

THE ROLE OF AMUZODA KHALILI IN IRANIAN CHILDREN LITERATURE

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Abstract

This article examines the distinctive educational and artistic features of children's literature through the example of the works of contemporary Iranian writer Faridun Amuzoda Khalili. Special attention is paid to his contribution to the development of Iranian children's prose, his thematic diversity, philosophical depth, and innovative artistic expression. The study focuses on the short story collection *The Journey of the Little Spring*, particularly the story *Beyond the Pine Forests*, which portrays the life, beliefs, and traditions of the Eskimo people. The analysis reveals how the author skillfully combines moral and educational ideas with artistic narration, highlighting themes of compassion, humanity, and resistance to unjust traditions. Through the character of a young Eskimo girl, the story emphasizes universal human values and the importance of empathy, demonstrating Khalili's mastery in embedding ethical lessons within engaging literary form.

Keywords: Children's literature, Iranian storytelling, Faridun Amuzoda Khalili, moral and educational themes, compassion, tradition and humanity, artistic mastery, Eskimo culture.

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that children's literature has several distinctive features that set it apart from general literature. These characteristics primarily manifest in its educational and instructive nature. Children's literature, above all, aims to educate and nurture. However, the ability to embed this education and upbringing within the shell of beautiful artistry requires great mastery from the writer.

One such masterful author is Faridun Amuzoda Khalili, who brought a fresh breath and a new spirit into Iranian children's literature. He elevated children's literature to a new artistic level, expanded its thematic scope, enriched the series of characters, and became one of the most prominent contemporary Iranian storytellers. In our study, we analyze his literary work as a high-standard example of children's literature. His literary career began in the 1980s.

Faridun Amuzoda Khalili was born in 1959 in Semnan Province, Iran. In 1979, he enrolled in the Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science at the University of Tehran. From 1980 onwards, he actively engaged in literary writing. His short story collection *فُریاد کوهستان* ("Faryād-e Kuhistān") "The Cry of the Mountains" (1981) brought him fame. In addition, he is the author of several other works, including:

“هیزم” (Hīzam) “Firewood”
“روزهای امتحان” (Rūzhā-ye Imtehān) “Exam Days”
“سه ماه تعطیلی” (Se Māh-e Ta'tilī) “Three Months of Vacation”
“آن شب که بی مهمان مابود” (Ān Shab ke Bībī Mehmān-e Mā Būd) “The Night Grandma Stayed with Us”
“دو چرخه آقاجان” (Do Charkhe-ye Āqājān) “Father's Bicycle”
“سفر چشمک کوچک” (Safar-e Chashmeh-ye Kūchak) “The Journey of the Little Spring”
“سفر به شهر سلیمان” (Safar be Shahr-e Soleimān) “Journey to the City of Solomon”
“دو خرمای نارس” (Do Khormā-ye Nārās) “Two Unripe Dates”
“آن سوی صنوبرها” (Ān Suy-e Sanubarhā) “Beyond the Pine Forests”

In 2008, for his contributions to literature and culture, he was awarded the "First-Class Order of Art" by the Iranian Ministry of Culture. Additionally, he was recognized as one of the "Top Twenty Writers of the Post-Revolutionary Twenty Years" and received the "Golden Plaque" award. Furthermore, his short story collection “هیزم” (Hīzam) “Firewood” was honored with a special prize by UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund).

In the process of depicting the world and humanity, a writer continuously creates new expressive techniques, introduces profound reflections, and presents various philosophical perspectives. In contemporary Iranian storytelling,

Faridun Amuzoda Khalili is one of the writers who has gained widespread recognition among readers and literary critics for his philosophical insights, thematic breadth, and innovative artistic expression. His short story collection “سفر چشمہ کوچک” (Safar-e Chashmeh-ye Kūchak) “The Journey of the Little Spring” includes stories about and for children and adolescents.

Among Amuzoda Khalili's stories written for young readers, there are also works dedicated to the lives and destinies of people from other regions. One such story, featured in The Journey of the Little Spring, is titled “آن سوی صنوبرها” (Ān Suy-e Sanubarā) “Beyond the Pine Forests”. In addition to its artistic value, the story emphasizes educational and moral themes, with the life of the Eskimos serving as its central subject. Why did the author choose to write about the Eskimos? In our view, Amuzoda Khalili was inspired by the works of American writer Jack London, who depicted strong-willed and resilient people living in harsh, cold climates.

As we know, the Eskimos are an indigenous group living in Alaska, Northern Canada, Greenland, and Russia (Magadan Oblast). Their primary occupations are hunting and fishing. Many Eskimos have preserved their traditional religious beliefs, including animism and shamanism. They believe in benevolent spirits that dwell in nature, as well as malevolent spirits that appear in the form of terrifying creatures. In every Eskimo village, a shaman serves as an intermediary between the human and spirit worlds. Their diet mainly consists of fish, herbs, and seaweed.

The story begins with a conversation about the Eskimo custom of taking an extremely old person to a remote death hut. According to Eskimo beliefs, when an elderly person becomes too old, a devil takes up residence in their body, and they start wandering restlessly around the hut. This, in turn, brings calamities and misfortunes upon the Eskimos in the village.

The theme of compassion takes center stage in the story's narrative. The character of Tom, a young Eskimo girl, becomes the main medium through which the plot gains emotional depth, revealing the protagonist's inner turmoil. Driven by her boundless love for her grandfather, she defies tradition. As Tom follows her grandfather and reaches the death hut, only one thought races through her mind:

“Tom tried to recall the name of the first shaman who had turned the death hut into a tradition, as told by her grandfather. But in her mind, only the name of the brave hunter Opa Kudan kept echoing, while she could never remember the name of that cursed shaman who had started the practice.”

The relationship between humans and their natural environment, as well as the irreplaceable role of nature in human life, has been a timeless subject explored by many writers from different perspectives. The way a writer or character integrates landscapes into a literary work is never accidental—it serves as a means to express ideas and enrich imagery. As a result, the role of nature intensifies and reinforces the protagonist's state of mind, emotions, and inner conflicts. The significance of landscapes in conveying the theme and the author's intentions is immense. In many cases, it is difficult to imagine expressing or depicting these elements through any other means. In Beyond the Pine Forests, the author assigns the task of reflecting the characters' emotions to nature itself. It is as if simple words are inadequate to capture the complexity of their inner experiences.

The author constantly seeks new ways to make landscape descriptions serve the theme and creative intent of the story. Whether these descriptions are presented from the author's perspective or through the protagonist's eyes, whether they appear at the beginning or end of an event—all of this is closely tied to the author's purpose, goals, national spirit, and various other elements. The granddaughter's emotional state is revealed through the depiction of nature, allowing the landscape to naturally blend into the narrative. Through these descriptions, the author conveys the deep spiritual connection between the old man and his granddaughter. The writer skillfully uses the landscape to reveal the inner world and psychological state of the story's characters. In events tied to the protagonist, nature is not just a backdrop; its details are intricately linked to the protagonist's emotions and depicted with delicate artistic strokes, enhancing the story's impact. In literature, the association of human emotions with the seasons is not new: spring symbolizes reunion, renewal, and rebirth; winter represents old age and purity; autumn conveys separation, melancholy, and emotional decline; while summer signifies abundance and fulfillment. A. Khalili, while describing the setting of the story, also highlights the unique beauty of winter. By portraying the snow-covered landscape, he mirrors the protagonist's thoughts, reflections, and mood. Human emotions and nature's scenery harmoniously intertwine:

“Snow had fallen throughout the night. But as dawn broke, as if by some miracle, the snowfall ceased, and the polar sun slowly rose, casting its pale green light, painting the vast white and transparent plains in a magical shade of green and turquoise.

A strange sound jolted the girl awake, pulling her outside the hut. The enchanted glow of the sun had vanished, replaced by the reddish-yellow light of the polar morning illuminating the endless plains. The hut was empty. Overcome with panic, she rushed outside.”

In the above passage, the beauty of the polar sunrise is vividly depicted, but for the granddaughter, who is plunged into despair by the departure of her grandfather, this beautiful morning holds no value.

In works that aim to reveal the inner world and thoughts of characters, it is natural for the landscape to carry deep meaning and significance. A. Khalili pays great attention to using landscapes as a means of conveying the emotions and inner states of his characters. The relationship between the landscape and the protagonist becomes more intertwined. By incorporating specific natural elements and objects that reflect particular concepts, the writer emphasizes the national spirit and the uniqueness of the character's thought processes. This brings us to the question of why the author named the story “Beyond the Pine Forest”. The symbol of the pine tree is interpreted differently in various cultures. For example, in Japan and China, the pine tree symbolizes eternity, longevity, and vitality because it retains its needles even during the coldest winters. In East Asia, the pine is known as the “tree of life” because it remains green and beautiful, no matter how many years it endures. The author merges these symbolic meanings to

reflect the fate of the main character, the grandfather, by naming the story “Beyond the Pine Forest.” Through the character of the grandfather, Khalili creates the image of an old, weary man who, despite his frailty, remains faithful to his principles, a master of his craft, and a skilled hunter—a true symbol of the Eskimo spirit.

In the story, the author reflects the grandfather's emotional struggles and thoughts as he faces his journey to the death hut. He knows that one day he will have to go there, accept death, but he cannot predict when. This moment of realization comes from his granddaughter, who doesn't fully understand the meaning of death. Throughout the story, the protagonist frequently drifts into thoughts and memories. He expresses his emotions and deep reflections in the form of monologues. As the reader listens to his words, they too become immersed in the character's thoughts, and a sense of empathy and sympathy for the old man arises. The grandfather, while explaining the concept of the death hut to his granddaughter, recalls the following memory:

“It was about fifty or sixty years ago. One night, I put out the fire in my old father's death hut, and we set off together... After traveling for half a day, my father could no longer walk. I carried him on my shoulders. We reached the place we needed to go before the polar star set.”

The story is written in a narrative style where the old grandfather tells his granddaughter Tom about the time when he had to take his father to the death hut. This part of the story is framed in a storytelling style within the narrative.

The author uses rich and distinctive language, making extensive use of similes in the story “Beyond the Pine Forest.” For instance, comparisons such as “the beaver's son stepping quickly with his head lowered like a brown bear,” “the old grandfather limping away from the village like a wounded old moose,” “the mother sleeping like animals in winter,” “Tom moving across the earth like a polar fox,” and “a dog following the grandfather inside” are prominent. These animal-related comparisons reflect the environment the Eskimos live in, and they help to portray the thinking patterns of the Eskimos. In the story, the character's emotional state is also compared to nature:

“The sound of the river ice breaking in the spring sun was broken,” Tom thought. But his grandfather said, “It's a broken sound, like the bones of an old seal after the Eskimo hunter's club strikes it.”

The story presents a true-to-life portrayal of Eskimo characteristics, pride, traditions, rituals, and beliefs. For example, the old man raising his hands to the sky, directing the palms toward the polar star as a sign of respect, the hunters' prayer before a hunt, and their view of hunting as sacred and deserving of respect all reflect the Eskimos' deep beliefs. Other details, such as throwing dry reindeer droppings into the fire, ice huts, Eskimo foods (frozen fish, fish soup), the thick furs they wear, their sleep under fur blankets, the travel bags made of reindeer skin, and boots made from seal skin, all serve to introduce the harsh, challenging nature of the North and the Eskimos' way of life.

The story features not only the main characters, the grandfather and granddaughter, but also Tom's parents, his younger brother, and other figures like the Beaver's son. The author uses different methods to mark time in the narrative. Time is often defined by the natural world, as seen in expressions such as “when the sun sets,” “at night,” “in the morning after the sun rises,” and so on.

In literature, human psychological states are revealed through dialogues, debates, and monologues. Writers and poets of every era use these methods to reveal the emotional depth of their characters, portraying their psychological states through discussions, arguments, and contrasting conversations. In doing so, the writer relies on linguistic mastery, because literature's mission is to uncover the hidden corners of the human heart and soul, and artistic language is an inseparable part of the writer's skill. Through language, the writer analyzes the complex, distinctive characteristics of characters, as well as how the environment and circumstances influence their psyche.

In the story “Beyond the Pine Forest,” the dialogue, particularly the monologues and conversations, serves as a crucial element for conveying the story's theme. For example, pay attention to the dialogue between the old man and his granddaughter about hunting and its significance in the life of the Eskimos:

“—Do you know, Tom, hunting, no matter what, is always something sacred and deserving of respect for a true Eskimo. You must always preserve its honor. The animals of the Eskimos are like our brothers and sisters. That is why, after they die, their spirits guard our huts. Never cause suffering to any hunted animal, Tom. Remember that...”

“—Grandfather, why don't you come hunting with me today?” “Ah, my dear, I wish I could go! Even if I had to hobble along, I would follow your tracks.”

“—It's alright, grandfather. Don't worry. I'll hunt the animal you want and bring it to you.”

“—Yes, Tom, go ahead. And even if you return empty-handed, don't lose hope, Tom. My father always used to say: 'No animal will ever fall into the trap of a hungry hunter.' That is true... Do you understand, Tom?”

In this dialogue, the character's emotions gradually shift, and the old man's words transform into a monologue. It's as if the old man is talking to himself, and the inner conflict of the character is conveyed through his thoughts.

The writer deeply explores the character's actions and psychological changes. In the debates and discussions, the author's speech plays a dominant role, as the writer adjusts the characters' expressions and reactions according to the situation and setting, highlighting the nuances of each event. This shift from dialogue to monologue allows the writer to present the character's internal struggles and emotions. In this way, the story becomes more vivid and real, capturing not only the external events but also the inner worlds of the characters. The careful use of language allows the reader to connect emotionally with the characters, making the narrative more engaging.

A. Khalili's mastery of storytelling is evident in his ability to harmonize the psychological states of the characters with their portraits. Through vivid descriptions such as “astonished glances,” “his chest swelling, and lips turning blue,” or “all the world's sorrows seem to have transformed into a huge chunk of ice, choking him,” the author conveys the internal struggles of the characters through external physical signs. The skillful choice of words in the monologues further enhances the emotional depth of the characters. Each character's psychological state is reflected in their internal monologues, which take various forms depending on the context:

Monologue - Memory

Monologue - Discussion

Monologue - Reflection

In “Beyond the Pine Forest,” the prominent types of monologues are memory and reflection. The old man’s monologues are filled with memories, such as the first time he went hunting, chasing the herd of caribou, or leaping over ice floes on the sea, even racing faster than the northern winds on a long journey. These memories reveal the depth of the old man’s experiences. On the other hand, the young girl, Tom, exhibits monologues that reflect her thoughts and reasoning, like this passage:

“At least, the rabbit should come out as soon as the sun sets,” she thought. “If it doesn’t, maybe it’ll come out when it gets dark. I can wait until then. The cold hasn’t made my body stiff yet. I can still sit here, watching the rabbit’s burrow. I can wait, but I don’t know about you, rabbit!”

In these inner musings, the difference between the old man’s memory-laden monologue and Tom’s reflective monologue is clear. Khaliliy uses these varying forms of monologues to capture the essence of each character’s thought process and emotional state. Furthermore, Khaliliy masterfully taps into the “key” to understanding Eskimo life and language: the internal monologue of the characters. Through the characters’ inner dialogues, the writer reveals their innermost feelings, their connection to the environment, and their worldview. The internal monologue allows the author to step inside the minds of the characters, bringing out their most intimate thoughts. The monologue of the old man illustrates this well:

“Undoubtedly, they’ve come to check on my warmth or to remind me, like some almost-dead old man, that someone needs to prepare food for me. But only when I eat the game I’ve hunted do I truly enjoy life. A girl eating hunted meat will never taste the same as meat from a hunted animal. That meat doesn’t sink into my flesh or my blood. In such moments, it feels as if someone is laughing at me.” This passage shows how the writer’s voice intertwines with the character’s voice, reflecting the old man’s philosophy of hunting and the personal satisfaction he gains from it. The inner conflict of the character—his thoughts, reflections, and memories—becomes central to understanding his actions and motivations, making Khaliliy’s storytelling not just a description of events but an exploration of the psychological and emotional landscapes of his characters. “But I won’t allow children, especially a little girl, to laugh at us old people... Eskimo children must learn to respect their elders, even when they are far from the village and passing away in solitude...”

The language of this internal monologue is very clear and sharply expresses the truth of life. It seems as though the author is speaking in harmony with the old man’s inner experiences. A. Khaliliy has managed to express the old man’s individual psychological profile through a distinctive language, and by typifying his condition through his speech, the character becomes believable. Indeed, internal speech is the mirror of a character’s soul. Through this mirror, the reader can see the old man’s “heart’s dialectic” and feel his pain.

In the examples above, both the old man and the granddaughter are speaking internally, hiding their feelings from others. The author’s speech joins with theirs, amplifying the characters’ inner emotions.

In conclusion, A. Khaliliy has skillfully depicted the life, customs, traditions, and religious beliefs of the people living in the distant northern lands, outside of Iran, for children and adolescents.

The resolution of the story Beyond the Pine Forest ends with the old man and his granddaughter returning to their village. The resistance of the younger generation to traditions and customs that have been preserved for centuries does not go unanswered. Tom’s father, that is, the old man’s son, brings him back home. In general, in many of A. Khaliliy’s stories, tragic events lead to hopeful, optimistic endings.

In summary, it can be said that A. Khaliliy is the first writer in Persian literature to tell a story about the life of Eskimos. Before him, no other writer had explored this theme. In this very interesting story, written for children and adolescents, the author depicts the reality of life in distant lands through a humanitarian perspective. This story reflects the versatility of the writer’s creativity.

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