

**Original Research Article****A Sociological Analysis of the Drama of “The Story of a Journalist” in association with the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (Mashrooteh)**

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**Abstract**

Sociological criticism of literary and artistic works is not the result of one person's perceptions, but the product of a large social group or class reaching the maximum possible consciousness and coherent totality. The play “The Story of a Journalist” was written and performed during the constitutional revolution and was one of the successful theaters of that time. Therefore, it can be understood that this play was developed based on its society and time and seeks to give a meaningful response to the situation of its time. The problem of this research is how this well-known work responds to the social conditions of its time and presents its worldview in response to the class system of its time. This research employs Lucien Goldman's theories and presents the sociological reading of this play and analyzes the way it has meaningfully responded to its time, that is, the constitutional revolution. For this purpose, the analytical-descriptive method was used and various aspects of this play were examined using library resources and the theories of Goldman's genetic constructivism. Examining the different components of the play in the two layers of Comprehension and Explication has shown that this play narrates the coherent totality of the intellectual class or the new middle class. The characters of the play are the representatives of the mentioned class and consider the newspaper as the solution to their consciousness structures and in this text, the structure of the newspaper is analyzed. In this review, the newspaper was scrutinized to get some of the main concepts of the constitutional revolution, such as the freedom of the pen, confronting oppression, or prohibiting evil. Then the problems of the newspaper and its criticisms were put forward. But in the end, from their worldview, the characters of the play, despite the problems of the newspaper, especially in Iranian society, know its benefits are more than its problems and start a newspaper and recommend it.

**Keywords:** *sociological criticism of the play, Mashrouthe theater, Lucien Goldman, Mashrouthe revolution, the story of a journalist.*

**Introduction and the problem statement**

One of the essential factors of the constitutional movement in Iran is the emergence of a new class and

the achievement of this class to a coherent totality and maximum possible consciousness in the society. In the Qajar period, Iran was divided into three upper, middle, and lower classes according to traditional

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sociology (Cohen, 1993) that the upper class was Qajar kings and princes, local governors, and all kinds of nobles, The middle class was made up of traditional marketers and artisans, and the lower class was made up of urban workers and farmers' subjects. However, with the arrival of the new world in Iran, a new class will be added to the classes of Iran, which can be called the intellectuals or the new middle class (See Abrahamian, 2009; Ashraf & Banuazizi, 2009). This new class is the product of Iran's encounter with the new world and comes to the scene with a full-fledged Mashrouteh he demands his right from the central powers and the ruling class and also leads the other social classes of Iran who are fed up with the oppression of the rulers. In the opinion of the leaders of this class, schools, newspapers, and theaters are the three main foundations for the development of nations, therefore many of them strive for all three at the same time. Like the author of the play "The Story of a Journalist", Fekri Ershad, who owns a newspaper and has created a theater on the top floor of his newspaper office, and by writing and performing his plays at the same time as journalism, he actively pursues the art of theater. Therefore, in this play, which is a mixture of the two fundamental foundations of Iranian modernism, the definitions and thoughts, mental structures of intellectuals, and the coherent totality considered by them are presented. The nature of the newspaper and the vital role it plays in the idea of government and the worldview of intellectuals has been shown in the theater media, which itself plays an essential role in the modernization of Iran and the victory of the new type of government and law in the country. according to the sociological criticism based on Goldman's theories, all works of art and literature are meaningful responses to their time and the social and political relations of their time, according to this idea the issue of this research is to find the conditions in which this play emerges. This research, which was carried out with the descriptive-analytical method and using library resources, it is first tried to introduce the

general theoretical foundations and the framework of the sociological criticism method according to Lucien Goldman's method and identify its important criteria, and then the play would be read and analyzed part by part by this method. Considering that in Goldman's method, in the analysis stage, a text or a literary work is considered in a larger context and its relationship with other texts and the social actions of the society are analyzed, everywhere in this reading, the relation of this text with other sources is discussed.

### Research Background

Moshtagh Mehr & Baghinejad (2012) in the article "Iranian Constitutionalism and Literary Criticism" discussed the history of Iran's intellectual and literary system since ancient times and claim that rationalism did not exist in Iranian thought until more or less before the constitution due to various reasons. With the occurrence of the constitutional revolution, Iranians change their ideas about what they had considered true and perfect. One of the types of revision by Iranian thinkers at that time was the rethinking of literary traditions, which was pursued with great effort. Some of the studies that have been carried out in Iran have specifically addressed the phenomenon of theater in the constitutional era and how theater emerged in the modern European style in Iran. One of these works is Sepehran's book (2009) called "Theatrocracy in the Constitutional Era" in which constitutionalism and theater are called a form of anarchism against Iran's center as a result of the absence of government in Iran.

### Theoretical Foundations

Lucien Goldman was one of the most important figures in sociological criticism in the 20th century. In his critique of sociology (genetic constructionism), understanding the meaning of a work is equivalent to reaching a unified whole or coherent totality within it. It is not easy for everyone to understand this coherent totality, and no group can succeed in

presenting it, except for a group that has reached class consciousness during the revolution, because the coherent structure is not something predetermined but emerges in the course of social transformations. Sociological criticism analyzes the work in two layers. The first layer is comprehension, through which the independent structures within the work occur and how the relationships between their parts and their relationship with the whole. The second layer is called explication, in which the entire work of art is considered a part of a larger social structure, and in this way, its relationship with other works or social structures is measured to reach a coherent totality (Adorno et al., 1998). In this view, the author is the mediator and representative of the thought of the group he belongs to, and if he was born in another place and time, all the structures he created in his work would be different (see Adorno et al., 1998; Goldman, 1997, 2003a, 2003b; Kahnmoepoor, 2011; Marks et al., 2003).

Ershad's intellectual introduction and description of the drama "the story of a journalist"

Fekri Ershad was born in 1248 in Tehran. He studied law and French at Dar al-Funun School. With the occurrence of the constitutional movement, he published the newspaper "Sobh-e Sadegh" and fled to the Caucasus after the coup of Mohammad Ali Shah. He returned to Iran in 1288 and resumed journalism (Shakouri & Pourrezaian, 2019).

### **Comprehension of the Plot of "The Story of a Journalist"**

"The story of a journalist" is one of Ershad's first successful experiences, a play that has humorous language and is completely political and critical. The first act takes place in the house of Khosro Khan, the hero of the show, who is worn out and depressed due to unemployment, the second act takes place in the newspaper office, which is full of tension and commotion, and the third act takes place in the courtroom is also full of commotion with the arrival

of various people from different groups. The main characters of this writing, Khosro Khan and his friend Yunus Khan, are both from the intellectual class and other classes recourse them. Khosro Khan, a young man who studied in Europe and returned to Iran and despaired of finding a proper place in Iran's administrations, together with his friend Yunes Khan, started a newspaper and in an article criticized the ruling style of the rulers fundamentally. The oppressed people consider them as their refuge and turn to their office, and request their various expectations and demands from them instead of rulers, and others come to them to seek help from the newspaper to cover up their wrongdoings. Finally, the government shuts down the newspaper and summons its leaders to court. On the day of judgment, all parties and masses of people come to the court and support the owners of the newspaper, but the judges do not stop confiscating the newspaper. Therefore, Khosro Khan and Yunes Khan start a new newspaper with a different name.

### **Comprehension of the Characters in "The Story of a Journalist" and their Class Origin**

The main character of this play, KhosroKhan, is a representative of the intellectual class:

"KhosroKhan: The day they sent us to foreign, they told us that if we completed our studies abroad and returned with a diploma, the Iranian government will entrust us with the tasks we deserve, and the nation will appreciate us. We went, worked hard for seven years, lived in exile, suffered hunger until we returned to our homeland with full joy and happiness with a diploma of doctor of law..." (Fekri Ershad, 2000, 17). And another character Yunes Khan, a friend, and colleague of KhosroKhan, a talented writer who writes a controversial article for the newspaper, is also from the intellectual class:

Younes Khan: My lord! Your Excellency, you have just arrived in Iran and you think that the actions of this country are legal! this country is a city of no

laws. Yes, sir, I have been thinking the same for some time, but unfortunately, despite the general relations I have with people and nobles, I have not yet found a job” (*ibid.*, 18).

Another character is Mirza Abolfavares, the old man who owns Al-Qorazeh newspaper:

“Mirza Abolfavares: We unfortunate who have accepted the unblessed job of journalism, are busy day and night... What did we gain? This misery of the country, this trouble, this seven or eight tomans paperwork... If we are moderate, they will say: “This newspaper is not important, that it does not curse, its writings are not fiery” If we are stringent everyone attacks us and punishes us” (*ibid.*, 25).

Another character is Mozabzab Al-Molk, the mediator of the ministries, who is in the middle of the intellectual class and the ruling class and is connected with both groups:

“YunesKhan: ... I have a friend called Mozabzab Al-Molk. He does not have a nickname, but he gave himself a nickname; A talky charlatan man. he has links in all of the ministries” (*ibid.*, 32).

“Mirza-ye Fokoli” is from the ruling class, who has a paradoxical name. Because being a Mirza is a link with the ruling class and being a Fokoli is one of the signs and characteristics of modernity and loving the new European culture. He asks the journalists not to write anything, about the villainy of the ruler of Rudbar who is his friend:

“Mirzai Fekli: Of course, Your Excellency, you know that Mr. Mujerab-al-Adara has become the Rudbar ruler and some people oppose him. I request your Excellency and other respected writers to be silent on this matter and not write anything...” (*ibid.*, 41).

Another character is a Kashani businessman from the traditional middle class named Hajikashi, who wants to cheat and not pay back the loans of others, and for this purpose, he asks for help from the newspaper:

“Hajikashi: I am a famous businessman. My goods are always on the seas. I wanted you to announce in your newspaper that Haji Mohsen’s large ship has

been sunk in the sea. His creditors should know and give him a deadline.” (*ibid.*, 54).

Another character is Khan-e Malayeri from the traditional class who asks for help from the newspaper to preserve his land:

Khan-e Malayeri: ...I am Sheikh Ali Nahavandi and have two hundred cavalries of my own... Some time ago, a wealthy person came and confiscated my property. Whatever I try, I can’t take it back. He is a rich guy. He spends everywhere... Now I have come to you journalists to announce my Petition in your newspaper. Whatever it costs, I will give it!” (*ibid.*, 56).

And the other persons of two officers, the Stenographer, Mirzaheidar Ali, the chief of the court, and the public prosecutor are all on the side of the ruling class who ordered the seizure and trial of the newspaper. In this play, there are representatives from different classes of society. Still, the main characters who shape the main story are on opposite sides, i.e. the intellectual class in front of the ruling class. The characters who are other than these two classes, i.e. the characters of the traditional middle class such as merchants or landowners, help to the overall image of the coherent totality intended by the writers. Sometimes they are on the side of the intellectuals and help to confirm the main idea that the newspaper is effective and useful, and sometimes they are on the opposite side. In this case, they give strength to the criticisms of journalism, which will be followed by the fact that the criticism of the newspaper also had a very important place in the world view of the intellectuals of the constitutional period.

### **Explication of the worldview and coherent totality of the playwright and his co-thinkers**

In the second part of sociological criticism, we will explicate the work. Explication means to see the text in the context of other texts of writers and thinkers along with the author of the text itself.

Referring to the freedom of the pen and the negation

of oppression as one of the foundations of the constitutional revolution. This article, in sync with many intellectuals in the Mashrouteh period, praises the freedom of the press, and sees it as indispensable for the country's progress:

"Khosro Khan: Yes, journalism is an honorable job with beneficial importance. According to Alexandre Dumas, journalism is a royalty without a crown" (*ibid.*, 23).

In addition to referring to the constitution of Iran's constitutional period, this text also refers to the law of the French revolution:

"Mirza Abolfavares: The License means the name they set for the newspaper, which must be approved by the Minister of Education.

Khosrokhan: I did not ever see this word in foreign laws. No, no, you are wrong, it should be as same in Iran...

Mirza Abolfavares: Yes, Monsieur Khosrokhan. The law does not mention the word and only mentions some obligations and it makes notification to the Ministry of Education a condition, but recently the Cabinet has added several articles to the press law..." (*ibid.*, 30).

For example, in the fifth article of the treatise "One Word", to prove the correctness of these thoughts, the keyword "negation of oppression" is used, which is obligatory for everyone in the Islamic tradition. And he considers it as the basic principle of the laws of foreign countries and writes: "Most of the good things, comfort, prosperity and security of foreign countries are due to the existence of this law. Because the main cause of it is justice and fairness, and God has ordered and encouraged it in many verses" (*Tabatabai, 2015, 221*). He considers the freedom of the pen and expression to be the result of this principle, which is included in the decree Enjoining good and forbidding evil, and writes "From the good results of this law, is the freedom of speech and pen, everyone, high and low, can do whatever they want for the welfare of the country and the nation, If his ideas and

concepts are accepted by the community, they will praise him, and if they are not, they will prohibit and condemn them" (*ibid.*, 237). In the sixth paragraph, Mostashar-Al-Doleh extends this general sentence about freedom of speech and pen to the specific case of freedom of the press. And the first group of "press freedom" considers the freedom to publish scientific books, which is confirmed by many verses and hadiths. And another group of presses is listed under the Enjoining good and forbidding evil and negation of the oppression. Yusuf Khan writes that some cases of press freedom, such as books and newspapers, are "part of the Enjoining good and forbidding". And it is not possible to prevent their publication, except in cases where the press is "harmful to religion or public morals" or is against the text of the law. In this case, "removing that harm is obligatory" (*see ibid.*, 226). Also, Mullah Abdul Rasool Kashani discussed the constitutional foundations one after the other in his treatise "Ensafieh" (1909) and reached the freedom of the pen. "Another of the principles of constitutionalism is the freedom of pen and production, business, and other life accessories, to write whatever he wants and to publish whatever he wants. he can speak and write, If someone takes his property" (*Zargarinejad, 2008, V. 2, 554-555*). And also the Armenian Hovian, says: "Remarkably, the Armenians of New Jolfa... European nations consider schools, newspapers, and theater as factors of community progress. Is it unreasonable for us, the youth of Jolfa, Isfahan, to look for one of the factors of community progress?" (*Hovian, 1990, 226*). Also, Mirza RezaKhanTabatabai Nayini writes in the newspaper "Theater": "The newspaper warns the nation about the flaws and corruptions of the country every day and informs the ways of progress and reform. It makes the nation aware of its rights" (*Tabatabai Nayini, 1978, 50-51*).

From these and many other cases, it can be concluded that the text "The Story of a Journalist" creates its meaning in relation to many other texts and ideas at

the same time. In this way, this text is placed in a more general structure next to all kinds of civil actions and struggles to achieve the newspaper and awareness and completes them, and on the other hand, it reacts to the opponents of the newspaper and supporters of dictatorship.

### **Dos and Don'ts of Newspaper Structure**

The thinkers of the constitutional period talked about how the newspaper should be more efficient, for example, Akhundzadeh wrote to the writers of the newspaper Mellat-e Saniye-ye Iran:

"In the national newspaper, you must state the affairs of foreign policy, and also write the measures taken by the Iranian government regarding the order of the province, the interests of the kingdom, and the nation. In addition to that, write some telegraphic news in clear handwriting, mentioning the news and internal events. For example, you should mention how severe cholera was in Tabriz..." (Adamiyat, 1978, 47).

And the structure of the newspaper from the point of view of the characters in the play is as follows:

"Younes Khan: We will print an article in two columns about war events, some provinces news, and we will sell it one Abasi..."

In this way, it becomes clear that the idea of the structure of the newspaper in the constitutional era as a pillar of the liberating pillars of Iran is similar in different texts of that time. But "The story of a journalist" also criticizes the newspaper (in the form of satire) and thus responds to the ruling discourse of the intellectual class based on time and place and new awareness in the explication layer. What was done at the same time by one of the clerics who wrote treatises during the constitutional period, who was also a journalist, Mirza Hassan Ansari wrote in his treatise called Ganjine-ye Ansar or the novel of Sheikh and Shukh (1907):

"Chairman: Toiling for free all your life and facing accidents destroys your intellect

Manager: what does he benefit from the history of

Isfahan and the translation of Vafiyat al-A'yan and the explanation of Abi-Hanifah and the facilitation of Vassaf and the authoring of Akhlagh Ol-Ashraf, in which he mixed a hundred thousand Arabic and Persian poems with aphorisms, that now he decided to waste his time and waste a newspaper?!

Vice President: Rather, he intends a sustenance letter (Roozi-Nemeh in Persian)!" (Najafi, 2012, 430).

### **Criticism of the Newspaper in the Social Thoughts of the Constitutional Era**

By seeing these examples, we can realize that newspaper criticism has existed in Iran since its inception. Ahmed Kasravi writes in his book "The constitutional history":

" In Iran, newspapers, both before and after the constitution, did not have a way for themselves, and this is why they always wrote contradictory. You can see that in one issue he wrote a lot about Mozaffar-Al-Din Shah's spreading justice or the efforts and vigilance of his crown prince Mohammad Ali Mirza and in the other issue, he lamented the troubles of the Iranian people, the tyranny of the rulers, and the destruction and disorder of the country" (Kasravi, 2010, 96).

So we see that the newspaper has a two-sided concept during the constitutional period. On the one hand, it is completely good and worthy and helpful to the progress of the country and one of the foundations of modernization and judicial government in the country, and on the other hand, it is a tool to welcome tyrannical rulers and earn sustenance. From the perspective of sociological criticism, newspaper and media are dual things that both help people, and sometimes there is weakness and inaccuracy in them that can harm groups of people and their wishes. From all of these, one can understand the worldview and coherent totality of the author and his co-narrators. Khosro Khan and Yunes Khan are the only ones who, knowing all the advantages and disadvantages of the newspaper, recognized it as something that the

country needs sooner and more than all:

“Khosrokhan: Indeed, you have done a wonderful job for us. I am very surprised. Although I was not a journalist, at least in Europe I had a relationship with the press office. There are no such usual arrangements. They took your property, what is the relation of it with the newspaper? No one will handle your complaint, what to me” (Fekri Ershad, 2000, 33).

### **The Intention of the Constitutionals and the Characters of the Play from Starting a Newspaper**

Yunes Khan and Khosrow Khan, representatives of the intellectual class, are more aware of society than all lower or similar classes, such as the masses and the traditional class, and even more than the ruling class. The activists know all the events in advance and are aware of their purpose and function and what they should do at the right time in the right place:

“Khosrokhan: ... Journalism needs capital if you don't know about European newspaper capital...

Yunus Khan: Yes, Mr. Khosro Khan, these statements are correct, but as a famous saying has been said since ancient times, “The mace should be proportional with the warrior.” Our country, our schools, our education, and our offices, want journalists like us!” (ibid., 35).

These writers are so persistent in their desire to wake up the masses that they are ready to pay the price from the beginning and foresee failure and try to be victorious in any way:

“I didn't tell you until today, I have another license that if they sequester the “The earthquake”, they will be ashamed of that name, and they will abandon the sequestering: “The sequester”. who can sequester “The sequester”? It is already sequestered!”

### **Conclusion**

Sociological criticism deals with the analysis of texts in the two layers of comprehension and explanation, in the layer of comprehension it deals

with the structural relationships of the work with itself, and in the layer of explication, it places the whole work alongside the simultaneous works to discover the worldview and the coherent totality. The drama “The story of a journalist” deals with the concept of “newspaper” (which is one of the fundamental concepts in the constitutional era) at the same time as its storytelling, and in this way reaches the layer of explication. The text criticizes why it is necessary to get a license for a newspaper in the seemingly legal country of Iran and it is not free like in European countries. Many thinkers and writers of that time have theorized about the newspaper and freedom of expression, to the extent that some of them consider it as a product of the religious decree enjoining us from good forbidding evil and considers it obligatory. On the other hand, since the same time, some discussions about newspaper criticism and a critical look at journalists had started, which can be seen in humorous or serious writings, because some newspapers have turned themselves into tools of autocrats for obtaining personal profits. Knowing all this, Khosro Khan and Yunes Khan finally considered the newspaper useful and started and maintained it in any way they could, because in their worldview or the ideal structure, they found many masses thirsty for activism, struggle, and an awakening and informing tool. In the mental and ideal structure of the intellectual class, if the newspaper can survive, it will eventually eliminate the shortcomings of the lower classes and make them prevail over the ruling class. “The story of a journalist” reveals that the coherent totality serves as a modern social tool such as a newspaper and questions and examines this tool and finally shows it in an idealistic way, useful, informative, and necessary along with other endeavors of the people.

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