



Small minorities in not so big minority

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Abstract: This paper deals with the history of children and young adults' literature in Iran, specifically for religious and tribal minorities and studies the role of the minorities in Iran children's literature, from the past till today. Zoroastrians, Christians (Armenians & Assyrians) and the Jewish along with the Sunnis, Turks, Kurds, Arabs and Balouchs, as religious minorities, are all studied here. Moreover, the paper has highlighted the activities of Christian missionaries in Iran and publicity affairs of Islamic Republic of Iran overseas. The obstacles in the way of promoting the children's literature for minorities and also some suggestions to spread good readings for the minorities' children are other parts of the paper.

Keywords: Iran, Children and Young Adults' Literature, Literature of Minorities, Islamic Revolution, Children Magazines.

The word "Iran" reminds you of not a big country which is synonymous with revolution, oil and politics. However, its 70-million population is heir to a millennial civilization; It's a land which throughout history has presented many scientific dignitaries and literary works to the world civilization.

Iran of today, consists of various groups and clans of races and languages that live in different corners of this land.

According to present constitution of Iran, state religion of country is Islam, official sect is Shia and official language is Persian. Though other religions, sects and languages are being seen in this country.

Following thousands years traditions of storytelling and lullabying in Iran, it's been 170 years that children books are being published and nowadays, 5000 titles of books are being published for children each year. There are considerable numbers of people who act as publisher, writer and illustrator of children books in Iran and receive many prizes from international events and societies. Several exhibitions, festivals and conferences are being held yearly. In the other hand, Children literature in Iran as a whole, has a minor place in global formula and is being threatred by global process in different aspects.

Persian script and language today is limited to only 3 countries of Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan. However, in Tajikistan as a cause of using Cyrillic script, has been dropped and also in Afghanistan empowerment of local dialects has limited Persian language usage.



Today Persian script is obtained from Arabic script and since 1100 years ago was an alternative for other script which were applied being in Persian record. This script is today in use in Iran and Afghanistan and has many similarities with Arabic and Urdu script in Pakistan.

Therefore, practically Persian children books are limited to Iran and in the other hand, these creative works face with invasion from translated works and global cartoon characters and in a separate discussion must think about maintenance of national and local literature of countries in globalization process.

The place of Minorities, from the past till today

The Zoroastrians

The Zoroastrians are considered the most aborigine religious minority in Iran.

Some of educational books which Zoroastrian clergymen began to write for children and young adults in order to retain the religion of their predecessors after that most of people in Iran entered Islam during two centuries gradually and very small population kept the Zoroastrian as their original faith, were written the centuries after establishment of the Islamic government, including *The Book of Advice for Children* and *Children Duties* which were educational books of The Zoroastrian for children.

By establishment of Pahlavi era in Iran, the history and culture of Iran before Islam got into the center of attentions. Such attitude was somehow due to the propagandas by Nazi regime in Germany that echoed the superiority of Aria descent. That's why numerous books about Zoroastrian heroes were published for Iranian children.

Today, Zoroastrians have a representative in Iran's parliament and students of the minority study their own religious books in schools. Two or three publishing houses in Iran deal with publishing the books especially for Zoroastrians. Zoroastrians in Iran have good relationship with the Zoroastrians living in England, India and America.

In previous years, there were some magazines such as "Homai" (i.e. a fictional bird) which have used to publish for children in Iran, while today, the three magazines published for Zoroastrians rarely allocate any pages to children.

Armenians



Armenians are the religious minority with highest population in Iran.

The first print machine came to Iran in 1607 thanks to the Armenians and in 1638, the book titled as “Saghmoos (Prophet David’s book) published in Isfahan in Armenian language. So the first books published in Iran belong to the religious minorities.

Armenians in Iran read the books and magazines published by Armenians overseas till 1872 , and then the first student book for Armenian children was published in church of Isfahan and after that publishing of Armenian books in Iran progressed increasingly.

Since then, it has continued and Armenians in Qajar and Pahlavi eras and after Islamic revolution have had enough freedom to publish children books in their language. Today, some Armenian publishing houses in Iran publish books; however, the quality and the numbers printed are far away to be acceptable.

It worth to say before 1920, Armenians children in Iran tended to read the magazines that were being published in Yerevan, Tbilisi, Beirut and Istanbul, but in that year, a magazine titled as Ankar (i.e. friend) began to publish in Iran for Armenian children.

Since then, more than ten magazines in Armenian language have been published in Iran for children and young adults. Currently, “Alik” magazine is being published for Armenian young adults in Iran, and a national radio station in Armenia language is working in Iran.

Assyrians

The Assyrians, who consider themselves as survivors of Assyrian Empire, have been living in plateau of Iran since thousands years ago.

The first children book in Assyrian language was published in 1841 thanks to the Americans in Oromyeh. We can say Assyrian children benefitted from their own books, at the same time and even sooner than Muslim children speaking Farsi.

The magazine titled as “Shoa-e Noorani (Bright Beam)” was published in 1849 in Oromyeh by Justin Perkins, the American priest, which is of high importance from different aspects. It is considered as the second magazine published in Iran and as the



first Assyrian magazine in the world. This religious magazine should be the first newspaper for children and young adults in Iran.

In Pahlavi era, some magazines like “Urhay” were published for Assyrian children young adults, while today, there is no active publishing house in Iran and Assyrian children mostly use the books and magazines that published in Iran or overseas.

The Jewish

The followers of Jewish in Iran are survivors of Bani Israel tribe which came into Iran about 2500 years ago. Dariush, king of Iran, made free the Jewish Iran after he captured Babel and let them live in Iran safely. That’s why today there are shrines of some Jewish prophets in Iran like Danial. Nowadays, very small Jewish community live in Iran, after most of them emigrated to Israel and America. The Jewish have also one representative in Iran’s parliament.

Since centuries ago, Jewish children have been learning the Hebrew in order to be able to study religious books. But the language Jewish use in writing and informal communications is a mixture of Farsi and Hebrew which is called “Farsihood”. The script of Jewish for Hebrew has been changed and is called “Rashi”.

The first book published in Farsi worldwide was a Jewish book. In 1546, the Torah was published in Farsi and in Rashi script in Istanbul.

In recent centuries, Jewish children in Iran have used mostly Farsi books, because the language and script of it are very similar to language of their tribe. Iran Jewish communities occasionally publish brochures and catalogues for Jewish children.

Jewish children sometimes have had their special magazines which “Hegula” is one of those important ones. Today, in religious ceremonies, the Jewish magazines allocate some pages to the children.

Local Minorities

The Turks and Azeri

The main parts of Iranian people, about 20 percent, speak in different dialects Turkish. By the first millennium, the Turkish speaking tribes emigrated from central



Asia toward Iran and their warlords could defeat Iranian governments and rule over vast areas of western Asia.

The Ghaznavids and Seljuq were the most important Turkish tribes. Although their governments didn't last very long, but groups of them could overcome the little Asia and ruled the region and parts of Eastern Europe for centuries in the name of Ottoman Empire.

It should be mentioned about Turkish speaking people that during recent centuries, there has been very limited form of script and it was Farsi that has been the official, literary, and scientific language spoken in Turkish speaking regions, even in ottoman country.

Besides rich treasure of folkloric and oral literature, publishing the books in Turkish began after Farsi language. In 19th century, the Turkish books reached to Turkish speaking children in Iran from Russia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Dagestan, but publishing the Turkish books in Iran got under way very soon and works of pulp fiction, novel, educational as well as translations from Farsi and other European languages were published in Turkish.

Publishing the children books in Turkish language was on the bloom until the end of Qajar dynasty and dozens of books were published in Tabriz, Tehran and other Turkish speaking cities.

At the same time with world war second and attack of ottomans and Russia to Iran and in the last years of Qajar era, an autonomous and separatist government was ruling in the year 1920 in Azerbaijan (Iran) for a whole year.

In Pahlavi dynasty, some writers active in children literature and also intellectuals made protests against the rule that children in Turkish regions were forced to read Farsi language and didn't have any books in their motherhood language.

For example, Samad Behrangi, a prominent writer with left-wing attitudes protested to this issue in the book titled as "Research in Educational Affairs of Iran". Although he rewrote some of the indigenous stories of Azerbaijan for children in Farsi, but he never wrote any book in Turkish for children. There was found among his handwritings the poetic translation of a pulp fiction named "Aunt Beetle" in Turkish language which was published after his death at the end of Pahlavi era.



After Islamic revolution occurred in 1979 and Pahlavi regime came to end, publishing the books in local and indigenous languages became legal. Today, some publishing houses in Tehran and Azerbaijan publish children books in Turkish.

Publishing the children magazines in Turkish got under way after revolution, one of the most important magazines was “Kapanak” which published by a state institute, but now it publishes no more. “Bayramliq” and “Oldooz” were other Turkish magazines for children. Today, some newspapers and magazines which are published in Farsi and Turkish in Turkish speaking regions have some pages for children in Turkish.

The Kurds

The Kurds are parts of Arian tribes which constitute 9 percent of population in Iran. They also live in turkey and Iraq (also Azerbaijan and Syria). Besides from rich treasure of oral literature, writing the books in Kurdish began in 16th century.

In Qajar dynasty, no newspaper was published in Kurdish, however many local languages including Armenian, Assyrian, Turkish, Arabic, Hebrew and Gilaki have their own newspaper.

In Pahlavi era there were limitations on publishing newspapers and magazines in Kurdish. By establishment of an autonomous government in Kurdistan after exit of Allies at the end of world war second, teaching Kurdish language became possible and two children magazines were published. But it came to end very soon after central government again took the power.

After Islamic revolution, it got possible to publish books and magazines in Kurdish. Today some publishing houses in Kurdish provinces tend to publish children books in Kurdish language. During previous years, two children's magazines were being published in Kurdish and nowadays, Kurdish newspapers and magazines allocate pages to children.

Conclusion and some suggestions

1- Publishing book and magazines in local languages needs to suitable cultural situations rather than limitations and legal permission. Most of these languages have brief history of written form and it's not easy for people to read them. Historically,



scientists and literate people have introduced their works and poems in Farsi among the tribes.

Even in Qajar era, when numbers of illiterate people aware of Farsi were less than today, there has been Farsi newspapers published in non-Farsi language regions, while no one thought about publishing children magazines in local languages.

Today, motherhood language of many famous writers and poets in field of children literature is not Farsi. They have not written any books in their tribal languages, while there are not any legal and executive limitations on writing in local language.

2- Due to this and also cultural situation, publishing children book and magazine in tribal languages as not economical. That's why many publishers abandon such projects immediately. It's necessary for state institutes to enter the field in order to retain the culture, costumes and rites of the tribes.

Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (Kanoon) is one the oldest and most credited organizations active in field of literature and art of children in Iran. It began to work 45 years ago and now covers more than 500 libraries around the country especially for children. It also publishes books in local languages (Turkish, Kurdish, Balouch...)

Last year, during the overall children and young adults press festival - held biennially and Seyedali Kashefikhonsari was the secretary of it- a special part for the first time was dedicated to non-Persian newspapers so that children press in local languages to be judged.

3- To achieve progress and evolution in this field, there is a need to effort and belief of intellectuals rather than need to governmental upheaval. At the moment, there is no festival and competition for children books in local languages. Moreover, nothing is mentioned in textbooks of universities about literature of children and young adults for religious and tribal minorities.

For example, "The Children's Book Council of Iran" which is the oldest active organization in field of children books and also representative of IBBY in Iran, has never dealt with children books in local languages in the list of selected and top books, survey groups,...



4- Iran has a special place among regional countries from the background and cultural equipments, then, better than any neighbor country, can organize festivals, competitions and seminars about children books for Zoroastrians, Armenians, Assyrians, Kurds, Turkmens and Balouchs. Iran's State and private organizations active in children literature should heed the suggestion.

5- The point which must be emphasized about literature of tribes in Iran is that, in contrary to writing process in languages of minorities, introducing the literature of tribes in Farsi language has been effective.

Most of the myths and folklore stories of different tribes have been rewritten to Farsi for children and it has become possible for Iranian children from all tribes to study them.

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