

Shahnush Parsipur was born on February 17, 1946 in Tehran in a dismantled aristocratic family. They moved to Khorramshahr when she was a child. She started writing short stories and articles from the age of sixteen. As she was determined to become a story writer, she chose the field of literature and as the only girl's high school in Khorramshahr did not have a literature department, she taught herself and studied independently. Before eighteen, she was employed at the Water and Electricity Department of Khuzestan as a telephone operator and secretary. In 1966 she came to Tehran to take the nationwide high school final exams. After passing her exams, she finds employment at Tolidarou, prepares for the university entrance exams and writes short stories. In the fall of 1967 she enrolls in the first night session classes at Tehran University. She starts working at the National Television of Iran and soon after marries film director Nasser Taghvai. In 1968 she gives birth to her son Ali. A year later she publishes her first book *The Little Red Ball* (1969), published by Kanoun Parvaresh Fekri Koudakan va Nojavanan. In 1973 she divorces Nasser Taghvai. That same year she receives her bachelor's degree in Social Science from Tehran University. By this time she has published several short stories in various literary journals and is producer of a television program on rural women of Iran. In June 1974, in protest against the execution of two revolutionary poets Keramat Daneshian and Khosrow Golsorkhi, she resigns from the National Television of Iran. She spends the summer of that year writing the novel *The Dog and the Long Winter* (1976). In September of the same year SAVAK (the notorious secret police of the Shah) arrests her with typewritten copies of her novel. She endures fifty four days of solitary confinement for protesting the execution of the two revolutionary poets. In the spring of 1976 she travels to India and Afghanistan and later to Paris with Ali. She enrolls at the School of Oriental Languages to learn Chinese language and culture. A while after leaving Iran, *The Dog and the Long Winter* appears in the Tehran book market. In 1977 *Trial Offers* (1970) and *Crystal Pendant Earrings* (1977), a compilation of short stories she had written till then are published. In 1977 she writes *Plain and Small Adventures of the Spirit of the Tree* but decides not to publish them until twenty years later.

The January Revolution of 1979 takes her to Tehran; before she is through with her Masters program. In September 1980, at the brink of Iraq's attack on Iran, she returns to Tehran with Ali. She sells books for the Publishing and Distribution Book Company. At the height of repression of secular intellectuals and the pro-democracy movement in August of 1981, she is arrested without due cause. Although she had not been a participant of any political group, she endures four years and seven months in Evin and Ghezel Hessar prisons. In prison, she finishes the first draft of *Tuba and the Meaning of Night*. After she recuperates her manuscripts from the Pasdaran, she gives them to flame. Upon release from prison in September 1986, she opens *Pichak* bookstore. But she closes it down after six months because of the unjustified intervention of the Revolutionary Committee and their many inquiries on those who frequented her bookstore. In the spring of 1987 she finishes the final draft of *Tuba and the Meaning of Night*. She had to wait for two and some years in dire need, until a week after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, to see the book in print. The huge success of *Tuba and the Meaning of Night* and the income from the two books she translated from English and French into Persian between 1987 and 1989, *Witchcraft of Salem Village*, by Shirley Jackson and *Para-psychology* in Que Sais -Je series, provides the means for her to write *Blue Intellect*. She spends the winter

and spring of 1987 on this book. While writing *Blue Intellect*, manic depression strikes her for the first time.

After the crisis subsides, she undertakes the publication of *Women Without Men* that she had started in Paris. *Nashre Noghereh* offers this book at the 1990 Spring Tehran Book Fair. Five thousand editions are sold in one week. The spiteful reaction of the *Hezbollah* added to its huge success – as a sound bomb detonated at *Nashre Noghere* – setting the stage for the withdrawal of *Women Without Men* from bookstores. In August of that same year, Shahrnush Parsipur and Mohamad Reza Aslani, chief editor of *Nashre Noghere* were arrested. Two months of imprisonment did not put an end to the constant contempt, intimidation and harassment of the writer. *Women Without Men* was the beginning of a new cycle of persecution and punitive actions against a writer who dared deal with taboos opening the chapter of virginity in contemporary Persian literature.

Despite her mental fatigue, psychological exhaustion and financial duress, she continued fighting to obtain permission to publish her oeuvres. The simultaneous publication of her translation of *Lao Tzu and Taoism* written by Max Kaltenmark; *From Confucious to the Long March* by Delphine Delors; *From Tobacco Wars of China to the Cultural Revolution* (in four volumes) written by a group of writers and researchers of Hattie University in 1990, bring about a ray of hope. However, *Blue Intellect* is not allowed to be published. Her endeavors in 1991 shatter all illusions of her writings being published in Iran. That year her *Trial Offers* in English is published in *A Chicago Anthology*, edited by Heshmat Moayed. In 1992, she agrees to attend the third Iranian Women's Studies Foundation conference in Los Angeles. She is not given permission to leave the country without the efforts of her friends abroad. She arrives in Los Angeles a few hours after the commencement of the conference and on the last day she unfolds *The State of a Writer* in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Throughout her ten months travel in North America and Europe, she lectures at many Iranian exile and immigrant literary gatherings, giving interviews to the Persian and non Persian press. In San Jose, California she arranges for the publication of *Blue Intellect*. In London, England she faces her second bout of manic depression and is taken to one of city's hospitals. In Paris, France the last leg of her trip, she continues her treatment. She returns to Iran in January 1992. Once again she finds that her work cannot be published. Once again she is placed under psychological, mental and financial duress. The publication of *The Etiquette of Drinking Tea in the Presence of the Wolf* (US, 1993), a selection of short stories she wrote after the revolution and during her ten month trip in North America and Europe, do not bring her a penny. After two years of living in austerity, isolation and seclusion, the sole produce of which is the translation of *The Rock of Tanios* of Amin Maalouf from French to Persian (1995) and some articles and short stories for *Adineh*, *Donyayeh Sokhan* and *Gardoun* literary magazines, she decides to leave Iran and takes residence in the US.

In September 1994 she arrives in Los Angeles. She finalizes the publication of *Blue Intellect* (1994). She then attends to her *Prison Memoirs* and finishes it in six months. The book is published in 1995 by *Nashre Baran*, from then on her publisher outside Iran.

In 1996 she takes residence in Berkeley, California. She writes articles and short stories for *Pejvak*, a local weekly as well as a few other socio-literary Persian language magazines published in California, namely *Negin* and *The Persian Book Review*. She also cooperates with *Shahrvand* bi-weekly (Canada) and for almost six years introduces literary works published in and out of Iran. She holds classes for Iranians interested in story writing. A selection of her student's stories was published in 2002 under the title *Arrival and Departure*.

In 1998, she writes a science fiction *Shiva* and in the midst of it falls into her fourth bout of manic depression. Soon after, *Women Without Men* is published in English followed by the publication of *Shiva* (1999). In November 1999 she starts writing *Sitting on the Wing of the Wind* which occupies her until November 2000. This tallest novel of Shahrnush Parsipur is published in 2002. She then makes a short trip to China.

In her years of self imposed exile, she builds strong bonds with Iran and the Iranian exile and émigré community. She pays close attention to the breach of the most basic human rights of her compatriots. She protests violations and signs petitions and pleas. She wholeheartedly takes part in the gatherings of her compatriots and expatriates in diaspora. She takes pride in presenting the state of the Iranian novel and short story to non Iranian literary and cultural circles who invite her to Canada, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Austria, England, France, Australia, Italy and Belgium. She twice receives the *Hillman - Hammett Award* and once the *Tablet of Cyrus the Great* from Encyclopedia Iranica.

Away from home, she continues her translation work. She turns to Persian *The Plato Papers* of Peter Ackroyd with the cooperation of Parviz Shokat. As a fellow at Brown University in 2003, she translates into Persian *The Unsettled Mind* by Kay Redfield Jamison, Professor of Psychology at Johns Hopkins University, also a manic depressive. Soon after, she undertakes the translation of Robert Coover's *Spanking the Maid*. None of these three books have been yet published.

The translation of Shahrnush Parsipur novels and short stories in the last few years, have picked up speed. *Tuba* translated into German in 1995 by Nima Mina, is translated into Italian in the same year and into English in 2006. The English edition of *Women Without Men* was the precursor of the Swedish, Spanish, Malayalan, Italian, Dutch and French. Shirin Neshat turned the theme of this novel into a feature film to be produced in 2007. Shahrnush Parsipur performs in the film.

The Heinrich Boll Foundation in Germany has invited this outstanding Persian writer as its distinguished guest in the spring and summer of 2007. Shahrnush Parsipur is now a writer in residence at the House of Heinrich Boll.

Nasser Mohajer
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