

An Analysis of Semantic Contrasts in the Poetry of Houshang Ebtehaj and Mohammad Ali Bahmani

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This article examines semantic contrasts in the poetry of Hooshang Ebtehaj and Mohammad Ali Bahmani, analyzing how these two contemporary Iranian poets employ this literary device to create unique thematic effects. Semantic contrasts, a crucial element in Persian poetry, enable poets to convey emotional and philosophical complexities. Ebtehaj uses contrasts such as “love and hatred,” “hope and despair,” and “life and death” to illustrate the instability of human experience, evoking a sense of urgency and impermanence. In contrast, Bahmani explores themes like “love and separation,” “justice and oppression,” and “freedom and confinement” to depict social and inner conflicts, engaging the reader with shared emotional and societal struggles. This study reveals that Ebtehaj’s semantic contrasts are largely philosophical and emotional, arising from a melancholic view of the world, whereas Bahmani’s contrasts serve as a critique of society and an expression of complex human emotions. Ultimately, this paper highlights how semantic contrasts serve as an essential tool for expressing poetic perspectives and adding depth to modern Persian poetry.

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Introduction

Semantic contrast, as a fundamental literary device, plays a pivotal role in Persian poetry by enabling poets to articulate complex emotional, philosophical, and social contradictions. Because the human mind possesses an inherently bipolar structure, these contrasts serve as a primary vehicle for conveying multi-layered experiences. This study addresses the significance of semantic contrasts in the works of two prominent contemporary Persian poets: Houshang Ebtehaj (H.A. Sayeh) and Mohammad Ali Bahmani. The research problem focuses on how these two poets utilize semantic oppositions—Ebtehaj through a more philosophical and existential lens, and Bahmani through a more social and human-centric perspective—to mirror their divergent worldviews. The primary goal of this research is to identify the similarities and differences in their application of this literary technique to enrich poetic depth.

Method

The methodology of this study is descriptive-analytical, grounded in library research. By examining the theoretical foundations of linguistic semantics—specifically focusing on cognitive semantics, structuralism, and lexical relationships—the study investigates the corpus of poems by both poets. Semantic contrasts are categorized into specific types, including graded contrasts, complementary contrasts, negative prefix-based contrasts, reciprocal contrasts, and directional contrasts. By analyzing selected verses, the research extracts and compares the functional roles and rhetorical implications of these oppositions within their respective poetic oeuvres.

Results

The analysis reveals that while both poets leverage semantic contrasts, their application varies significantly in theme and intent:

- **Houshang Ebtehaj:** Employs semantic contrasts—such as “love/hate,” “hope/despair,” “life/death,” and “high/low”—to reflect a melancholic, philosophical attitude toward existence. His

use of contrast emphasizes the instability of life, the inevitability of time, and the existential anxiety of the human condition. His poetry often portrays these contrasts as inherent, inescapable attributes of the human journey.

- **Mohammad Ali Bahmani:** Focuses primarily on social, humanistic, and internal psychological contradictions. Utilizing oppositions like “love/separation,” “justice/oppression,” “freedom/captivity,” and “high/low,” Bahmani bridges the gap between individual emotion and social reality. His contrasts are more intimate and empathetic, often serving as tools for social critique or expressing complex interpersonal relationships.
- **Linguistic Categorization:** The study demonstrates that both poets effectively manipulate various forms of opposition (graded, complementary, directional, etc.) to enhance the musicality and cognitive resonance of their poetry. Ebtehaj’s usage is characterized by a classical depth reminiscent of Hafez, whereas Bahmani’s approach reflects a modern synthesis of contemporary social reality and classical tradition.

Conclusion

Semantic contrasts function as an essential architectural element in the poetry of both Ebtehaj and Bahmani, though they serve different poetic purposes. For Ebtehaj, these contrasts are manifestations of an existential struggle against the flow of time and the impermanence of life, creating a tone of profound, philosophical melancholy. For Bahmani, they are instruments of modern, empathetic expression, used to navigate the frictions of social life and the complexities of human emotion. Ultimately, this research confirms that semantic contrast is not merely a decorative literary device but a crucial cognitive tool that allows these poets to transcend simple descriptions and explore the profound intricacies of the human experience in contemporary Persian literature.