poetry. To date, only a few studies, such as those by Karimi-Hakkak and Fomeshi, have offered in-depth analyses of Parvīn's work. Both of these scholars explore the novel features of one multi-layered debate poem, namely 'God's Weaver', for which I present a thorough analysis in chapter two.

The other transgressive act by Parvīn that has escaped the attention of most scholars is entering the masculine space of fine mystical and didactic poetry. This genre, which is central to Persian classical poetry, was formally monopolised as a masculine field of expression. Debates were often between two men of power that contested on religious or ethnic superiority. Parvīn's poetry is permeated with mystical themes and motifs, borrowed from classical Persian poetry. In the Iranian-Muslim culture, spirituality is another realm from which women have been barred because of their gender. Parvīn presumed to use these mystical themes and motifs to express her own spiritual/religious predilections. Beyond this, she integrated these themes seamlessly into her other poems, such as those on socio-political topics. With this innovative technique, Parvīn created her multi-layered poetry which recalls masterpieces by prominent Sūfī poets such as Rūmī and Ḥāfīz. By adopting mystical themes and motifs to express her spiritual and socio-political thoughts,

Parvīn crossed both the literary and religious/spiritual boundaries for women. But Parvīn's transgressions were not limited to emulating her male predecessors. In entering the masculine space of poetry and mysticism, Parvīn did not lose or 'rise above' her gender. She did not write in a 'manly' manner, as her work was often described by prominent men of letters such as Bahār. She adopted mystical themes and motifs that were esteemed as inherently masculine, but she feminised them by weaving into them her identity and perspective as a woman.

Parvīn's ultimate act of transgression in her work was her introduction of femininity into the patriarchal field of classical poetry. The absence of critical analysis regarding femininity, as both a part of Parvīn's literary identity and as one of the key concepts in her work, has left a significant gap in the research about her. Although femininity is one of the main themes in commentaries on Parvīn, and the source of controversies about her authorship after her poetry was published in *Bahār*, the literature has failed to provide clarity on it. While Parvīn introduced femininity into classical Persian poetry, and explicitly asserted her literary identity as a woman, her work has commonly been considered devoid of femininity.

It is essential to study Parvīn's poetry in the light of her transgression of gender norms because it shows how the Iranian-Muslim gender norms affect the poetry of women, and particularly a woman who pioneered in publishing her work after centuries of the marginalisation of women from literary activity. Moreover, Parvīn's transgression reflects the worldview of a Muslim intellectual woman who experienced the early decades of the twentieth century, when Iran's gender norms were being drastically transformed. Investigating Parvīn's poetry in ways beyond noting the classical characteristics for which she has always been praised helps to open new perspectives on the cultural transition that started in the early decades of the twentieth century. Such investigation can shed light on why Parvīn has enjoyed such immense popularity while at the same time her transgressions have been ignored. By performing analysis on Parvīn's work and contextualising it, I wish to illuminate the neglected aspects in her poetry. My aim is to free Parvīn from entrapment in evaluations based on patriarchal norms, which brand her as a solemn follower of classical conventions. What special characteristics shaped Parvīn's literary identity, and her work, bringing her a lasting popularity in the patriarchal Muslim-Iranian culture?

Research Question

Among the women authors of the early twentieth century whose work was published, Faṣl-i Bahār Khānum (d. 1940) and Fakhr-i ʿUẓmā Arghūn (d. 1966) to name just two, the publication of Parvīn's work continues to be the most impactful. While she was praised for her fine skills in composing classical poetry, she was

disbelieved and accused of fraud. However, Parvīn's poetry remained immensely popular. It was used as didactic material in school curricula under the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979). Her work was used in school textbooks after the Revolution of 1979 when all textbooks were altered to represent ideological Islamist and revolutionary virtues. Parvīn's poetry appears in the last version of almost all the Persian language and literature textbooks currently taught in schools in Iran. These fascinating facts about Parvīn and her poetry framed my main research question: What special characteristics shaped Parvīn's literary identity, and her work, bringing her a lasting popularity in the patriarchal Muslim-Iranian culture? To find an answer to this question, I posed the following sub-questions: How did Parvīn's gender affect her reception as a poet of classical style, and why was her authorship disbelieved? Why did she need to defend her female identity? Why did her gender and the femininity in her poetry turn into such a mystery? Why did she revive the long-forgotten classical genre of Persian debate poetry? What innovations did she introduce into this genre? How did she engage in the socio-political transformations of her society, as it went through two major historical turning points? Why has she gained nation-wide popularity to the point that her poems are included in school curricula under the Islamic Republic in Iran? By answering these questions in the various chapters of this book, I wish to open up new perspectives into the world of Parvīn who was both admired and ostracised because of her poetic talent in the patriarchal Iranian-Muslim culture.

Conceptual Framework and Methodology

Two pivotal concepts are necessary for understanding Parvīn's literary identity as a woman, and the controversial reception of her poetry in the Iranian-Muslim culture. Those concepts are femininity and transgression. Among the previous studies on Parvīn's work, Milani's *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* is the only source that seriously considers the impact of cultural gender norms on Persian women writers such as Parvīn. In her chapter, 'The Perils of Writing', Milani explains how 'silence and immobility' were turned into ideals of femininity in classical Persian literature.⁸² When focusing on Parvīn as a female poet, Milani gives examples from Parvīn's *Dīvān*, and highlights the subversive nature of the new motifs that Parvīn introduced into her poetry.⁸³ Building upon Milani's argument, I suggest that Parvīn's literary identity and her work are transgressive rather than subversive. To analyse the nature of Parvīn's transgression, I form my conceptual framework based on the intertwinement of two concepts that are central to my argument: the Iranian-Muslim gender construct of femininity, and Parvīn's transgression of them.

In my conceptual framework, I use Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity to expand Milani's argument about the gendered norm of 'silence'. As Butler put it, gender 'is an identity tenuously constituted in time'. It is an identity that is 'instituted through a stylised repetition of acts'. Butler further argues that 'gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo'.⁸⁴ As she defines it, femininity is 'the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment'.⁸⁵ Using Butler's definition of performativity, I explore the gender construct of femininity in the Iranian-Muslim culture. I investigate the historical and cultural context in which the Iranian-Muslim culture defined femininity by imposing certain roles on women. As the most telling example, I explore how in the patriarchal Persian culture silence turned into the idealised performative act of femininity. I further survey how reshaping feminine roles after the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911 reshaped the notion of femininity in Iran.

Concerning the second central concept in my framework, i.e., transgression, I mainly borrow from Michel Foucault as one of the founders of the Theory of Transgression. I choose Foucault's approach to the concept of transgression because, as Claudia Yaghoobi states, Marquis de Sade (d. 1814), George Bataille (d. 1962) and Michel Foucault (d. 1984) examined the central role of sexuality and replaced 'transgression and the limit with the sacred and the profane' in their approach toward the concept of transgression. However, Foucault's argument in his 'Preface to Transgression' demonstrated that the concept of transgression is pivotal to understanding liminal experiences shaping social and cultural boundaries.⁸⁶

Transgression for Foucault cannot have a life of its own outside of the limit. As he put it, 'limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess'. A limit only exists because it is crossable and, reciprocally, transgression exists because it crosses a limit. The relationship of the limit and transgression 'takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust'.⁸⁷ In other words, transgression is 'an affirmation of *difference*, an affirmation which confirms the alterity of the different, without denial or recapitulation' and what is transgressed is 'always a limit, a line, boundary which circumscribes, which delimits a space, an order, a mode of thinking, a way of being, and beyond which it is forbidden to go'.⁸⁸

By the application of Foucault's concept of the limit and its transgression, I explore Parvīn's authorship and her poetry in the context of Iranian-Muslim culture as her act of transgression. In the patriarchal Persian culture and literature, repression of women was promoted as the idealisation of femininity. Silence, among other gender norms, was multiplied into liminal boundaries that deprived women like Parvīn, not only of having a voice, but also of the means of creating their own intellectual, literary, and spiritual identities. In this research, I demonstrate that

Parvīn's transgression of these cultural gender boundaries affirmed the difference between masculine and feminine in the Iranian-Muslim culture and turned her authorship into an unresolved mystery.

In her analysis, Milani referred to Parvīn's feminisation of the classical character of the nightingale, which is always male, as a subversive motif in her poetry.⁸⁹ Moayyad's choice of the title for his translation of Parvīn's work hints at the subtle point of Parvīn's 'voiced nightingale'. In Moayyad's title, however, Parvīn's nightingale does not sing, but laments, which implies that probably he did not see the element of subversion in Parvīn's nightingale as a newcomer in her poetry.⁹⁰ In my study, I take Milan's argument a step further, and expand transgression to Parvīn's literary identity, her poetry, and its reception. Foucault defined transgression as different from subversiveness. For Foucault, 'transgression' means crossing a limit to open new spaces within the heart of the limit. In the case of Parvīn, 'transgression' describes what it meant to cross the Iranian-Muslim gender norm of 'silence' and to overcome its liminality. By applying Foucault's concept of transgression, I demonstrate how crossing this limit opened up a space for Parvīn in the patriarchal Persian literature and society—a space in which she asserted her literary identity as a woman and achieved lasting popularity.

The few analytical studies previously done on Parvīn's poetry have approached it from various angles. Karimi-Hakkak, for instance, performed a detailed text-based analysis of 'God's Weaver', and indicated Parvīn's departure from purely classical toward modern poetry. Similarly, Fomeshi examined Parvīn's 'God's Weaver' in two articles in which he analysed the motifs and themes. In his first article, which was a comparative literary analysis, he postulated that Parvīn was probably inspired by Whitman's 'A Noiseless, Patient Spider'. In his more recent work, Fomeshi opened up new perspectives for interpreting this poem as a contribution to Islamic mysticism, by pointing out that the spider could represent a female mystic. Milani took a feminist stance. Her cultural-historical study of gender in the Iranian-Muslim culture focused on Parvīn's work in its social context and indicated how female poets have been branded as deviants in patriarchal cultures. Dabashi situated Parvīn in the Constitutional era and examined the role she played in shaping the political history of Iran by composing poetry that showed her engagement in the socio-political issues of her country.

Parvīn's femininity, her literary identity, her poetry, and nation-wide popularity are multidimensional questions. These problems are complex because Parvīn, as a female poet of the early twentieth century in the Iranian-Muslim culture, experienced a particular situation. In her brief literary career, Parvīn experienced fundamental socio-political transformations with serious repercussions for Iranian women. The methodology I adopt to approach the multifaceted questions about Parvīn is performing a detailed textual analysis of Parvīn's work while studying

it within the historical and contemporary socio-political, and cultural context. By performing a thorough analysis of Parvīn's poems, I shall investigate her capability for expressing her thoughts through the language of classical Persian poetry. By contextualising Parvīn's work within the socio-political and cultural milieu in which she lived and wrote, I investigate her engagement in her society.

As a female poet writing in the Iranian-Muslim culture, in which femininity was shameful and 'good' women were supposed to be voiceless, Parvīn used her poetic prowess to comment on controversial issues in her society. She revived debate poetry, a classical genre, which has been used by prominent male poets to tackle controversial issues of their times. Parvīn used debate poetry as a powerful mode of expression, to compose the majority of her work. By situating the in-depth textual analysis of Parvīn's work within her contemporary atmosphere, I demonstrate how and why Parvīn used her literary skills, particularly the genre of debate poetry, to negotiate her position in the Iranian-Muslim society, and gain agency in a male-dominated literary culture. The combination of detailed textual analysis of Parvīn's poetry and contextualising it also facilitates the investigation of her century-long popularity. To approach Parvīn's reception, however, I read her poems within the present-day context. This technique illuminates how Parvīn's poetic prowess continues to give her the agency to communicate with her audience, although her work is censored to fit the ideological values of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Contextualisation of the detailed analysis of Parvīn's work illuminates the neglected aspects about this major poet and her literary art. By applying this new method, Parvīn's agency as a female poet will come to the fore, and the stereotypical image of her as a poet conforming to patriarchal norms will be revised.

Organisation of Chapters

In chapter one, I investigate the question of Parvīn's femininity and the controversies around her authorship as a woman. I start with a history of how she has been received as a woman poet, and of how femininity has been perceived in her work by both her critics and admirers. Since Parvīn's femininity turned into a controversial issue that remained unresolved, and resurfaced even decades after her death, I provide a thorough review of the literature to catalogue the debate on her gender or femininity from the time her poems appeared in the journal *Bahār* in 1920-21 to the present time. I then explore the concepts of gender and femininity through a historical-cultural analysis of how these concepts were constructed in the Iranian-Muslim culture. I give an account of these gender norms, showing how they have marginalised women, depriving them of the right to have a voice or to write poetry. With these cultural-religious gender boundaries in mind, I analyse the reasons why Parvīn's femininity

fuelled such long-lasting controversies. By analysing examples from Parvīn's poetry, I indicate how she experienced authorship as a gendered performative act, and how she responded to the hostile reception of her identity as a female poet. I explain the ways in which Parvīn pioneered in breaking with this centuries-old patriarchal gender divide and established a literary identity for herself as a woman.

In chapter two I investigate why and how she revived the classical genre of Persian debate poetry (*munāẓara*) to express her thoughts and emotions. I explore Parvīn's revival of *munāẓara*, which is a classical genre employed by Asadī-yī Ṭūsī, and also exploited by numerous prominent male Persian authors such as Firdowsī (d. 1019 or 1025), Niẓāmī and Rūmī. Parvīn's use of debate poetry is one of the reasons why she has been praised as a classical poet. I propose, however, that her adoption of this genre is a clear manifestation of her transgression of patriarchal gender norms in the classical literary tradition of Persian poetry. In this chapter, I analyse 'God's Weaver', which is one of Parvīn's widely read debate poems, to illustrate her innovative revival of this genre. The reference point for my analysis is the extant debate poems written by Asadī. I introduce and briefly analyse his debate poems, which are the first mature examples that have come down to us following the start of the Islamic era. Then I analyse Parvīn's 'God's Weaver' by contextualising it within the socio-political era when Parvīn composed her poetry. I also focus closely on the text of the poem to analyse Parvīn's prowess in adopting classical and mystical themes or motifs and in incorporating them into her poem. I investigate the associations that I suggest Parvīn made between the classical motifs and modern themes, such as the challenges that women like herself faced as artists in a patriarchal literary tradition.

With this analysis, I shall demonstrate how Parvīn developed her characters and positioned them in a debate to address one of the controversies of her times: the situation of women in a patriarchal society, which was undergoing fundamental transformations at the turn of the twentieth century. I wish to demonstrate how Parvīn used the imaginary debate poem as a safe space in which to criticise Iranian-Muslim gender boundaries. I examine different aspects of Parvīn's transgressive break with silence, the ideal of femininity in classical Persian literature. My aim is to analyse the changes that she made in the resignifying of mystical motifs as she wove a feminine voice into the male-dominated literary tradition.

Chapter three centres on Parvīn's engagement in the socio-political issues of her times, and why it has been neglected. With the analysis of socio-political themes in Parvīn's poetry in this chapter, I intend to delineate Parvīn's significant contribution to Persian Committed poetry. The traditional gender divide would dictate the exclusion of women from the socio-political historiography in Iran.⁹¹ Similarly, only male poets of the era were admired as poets with an important role in shaping the literary trend of Committed poetry, as a significant component in Iran's political history. Following the suggestions of several literary scholars such as Dabashi,

who referred to Parvīn's participation in introducing socio-political engagement into Persian poetry, I shall focus on several poems in which Parvīn addressed the socio-political topics of her times. I suggest that Parvīn's socio-political engagement has been neglected because she is generally pigeonholed as a classical poet. This notion has led to overlooking her poetry about contemporary issues of her society. I suggest that the analysis in this chapter demonstrates that Parvīn wrote poems on the central themes which were expressed in Persian Committed poetry, such as inequality and discrimination, corruption and oppression by the authorities and different aspects of women's situation in a patriarchal society, including their isolation, veiling and unveiling, and marginalisation.

In chapter four, I focus on why Parvīn has enjoyed an enduring popularity with her nation-wide audience in Iran by analysing the inclusion of her poetry in Iran's school curricula.⁹² I explore the reasons for Parvīn's immense popularity, which has been compared to prominent classical poets such as Firdowsī, Khayyām (d. 1131), and Nizāmī. I start with the history of her reception and the controversies about her authorship. Then I investigate how Parvīn secured a particular niche for herself in the world of Persian literature. To investigate the trajectory of Parvīn's reception in a patriarchal culture, I choose to focus on her work's presence in the most recent versions of school text-books on Persian language and literature. Since public education is a good indicator of a ruling system's ideology, and as the Islamic Republic of Iran is an example of an institution exercising patriarchal discrimination against women, an analysis of these poems sheds light on the state of Parvīn's reception in Iranian society about a century after her publications. I analyse the poems that are chosen for school textbooks, examine the alterations in these poems, and discuss how they are being used to serve the educational purposes promoted by the Islamic Republic.

In chapter five, I explore an instance of how Parvīn's poetry is used in politics in Iran. I analyse Ali Khamenei's speeches mainly delivered on critical issues on different occasions. In these speeches, Khamenei recited a religious poem in Parvīn's *Dīvān* to his audience who were the severely mutilated Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) veterans in one case, and the survivors of a catastrophic earthquake in Azerbaijan in another. In my analysis, I demonstrate his use of a specific selection of couplets from this poem to advise the audience to live through their dire situation with patience and gratitude. I elaborate on how Khamenei connected the mystical motifs and themes in the work of a female poet to promote the ideology by which he ruled Iran under the Islamic Republic. I also analyse his recitation of the same poem and his comments on the occasion of his hospitalisation for surgery. I shall examine why, in this more personal conversation with an audience of writers and artists, Khamenei introduced Parvīn as a pious female poet, and used her religious and didactic poem to underline his own Islamic piety and religiosity by being grateful for his illness.