



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF ARTS & SCIENCE

Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies

The Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies
University of Toronto
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Toronto, Ontario Canada M5S 1C1

Dear Members of the Board Committee,

My name is Abolfazl Moshiri, and I am applying for the position of Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies. I received my PhD in November 2021 from the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, University of Toronto. My specialization is Persian literature and culture with a focus on mystical and esoteric literature of the Persianate world.

For the past twenty years, I have studied the literature, culture, history, and politics of Iran and the Persianate world. For my BA and first MA, I researched modern Iran and Central Asia, and for my second MA and PhD, I studied the medieval Persianate world. While I continue to gain breadth in my understanding of the Iranian cosmopolis, my doctoral research focused on Persian mystical literature and its multifaceted manifestations in various classical sources of the Persianate world from the tenth to sixteenth century. My PhD dissertation, entitled “The Devil’s Advocates: The Exoneration of Iblīs in Persian Mysticism,” explores the portrayal of Satan in the medieval literary sources of the Persianate world.

In the field of classical Persian literature, I have been formally trained in and have mastery of the Persian prosodical system (*‘ilm-i ‘arūz*) as well as rhetorical/stylistic devices (*ṣanāyi ‘-i adabī*). These are indispensable pedagogical tools for studying Persian literature, especially poetry, which traditionally has been considered to be of greater cultural prestige than prose; moreover, classical prose texts—mystical, historical, ethical, etc.—regularly have verses of poetry embedded in them, such being the cultural value afforded to poetry.

Persian is my native language, and reading classical Persian, alongside classical Arabic, Pahlavi/Middle Persian, and Tajiki in Cyrillic and Ottoman Turkish, has been part of my foundational academic training. In the past twelve years, I have worked with a wide range of medieval Persian and Ottoman manuscripts, lithographs, and archival materials.

From November 2022 to August 2023, I was a research associate with the Women Poets Iranica project, and from September 2023 to August 2024, I was a postdoc research fellow at the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations. The focus of my research during these times was investigating the biographies and poetry of women poets in the Iranian world from the 10th to the 21st century.

In applying for the postdoctoral position at the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies, I seek to contribute my knowledge and expertise as a researcher of poetry of Iranian Women from the classical period to contemporary times. To date, I have identified over fifteen hundred female poets whose works have significantly contributed to the Persian literary tradition over the past millennia. My objective is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the biographies and poetic works of approximately two hundred of these women.

Broadly, my focus will encompass the diverse array of poets who have written in Persian, as well as other Iranian languages, across various regions, including Iran, Anatolia, Central Asia, South Asia, the Caucasus, and the diasporic communities. Some of these women will not only include household names such as Mahastī Ganjavī (fl. 6th /12th Century) and Jahān Malīk Khatūn (d. c. 792/1392), as well as some of the famous poets of Mughal court such as Zeb al-Nisā (d. 1114/1702) but also lesser-known poets such as Mihrī Hiravī (fl. 9th/15th Century) and Bībī Hayātī (fl. 12th/18th) Century. My specific focus will be on some of the women poets of Anatolia of 9th–13th/15th–19th Century, some of whom like Laylā Hanim (d. 1240/1825), belonged to the Mevlevi Sufi order, and wrote their poetry both in Persian and Ottoman.

This research aims to illuminate their contributions and the contexts in which they operated, particularly in literary circles that have historically been dominated by male figures. By documenting their poetic endeavours and contextualizing their work within their respective literary societies, I intend to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role and impact of female poets in Iranian literature. This study will not only highlight their artistic achievements but also explore the socio-cultural dynamics that shaped their creative expressions and contributions.

Thank you, and sincerely,

Abolfazl Moshiri