

**Spotlight on Women Translators:**  
**Songs and Poems from Iran**  
*Translated from the Farsi by Bānoo Zan*



Today, we continue NTM's established tradition of featuring the work of women translators with these **5 poems and songs by Persian authors translated from Farsi by the accomplished poet and translator Bānoo Zan**. We fell in love with her translations, and you will, too.

**We'd love to hear from you!** Let us know how you like our posts, or attend, share, and spread the word about our readings. Open your heart to the beauty of the world and celebrate its cultures and voices, using [#TranslationMonth](#). Happy National Translation Month and happy reading!

—*Claudia Serea and Loren Kleinman*

## Spotlight on Women Translators: Songs and Poems from Iran

*Translated from the Farsi by Bānoo Zan*

### Remember the Dead Candle

*By Ali-Akbar Dehkhoda*  
*Translated by Bānoo Zan*

O Bird of Dawn, when this dark night  
ceases its evil deeds,  
and at the soul-restoring breath of dawn  
drowsiness departs from slumbering heads,  
the beloved in the azure litter  
unties the knots in her golden tresses,  
God manifests in perfection,  
and ill-mannered Ahriman<sup>1</sup> is under siege,  
remember the dead candle. Remember.

You companion of Joseph in this dungeon,  
when your dream is lucid in truth,  
when you join your sweetheart, kith and kin  
with joyful heart and sweet smiles,  
when you are envied by enemies and cheered by friends,  
freer than breeze and moonlight,  
remember the one who, for a while, every night with you  
in desire of union with loved ones,  
counted the stars till dawn. Remember.

You poor destitute Nightingale,  
when the garden flourishes again,  
and the horizons are a Chinese painter's workshop  
with hyacinths, red roses, and basil flowers,  
when dew-sweat covers the flushed flower-face,  
and you let fall the reins of abstinence,  
remember the early blooming flower, who, in sorrow,  
unrelieved by desired flame,  
withered in winter. Remember.

O companion of the son of Amram<sup>2</sup> in wilderness,  
when these years come to pass,  
and that choice Beloved at the mystic feast  
reveals the promise,

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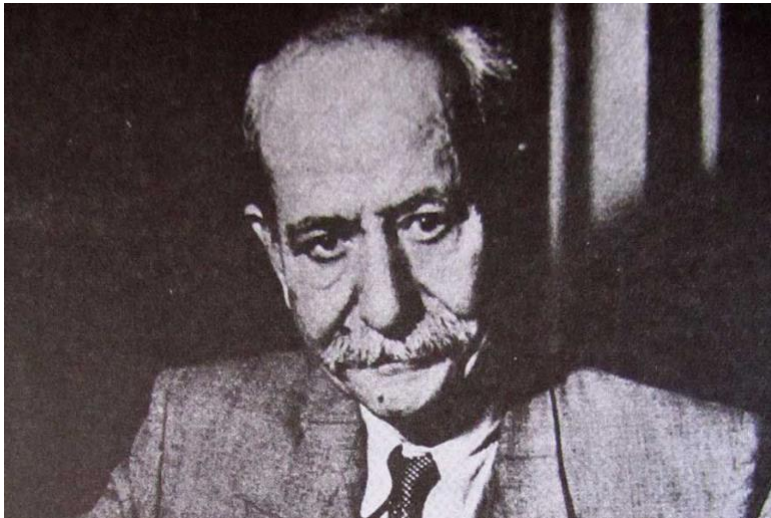
<sup>1</sup> Ahriman is the evil spirit in Early Iranian Religion, Zoroastrianism, and Zorvanism, Lord of Darkness and Chaos, and the source of human confusion, disappointment, and strife.

<sup>2</sup> In the *Book of Exodus*, Amram is the husband of Jochebed and the father of Aaron, Moses, and Miriam.

and every morning the scent of ambergris and incense  
rises up to Saturn from the gold altar,  
remember the one, who for the sins of the heedless tribe,  
longing for a glance at the face of the promised land,  
died in the desert. Remember.

You child of the golden era,  
when the times flourish anew,  
and, pleased with the worshippers' devotion,  
God once again is God,  
when Eram's ways and Shaddad's name are dust,<sup>3</sup>  
and the idle-talkers' mouth is stopped with mud,  
remember the one, who for the crime of demanding justice,  
by the executioner's blade,  
drank the cup of union. Remember.

### About the poet



#### **Ali-Akbar Dehkhoda**

**(1879-1956):** Prominent Iranian linguist and lexicographer, scholar, poet, and social critic. After the constitutional decree in 1906, Mirza Jahangir Khan Shirazi founded the newspaper *Sur-e Esrafil* (Israfil's Trumpet) and hired Dehkhoda as editor-in-chief and contributor.

### Notes on the poem

The poem is a *mossammat* (poem in five stanzas of nine hemistiches, with alternate rhyme, with the last hemistich differing in rhyme, like a refrain). It is an elegy for Mirza Jahangir Khan, known as Mirza Jahangir Khan Sur-e-Esrafil (1875-1908), writer, intellectual, and revolutionary during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911). He was the founder of the progressive weekly newspaper *Sur-e Esrafil*. He was arrested, tortured, and executed on June 23, 1908, following the coup d'état of Mohammad-Ali Shah Qajar. Dehkhoda was exiled. After landing in Switzerland, he resumed the publication of the weekly. The poem appeared in the last issue on March 8, 1909, pages 4-5.

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Quran, Eram (or Iram of the Pillars) was a city of worshippers of stone idols, who defied the warnings of the prophet Hud. To punish them, God sent a drought. But the people would not repent, so they were destroyed by a furious wind, from which only Hud and a few believers emerged. Shaddad was King of the lost Arabian city of Iram of the Pillars, mentioned in Sura 89 of the Quran.

## Daughters of Cyrus

*Translated by Bānoo Zan  
Versified by Cy Strom*

Daughters of great Cyrus<sup>4</sup>  
how long will you fret?  
Under yoke of men  
how long will you bend?

Here upon this land  
daughters of Sāssān<sup>5</sup>  
how long to be silent  
women of Iran?

For good no one does care  
Of evil none's aware  
Menfolk of Iran  
Aren't women human, too?

How long in your hijab?  
How long to be asleep?  
Learn the reason  
for this wreck—  
the reason is the sheikh

The country is in ruin  
The nation is asleep  
Women of the nation, it's  
time for revolution

Daughters of the nation  
how long will you suffer?  
From you head  
tear the chādor<sup>6</sup>—  
your chādor of dishonour

### Notes on the poem and poet/songwriter

This is an old Iranian song by an unknown composer and poet. It was first released in 1927, well before Kashf-e Hijab (unveiling) decree issued by Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1936.

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<sup>4</sup> Probably a reference to Cyrus the Great (c. 600 – 530 BC) the founder of the Achaemenid Empire

<sup>5</sup> Probably a reference to the ancestor of the Sasanian (or Sassanid) Dynasty (ruled 224-651) in Persia

<sup>6</sup> Full-body-length semicircle of fabric open down the front, tossed over the woman's or girl's head and held closed in front



The poetry is attributed to **Mohammad-Ali Amir-Jahed (1896-1977)**, and the composer is probably Morteza NeiDavoud (1900-1990). They may have preferred to remain anonymous for fear of backlash from religious hardliners.

The song was first performed by the legendary singer Qamar-ol-Moluk Vaziri (1905-1959). Qamar was the first woman singer in Iran to perform in public without wearing hijab. Some attribute the first performance of the song to another prominent female singer, Molouk Zarrabi (1907-1999). Several female singers have performed it over the years.

It should be noted that freedom from compulsory hijab is still one of the significant demands of the Iranian women's movement.

**Three *Do-Beytis*<sup>7</sup>**  
**By *Baba Taher Oryan***

I have a heart that heals not  
My wordy speeches help it not  
I throw it to the wind—the wind takes it not  
I throw it into fire—smoke rises not

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The breeze that combs those tresses  
Pleases me more than hyacinths  
When I embrace her in dreams at night,  
My bed smells of roses at dawn

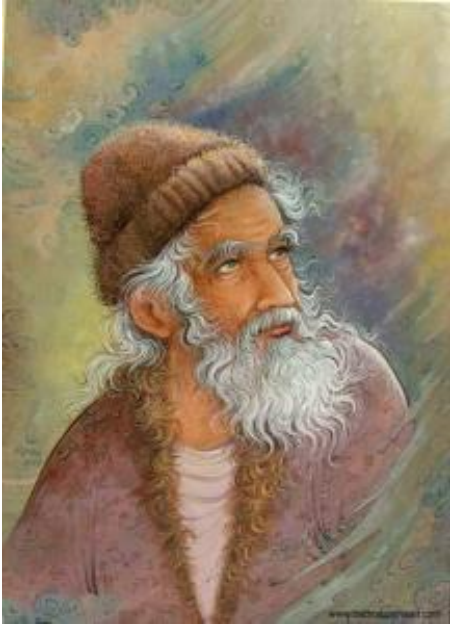
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If love is lover, which is lover?  
And if lover is love, what is love's name?  
Love and lover are inter-twisted  
I know not who is love and who is lover

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<sup>7</sup> Do-beyti: a form of short poem in Persian similar to ruba'i, a quatrain (four lines) with a different meter from ruba'i. The rhyme scheme is aaba.

## About the poet



**Baba Tahir**, or **Baba Taher Oryan** was an eleventh-century Persian dervish from Hamedan, Iran. Not much is known about his life.

**Do-beyti**: a form of short poem in Persian similar to ruba’i, a quatrain (four lines) with a different meter from ruba’i. The rhyme scheme is aaba.

## Translator’s note

For me, translating poetry is more than translating the content. While I try to be “faithful” to content, I try not to change the form if I can help it. Baba Taher’s poems are do-beyti’s: quatrains with a meter different from ruba’i. They are mystical and romantic and are written in the regional dialect of Hamedan, Iran. The register makes them intimate. Hence, despite the fact that they have been written in the eleventh century, they sound surprisingly fresh. I tried to convey it by using a coined word, “inter-twisted,” instead of a more predictable word. I also tried to convey the pun used in one of the do-beyti’s between “del” (heart) and “delbar” (heart-thief or someone your heart is close to, meaning beloved) by replacing the two words with “love” and “lover” respectively. I decided not to go with “heart” and “sweetheart.” I could not preserve the rhyme in these do-beyti’s (aaba), but replaced it with eye-rhyme, identical rhyme, and parallelism at the end of the lines wherever possible.

— *Bānoo Zan, translator*

## About the translator and editor



**Bānoo Zan** is a poet, librettist, translator, teacher, editor, and poetry curator, with more than 200 published poems and poetry-related pieces, as well as three books. *Song of Phoenix: Life and Works of Sylvia Plath*, was reprinted in Iran in 2010. *Songs of Exile*, her first poetry collection, was released in 2016 in Canada by Guernica Editions. It was shortlisted for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award by the League of Canadian Poets in 2017. *Letters to My Father*, her second poetry book, was published in 2017 by Piquant Press in Canada. She is the founder of Shab-e She'r (Poetry Night), Toronto's most diverse poetry reading and open mic series (inception: 2012). It is a brave space that bridges the gap between communities of poets from different ethnicities, nationalities, religions (or lack thereof), ages, genders, sexual orientations, disabilities, poetic styles, voices, and visions.



**Cy Strom** is a professional editor. He holds MA and MPhil degrees from Columbia University in early modern European history and has published in academic and other areas, including a chapter in the dazzling art monograph *Oscar Cahén*. He edits in different genres and sometimes languages and has had a role in developing professional editorial standards and educational materials. A draughtsman and painter, for years he ran a drop-in session at an art studio.

The original Persian text of  
"Remember the Dead Candle"  
By Ali-Akbar Dehkhoda

یادآر ز شمع مرده یادآر  
علی اکبر دهخدا

ای مرغ سحر! چو این شب تار  
بگذاشت ز سر سیاهکاری  
وز نفعه‌ی روح‌بخش اسحار  
رفت از سر خفتگان خماری  
بگشود گره ز زلف زرتار  
محبوبه‌ی نیلگون عمار  
یزدان به کمال شد پدیدار  
و اهریمن زشت‌خو حصار

یادآر ز شمع مرده یادآر

ای مونس یوسف اندرین بند  
تعبیر عیان چو شد ترا خواب  
دل پر ز شمع، لب از شکر خند  
محسود عدو، به کام اصحاب  
رفتی بر یار و خویش و پیوند  
آزادتر از نسیم و مهتاب  
زان کو همه شام با تو یک چند  
در آرزوی وصال احباب

اختر به سحر شمرده یاد آر

چون باغ شود دوباره خرّم  
ای بلبل مستمند مسکین  
وز سنبل و سوری و سپر غم  
آفاق، نگار خانه‌ی چین  
گل سرخ و به رخ عرق ز شبنم  
تو داده ز کف زمام تمکین  
زان نوگل پیشرس که در غم  
ناداده به نار شوق تسکین

از سردی دی فسرده، یاد آر

ای همره تیه پور عمران  
بگذشت چو این سنین معدود  
و آن شاهد نغز بزم عرفان  
بنمود چو وعد خویش مشهود  
وز مذبح زر چو شد به کیوان  
هر صبح شمیم عنبر و عود  
زان کو به گناه قوم نادان  
در حسرت روی ارض مو عود

بر بادیه جان سپرده، یاد آر



چون گشت ز نو زمانه آباد  
ای کودک دوره‌ی طلائی  
وز طاعت بندگان خود شاد  
بگرفت ز سر خدا ، خدائی  
نه رسم ارم ، نه اسم شداد،  
گل بست زبان ژاژخائی  
زان کس که ز نوک تیغ جلاد  
مأخوذ به جرم حق ستائی

پیمانه‌ی وصل خورده یاد آر

The original Persian text of  
"Daughters of Cyrus"  
Attributed to Mohammad-Ali Amir-Jahed

دختران سیروس

دختران سیروس تا به کی در افسوس؟  
زیر دست مردان تا به چند محبوس؟  
در چنین محیطی دختران ساسان  
تا به کی خموشی ای زنان ایران؟  
هیچکس خبر نیست فکر خیر و شر نیست  
ای رجال ایران زن مگر بشر نیست؟  
چند در حجابی؟ تا به کی به خوابی؟  
از وجود شیخ است این چنین خرابی  
مملکت خراب است ملتش به خواب است  
ای زنان ملت، وقت انقلاب است  
دختران ملت، تا به کی به ذلت؟  
برکنید از سر چادر مذلت

The original Persian texts of  
Baba Taher's Do-Beytis

بابا طاهر عریان

دلی دیرم که بهبودش نمی‌بو  
سخنها می‌کرم سودش نمی‌بو  
بیادش می‌دهم نش می‌برد باد  
در آتش می‌نهم دودش نمی‌بو

\*\*\*

نسیمی کز بن آن کاکل آيو  
مرا خوشتر ز بوی سنبل آيو  
چو شو گیرم خیالش را در آغوش  
سحر از بستر م بوی گل آيو

\*\*\*

اگر دل دلبری دلبر کدامی  
وگر دلبر دلی دل را چه نامی  
دل و دلبر بهم آمیته و بنم  
ندانم دل که و دلبر کدامی