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present

Dynamics of Continuity and Creativity: Models of Change in Persian Poetry, Classical and Modern

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Persian poetry, an aesthetic system now over 1100 years old, has gone through a series of changes. Emerging in the steppes of Central Asia through the late-ninth and tenth centuries CE, it was founded initially on an aesthetic of *joie de vivre*, a worldly view that remains unique in the annals of Persian poetry. A courtly milieu and themes of *carpe diem* and a variety of ideas seemingly based on a healthy hedonism gave this early poetry a simple sophistication that remained unparalleled in the works of the generations that followed. Concurrent with the ascendance of Sufi institutions and power structures through the twelfth century, new processes got underway that were marked primarily by a grand interiorization of poetic assets and machinery of the previous aesthetic system. Mystically inclined theosophists and poets gradually redirected many primordial figures of the pre-Islamic Persian past toward new purposes. Novel discursive and ideological shifts were adopted to accommodate their vision and explore other vistas of poeticity. Also, in a grand process of cultural realignment with Europe over the past two centuries, diverse modelling activities began to change Persian poetry's system of signification and communication once again to bring about a new aesthetic that is now thriving in Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia. In order to move beyond the narratives provided by the medieval Tazkerehs and the largely positivist and nationalist paradigms of existing histories of Persian literature, we must begin to take sufficient note of the logic of change in this aesthetic tradition based on new insights into the internal dynamics of the expressive system underlying Persian poetry.

Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak is a professor of Persian Language, Literature and Culture at the University of Maryland and now a visiting professor at the UCLA Department of Near Eastern Languages. He is the author, translator and editor of twenty-three books and over one-hundred academic articles, and has contributed to various leading encyclopedias such as *Britannica* and *Iranica*. His works have been translated into many languages and the Persian translation of one of his most important books, titled *Recasting Persian Poetry* (Persian title: *Tali'eh-ye Tajaddod dar She'r-e Farsi*) is the standard textbook for Ph.D. programs in Persian literature in Iranian and Indian universities.

Light refreshments will be served

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