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THE CHAINS OF LIBERATION AS SEEN THROUGH THE LENS OF SADEQ CHUBAK'S STORY "THE BABOON WHOSE BUFFOON WAS DEAD"

Abstract. This article proposes an examination of the theme of alienation and freedom in Sadeq Chubak's short story "The Baboon Whose Buffoon Was Dead". Through the character of Makhmal, a domesticated baboon bound to his deceased master, Chubak constructs an allegory that explores the existential and social dimensions of alienation within the context of Iran's rapid modernization. Using Jaeggi's philosophical concept of alienation as powerlessness and internal division, alongside Seeman's social-psychological model, the study investigates how Makhmal's symbolic struggle with the death of his master reflects broader issues of autonomy, subjugation, and existential anxiety. The analysis reveals how Makhmal's attempts at liberation are restrained by existential fears and the remnants of oppressive societal chains. The study contributes to existential discourse by connecting the narrative's themes to broader socio-political dynamics, positioning Chubak's work as a reflection of alienation in transitional societies like Iran.

Keywords: Alienation, Freedom, Social Constraints, Allegory, Sadeq Chubak

1. Introduction

1.1. Statement of the Problem

"Like the statue of Glaucus, which time, sea, and storms had so disfigured that it less resembled a God than a ferocious Beast, the human soul, the human soul altered in the lap of society by a thousand forever recurring causes, by the acquisition of a mass of knowledge and errors, by the changes that have taken place in the constitution of Bodies, and by the continual

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impact of the passions, has, so to speak, changed in appearance, to the point of being almost unrecognizable.” (Rousseau 1997: 124)

This is how Rousseau begins his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality among Men*. The disfigurement Rousseau speaks of here is the deformation of human beings by society, a concept masterfully captured by Sadeq Chubak in his narratives, thereby establishing a nuanced convergence of philosophy, sociology, psychology, and literature.

In Iranian literature, few narratives resonate as deeply with the complexities of the human condition as Sadeq Chubak’s short stories. The present article aims to explore the philosophical underpinnings embedded in Chubak’s narrative, seeking to explore and understand the complex relationship between two contrasting concepts, freedom and alienation, as portrayed in his masterful storytelling of *The Baboon Whose Buffon Was Dead*. Renowned for his deep understanding of the complexities of existence, Chubak incorporates ideas and themes related to existentialism in this short story, which often explores fundamental questions about human existence, freedom, purpose, and isolation.

The theme of alienation is one of the foremost subjects in the exploration of human understanding, extensively examined across various fields of humanities, including philosophy, sociology, and psychology. From a sociological perspective, individuals experience alienation either in relation to themselves or in relation to the unfamiliar societal framework. In literary texts, this theme has also captured the attention of authors to such an extent that it has become a central motif of modernity. Contemporary writers worldwide often depict their protagonists, or more precisely, their anti-heroes, as embodiments of alienation. Sadeq Chubak (1916-1998) is among the contemporary Iranian writers who have portrayed the corruption and decline of the modern world. His works emphasize the darker and more somber aspects of life, such as suffering, despair, alienation, and hopelessness, while highlighting the struggles individuals face within a morally corrupt and deteriorating society. The characters of Chubak’s stories are individuals who perpetually remain bound and captive, never able to contemplate liberation or escape their constraining circumstances.

In this research, I have adopted a descriptive-analytical approach to explore the reflections of alienation as embodied by Makhmal, the protagonist of *Antari ke lutiash morde bud (The Baboon Whose Buffon Was Dead)*.

2. Discussion

2.1. Biography

Sadeq Chubak, born on July 4, 1916, in Bushehr, emerged into the world of literature following a period of illness during his childhood, prompting his family to migrate

to Shiraz for medical treatment. He studied in Bushehr, then Shiraz, and at the American College in Tehran. Choosing to diverge from his father's commercial pursuits, Sadeq opted for a literary path, leading his employment in the Ministry of Culture. Chubak undertook journeys to England, the USSR, and the United States. He was also engaged in the translation of works by Edgar Allan Poe to Persian, alongside other stories like *Pinocchio*. After the World War II, Sadeq Chubak dedicated several years to teaching English in various language institutes and schools. He also served as a translator at the Information Department of the British Embassy in Tehran for a period of two years. In 1949, he was employed by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, later continuing his tenure with the National Iranian Oil Company after the nationalization of oil industries in 1951. His role evolved into that of the head librarian, a position he held until his retirement in 1974. During the initial years of his retirement, Chubak spent time in England before relocating to the United States in 1979. He settled in El Cerrito, near Berkeley, California, where he lived until the end of his life (Ghanoonparvar 2009²).

In 1945, he published his first collection of stories titled *Kheyime Shab Bazi (Puppet Show)*. Ghanoonparvar notes that Chubak's skill in describing details, landscapes, character development, and their relationships is worth mentioning in these narratives (Ghanoonparvar 2005: 14). This might be the reason why the collection quickly gained popularity and attracted many admirers. However, due to one of the stories, it was prohibited from publication for ten years. In 1950, Chubak published his second collection of stories, titled *Antari ke lutiash morde bud (The Baboon Whose Buffon Was Dead)*. The stories within this book also attained acclaim, contributing to his recognition as a prominent literary figure.

What brought Sadeq Chubak to prominence was the publication of his novels, particularly *Tangsir (Tangsir)* and *Sang-e Sabur (The Patient Stone)*. *Tangsir* has been translated into eighteen languages worldwide, and in 1973, Amir Naderi adapted the novel into a film of the same title. Notable actors such as Behrouz Vossoughi, Parviz Fanizadeh, and Mahmoud Bahrami featured in this cinematic adaptation, which was released in 1974.

While his novels have undergone extensive examination in the Western literary sphere, his short stories remain comparatively less acknowledged, attracting limited scholarly investigation. However, Sadeq Chubak's short stories are noteworthy contributions to modern literature. His storytelling effectively captures the unique linguistic and cultural characteristics of southern Iran, using everyday, informal speech to make his characters and dialogue feel authentic and relatable. His exceptional precision and depth in describing details, coupled with the accurate and vivid representation of reality, has led scholars to define his work as one of exaggerated or extreme realism. His writing instrument served

² Article only available on the internet: Mohammad Reza Ghanoonparvar, "Chubak, Sadeq", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online edition, 2009, available at [Chubak, Sadeq](#) (accessed on 12 October 2023).

as a conduit for the voices of the impoverished and marginalized segments of society, leading many to categorize his works within the framework of naturalism. However, some critics have also condemned what they describe as the “pestilential naturalism” present in his works (Parham 1957: 46). Others, as Dastqeyb puts it, extended their critique by asserting that he failed to accurately depict Iranian society (Dastqeyb 1973: 10).

2.2. Historical overview of the theory of alienation

The concept of alienation has evolved throughout history, developing in tandem with shifting social, economic, and philosophical contexts. In the following lines, we will trace the evolution of thought surrounding alienation, pointing out the contributions of prominent scholars who have engaged with its complex dimensions. Although the concept of “alienation” holds a distinct position within contemporary life studies and research, its precise meaning remains somewhat ambiguous.

In the 18th century, Rousseau published influential works on the theme of alienation. Around the start of the 19th century, Hegel used German terms in partially different senses for this concept, such as *Entäußerung*, signifying a form of separation and alienation from oneself within the context of Christian theology and Lutheran tradition. This very term later was substituted by *Entfremdung* or social alienation in the works of Feuerbach and Marx. The notion also found a different pathway into existentialism through thinkers like Kierkegaard, as reflected in existentialist literary-philosophical works such as Camus’s *The Stranger* (Lukács 2012: 20).

Especially through Marx’s perspective, the concept of alienation became detached from its metaphysical undertones and took a more distinct form within this world. It signified that self-alienation was not merely an intrinsic part of human essence within the world, but rather its roots were embedded in the historical sphere, specifically within the realm of “estranged labor”. Thus, with Marx, the concept of alienation evolved from cognitive essence into a philosophical-societal understanding. In this context, self-alienation was perceived as a consequence of the ever-increasing labor estrangement, the mechanization of tasks, and the increasing human dependence on objects (Musto 2021: 3-10). Gradually, this notion of alienation distanced itself from its philosophical roots and approached the concept of human objectification in the works of modern thinkers like Lukács – a concept where humans are reduced to instruments and transformed into objects (Lukács 2012: 19-21). In the 20th century, following World War II and the emergence of totalitarian fascist and communist regimes, along with the mass destruction of lives and the unrestrained control of governments over individuals’ destinies, the concept of alienation regained serious consideration

in philosophical-societal discourse. Intellectuals such as Marcuse, Eric Fromm, C. Wright Mills, and others regarded it as a testament to human decline in the 20th century.

In the context of modernism, alienation refers to the sense of estrangement, detachment, or disconnection that individuals can experience from themselves, their society, and the world around them as a result of the rapid societal changes brought about by modernization during the 19th and 20th centuries. The French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1976) described alienation as the “perceived lack of socially approved means and norms to guide one’s behavior for the purpose of achieving culturally prescribed goals”, proposing the concept of *anomie* in this regard. He writes that when individuals find themselves in a normless state within society, they lack the parameters to hold on to and, as a result, cannot situate themselves within that society, leading to social drift and isolation (Durkheim 1976, apud Sarfraz 1997: 50).

In my research, in defining alienation, I chose Jaeggi’s explanation, who describes it as “indifference and internal division, [...] powerlessness and relationlessness with respect to oneself and to a world experienced as indifferent and alien. Alienation is the inability to establish a relation to other human beings, to things, to social institutions...” (Jaeggi 2014: 3). I also followed Seeman’s social-psychological point of view. He proposes five main types of alienation that represent different aspects of an individual’s relationship with their social environment and can contribute to feelings of alienation, which are as follows:

1. *Powerlessness* – When an individual perceives they cannot determine their fate in the society in which they live, or when they are unable to control their actions, behaviors, and decisions that affect them.
2. *Meaninglessness* – A state in which an individual can no longer perceive the organizational functions of the social system to which they belong and, consequently, cannot predict the outcome of their actions. Individuals experiencing this dimension feel that their life lacks purpose or significance.
3. *Normlessness* – A condition where ethical norms, as regulators of behavior and social relationships, become unstable, endangering the cohesion of society. This dimension refers to an individual’s perception of not fitting into the social norms and values of their society, and, to attain a desired outcome, they might have to act in ways that are not accepted or approved by the larger social context.
4. *Isolation* – A state in which an individual can no longer identify themselves with the societal goals of the community in which they live. In other words, the person does not feel a mental connection to their community and sees themselves as alone.

5. *Self-estrangement* – When an individual brings about their own realization, and if they do not experience satisfaction within themselves, they feel a sense of self-estrangement. This dimension pertains to a sense of detachment from one's own identity, values, or sense of self (Seeman 1959: 784-91).

2.3. Historical and political context

Before delving into the central theme of this research, we find it essential to draw on the events that led to the modernization of Iran and discuss the dynamics of this modernization process. When we refer to modernization in the context of Iran, does modernization align with the Western understanding of it, or did the process of modernization in Iran develop differently? Moreover, if it is indeed different, what implications does this distinct modernization hold for the individuals? Such clarifications serve to provide a deeper understanding of the contextual backdrop within which the works of Sadeq Chubak were composed, as well as the potential challenges that his characters may have been struggling with.

Consequently, it is imperative to conduct a brief overview of the phenomenon that transpired together with modernization, specifically the emergence of the *intelligentsia* and the *literati* group – a group to which Sadeq Chubak also belongs. Such an inquiry is deemed necessary to gain a better understanding of the various changes that occurred alongside modernization and their interplay with the intellectual and literary dimensions of Iranian society.

The primary actual encounter of Iranians with manifestations of the modern experiences of the early 20th century, including technology and secularization, started with the Constitutional Revolution, which occurred between the years 1905-1907. The crowning achievement of this revolutionary era was the establishment of Iran's first parliament in 1907. As Abrahamian remarks, Iran's Constitutional Revolution – like many other revolutions – began with great expectations but foundered eventually in a deep sea of disillusionment. It promised the “dawn of a new era”, the “gateway to a bright future”, and the “reawakening of an ancient civilization”. It produced, however, an era of strife that brought the country close to disintegration (Abrahamian 2018: 34).

In other words, the Constitutional Revolution was meant to lead toward a comprehensive modernization of the nation by replacing traditional governance methods with a more democratic framework. However, the formation of the parliament did not trigger a seamless transition towards democratic governance and liberal rule in the country since the Shah persisted in upholding an arbitrary system of governance. This approach enabled him to wield considerable power and enforce abrupt modernization measures according to his own discretion,

rather than adhering to the gradual and participatory evolution that democratic ideals would suggest. In addition to the prominent influence of foreign intervention that considerably constrained Iran's sovereignty during the period subsequent to the Constitutional Revolution, another factor contributing to the limited efficacy of the revolution was related to the fact that the revolutionary movement itself was not entirely cohesive. Different groups and factions had varying visions for the future of Iran. Some wanted a more radical transformation of society, while the more conservative or traditional ones, such as some religious leaders and landowning elites, were concerned about losing their influence, or that the Western culture would prevail in Iran. Moreover, some reforms fell short of addressing the deep-seated socioeconomic problems faced by the majority of Iranians, such as poverty, land inequality, and lack of modern education. Katouzian thus states that both the "systemic arbitrariness (*estebdad*) and the resulting individual examples of injustice (*zolm*) create an acute sense of fear and insecurity, mistrust, disbelief, frustration, resentment and alienation" (Katouzian 2003: 261).

Given the previously stated, as Najafibabanazar claims in her doctoral thesis, "modernization happened in a defective manner in Iran, since it did not include the individual in a seemingly democratic progressive shift; thus creating and enforcing a sense of dislocation and alienation of the individual from the state" (Najafibabanazar 2018: 43). Therefore, a forceful and speedy modernization left many alienating effects on individuals, in a society that was in a transitory phase.

While the impact of the Constitutional Revolution was limited, the revolution did bring about certain positive changes as a response to "social malices" (Dabashi 1985: 171), such as the formation of *intelligentsia*, a "modern bourgeois phenomenon", a "self-conscious social group concerned with ideological solutions to real or perceived social problems" (Dabashi 1985: 151) that "saw itself as the seer/knower/redeemer, destined to deliver the masses from the bonds of poverty, ignorance, and tyranny" (Dabashi 1985: 155). As Dabashi mentions, their *raison d'être* was "the trinity of liberty, equality, and fraternity – located within the larger trinity of democracy, rationality, and anti-imperialism" (Dabashi 1985: 157).

Within *intelligentsia*, a distinct group of intellectuals known as the *literati* assumed a significant role in shaping the socio-political landscape of the nation, thus they became "the most sensitive and vocal segment of the *intelligentsia*" (Dabashi 1985:170). This group comprised writers, poets, scholars, and artists who utilized their literary and creative endeavors to express political ideas, advocate for social change, and contribute to the broader discourse surrounding constitutionalism and modernization. One of the subgroups of the Persian *literati* emerged from "minds and souls unperforated by total political commitment" (Dabashi 1985: 172). Their literature was "born out of the struggle of the nation for a better life" (Shaki 1956) and Sadeq Chubak was an integral component of this movement.

According to Ghanoonparvar, Chubak's stories "are marked by the author's choice of characters from among the lowest strata of society, his meticulous reproduction of colloquial Persian, and his accurate description of the scenes, actions, and behavior of characters" (Ghanoonparvar 2009: no page number). Many of his fictional works are set in the southern provinces, in particular in the Persian Gulf region. Drawing frequently on childhood memories and experiences, Chubak's fictions leave little room for the joyous aspects of life in the region, and instead, are inhabited by displaced and outcast persons who, because of an accident of history and geography, are trapped in the dead-end of tradition, and are gripped by dire need and caught in the struggle for existence (Ghanoonparvar 2009, Mostaghel 1979) Although Chubak in his narratives does not explicitly criticize society and its behaviors, and "there is no moralizing voice to interpret what we see" (Mostaghel 1979: 228), his characters appear to be more like archetypes of individuals whose identities have been taken away alongside with their alienation and we only know and perceive only what we read in the short stories written by Chubak.

For example, he presents us with an incident from the characters' lives, as is the case with Morad, the protagonist in the story *Flowers of Flesh*, where Chubak depicts the solitary figure of Morad, a seemingly adrift young opium addict, captured in a poignant moment that briefly disrupts his existence amidst the bustling street. Or a snippet from the life story of one of the characters. This snippet usually showcases the individual at the most challenging juncture of their life, the point of complete estrangement. Such is the instance of Seyyed Hassan Khan, the protagonist of the story *A Man in a Cage*, who experiences fleeting moments of happiness solely during slumber, when smoking opium, or when around his dog, Rasu. However, as the mating season approaches and Seyyed Hassan Khan lets in one of the street dogs, that means he will remain all alone, he becomes entirely self-alienated, and ultimately, we find his crouched-up corpse behind the garden gate, with Rasu and the stray dog mating shamelessly nearby. But Chubak's characters are not only human beings. In the story *The Baboon Whose Buffoon was Dead*, "Chubak addresses such concepts as freedom and the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed from the perspective of a domesticated primate" (Ghanoonparvar 2009: no page number), and, as Mostaghel asserts, "in between the human and the animal worlds, Makhmal symbolizes all of Chubak's characters. Some are better off materially than others, but none is free. All are bound by the chains of an often-cruel master-society" (Mostaghel 1979: 229).

All these characters show those who, when are estranged from what is real, can no longer be themselves. They are alienated from themselves and society.

2.4. *Literary Analysis*

For most of Chubak's characters, estrangement is an inevitable fate. The short story *The Baboon Whose Buffoon Was Dead*, in which the protagonist, a monkey named Makhmal, faces solitude, anguish, fear, and coercion following the death of his master, Jahan, provides a narrative that unfolds psychological and emotional tensions. The storyline unfolds as Makhmal awakens one morning to the lifeless state of his master. Despite thoroughly examining the lifeless body and the surrounding environment, Makhmal is unable to identify any indications of life: "The skin of the buffoon's face remained perfectly still. The eyes were open, rolled upward, showing their whites. The face was curiously stiff" (Chubak 2011: no page number³). Consequently, Makhmal becomes ensnared in mental and emotional distress. The demise of his master is presented as a transformative event, symbolizing Makhmal's liberation from a constrained existence. But to what extent can this liberation be understood as freedom? Makhmal now confronts the challenge of navigating this newfound state and experiences uncertainty about how to cope with and make sense of this significant and unfamiliar aspect of his existence. The juxtaposition of liberation and uncertainty adds complexity to Makhmal's emotional and psychological state in the aftermath of the discovery. Of course, one can think that he was now able to shape his life in accordance with his own choices, but, when the identity fails to appear, the estrangement makes its way. Realizing that his master was dead, that "he escaped from his master" and he was "off to a new world, on his own", "all at once an ache of loneliness seized his vitals as he realized that in all that wide, vacant plain he was entirely alone", then he suddenly felt joy and he "felt he was the victor at last", "yet the pattern of a lifetime was stubborn. The memory of thrashings, curses, kicks dealt out by his master in fits of depression could not be erased by Makhmal's recognition that his master now could have no effect on him" because:

"He was forever anticipating the raps of his master's cane on his head, the cruel pull of the collar around his neck, the kick in the belly. A glance from his master paralyzed him with fright, for he was more afraid of Jahan than of anyone. His life was one of a continual state of terror, and his terror was matched only by the loathing and disgust he felt for all mankind and for his master in particular" (Chubak 2011).

³ The English translation of the narrative *Antari ke Lutiash Morde Bud* was found in the online edition of the anthology *Tablet & Pen: Literary Landscapes from the Modern Middle East* (a *Words Without Borders* anthology), edited by Reza Aslan and translated by Paul Avery. However, the page numbers were not provided. This story appears in Part 2, Section VII.

And then, a relentless fear reemerges within Makhmal's psyche. In the absence of Jahan, the protagonist is confronted with a profound existential dilemma: "Without his buffoon, he was not complete". But as Makhmal acknowledges that now only the chain is the one that keeps him captive, he starts exploring it with loathing and astonishment. As he examines the chain, he realizes that it was "rough, heavy, stained with rust", mirroring his existence during the period of captivity under his master. The moment when Makhmal decides to uproot the stake serves a powerful existential metaphor: "At last he reached the other end, the end that was not a part of himself, but another, a hostile world". Upon reaching "the other end", he initiates his transformative journey toward liberation, a journey previously unknown to him, "not part of himself" until that moment. However, the existence of a "hostile world" suggests that his liberation may be more complex than a simple physical act, and anticipates the struggles that the baboon will be faced with. Fear is a recurrent image within the storyline. It pervades the entire narrative, as it is exemplified in the narrator's exposition of the motivations that led Makhmal to refrain from liberating himself from the chains while his master was still alive: "Yet, in reality, only Makhmal's habitual fear had kept him from pulling it free in the past". But eventually, Makhmal manages to free himself and:

"What a marvelous feeling! Makhmal began to leap about, overjoyed at his liberation. Then he moved away from the almond bush, and the chain followed him. As he leapt, the chain leapt. As he bounded about with joy, the chain bounded. It, too, had been freed, but each was fastened to the other. He winced at the pull and the noise of it. His spirits sank. But there was nothing to be done" (Chubak 2011).

In this excerpt, one can see how Makhmal experiences an initial surge of euphoria upon attaining freedom. His jubilation is manifested through lively and unrestrained movements, marked by leaps and bounds. However, the joyous occasion takes an unexpected turn when Makhmal realizes that the chain, which once bound him, now obediently trails along with each enthusiastic movement he makes. The chain, while no longer confining him directly, continues to be an inseparable part of his liberation, symbolizing a lingering connection to his past captivity. As Makhmal leaps with joy, the chain mirrors his every move, serving as a constant reminder of the history they share. The synchronized movements of Makhmal and the chain suggest that liberation is not absolute; it comes with a connection to the past that cannot be easily erased. The discomfort arising from the pull and noise of the chain adds a note of ambivalence to Makhmal's liberation, highlighting the complexities involved in the transition from captivity to freedom. The unbreakable link between Makhmal and the chain highlights the lasting effects of past confinement on one's sense of liberation, capturing the paradoxical nature of newfound freedom.

Then, the narrative unfolds as Makhmal separates from his master, venturing into a new and unfamiliar world to him. As Makhmal explores, he experiences a range of emotions, from initial curiosity and peace to loneliness and discomfort. The encounter with the shepherd turns violent, leading Makhmal to flee in fear and confusion. Eventually, he finds a moment of contentment but is interrupted by a hawk, which triggers a renewed sense of danger. This passage from the narrative delves into Makhmal's sensory experiences, including his pleasure in scratching, eating grass, and the temporary escape from his troubles. However, the return of the hawk shatters his peace, leaving Makhmal anxious and vulnerable.

As the narrative progresses, Makhmal, compelled by his instincts, decides to return to the oak tree where Jahan's body lies. We can see how "on his daylong trek he moves, gradually from a feeling of exhilarated freedom to one of terrified captivity" (Mostaghel 1979: 228). When Makhmal finally decides to leave his master and be on his own, in the face of peril, his instincts invariably guide him to his dead master's side: "While the boy rolled about and bellowed, Makhmal bounded off and retraced his path at top speed, instinctively selecting the only route he knew" (Chubak 2011).

The story takes a dark turn as two charcoal burners carrying axes approach. Makhmal, caught between the worlds of man and ape, is filled with terror, sensing that these men mean harm. Despite his frantic attempts to flee, the chain around his neck, both literal and symbolic, holds him back. The passage ends with the woodsmen approaching, laughing, and Makhmal in a state of extreme distress.

It is remarkable to see how, amidst it all, a recurring tableau unfolds – the image of the chain, ceaselessly bound to Makhmal, steadily accumulating weight as the day wanes. In this relentless cycle, his destiny is irrevocably woven towards a cruel demise, each link of the chain etching a tale of brutal finality:

"Madly he bent down and bit into the chain, gnawing at it in his fury. Its links clanked between his teeth. He rolled his eyes in rage, blood and bits of tooth and froth spurting from his mouth. Suddenly he jumped into the air and let out a yell that subsided into a harsh, ugly, painful grating in his throat" (Chubak 2011).

2.5. Alienation and Isolation Seen from an Existentialist Perspective

Makhmal's loneliness and inability to connect with the external world resonate with existentialist themes of isolation. The following paragraphs will discuss and analyze various aspects of Makhmal's isolation, addressing both its physical and existential dimensions.

Makhmal's Loneliness: Makhmal's deep sense of loneliness and alienation serves as a poignant expression of existentialist themes. Existentialist philosophers,

particularly Jean-Paul Sartre, emphasized the concept of “existential isolation”, suggesting that individuals are fundamentally alone in their existence. Makhmal’s isolation after the death of his master is not just physical but also existential – a sense of being cut off from meaningful connection or understanding with the world around him.

Absence of Meaningful Connection: Makhmal’s relationship with Jahan, his master, is one of subjugation rather than companionship. Jahan represents an external force that exerts control over Makhmal’s actions, and their interactions are marked by exploitation and cruelty. In the absence of genuine human connection, Makhmal is left in a state of isolation, unable to establish meaningful bonds with others.

The Chain as a Symbol of Alienation: The chain around Makhmal’s neck becomes a symbolic representation of the alienation inherent in his existence. It physically binds him to his master and metaphorically binds him to a life devoid of authentic relationships. The chain is a tangible manifestation of the constraints imposed by external forces, restricting his freedom and reinforcing his sense of isolation.

Encounter with the Shepherd: When Makhmal encounters the shepherd boy, there is a fleeting moment where he seeks connection by observing the boy and accepting the offered acorn bread. However, the connection attempt quickly turns into an episode of violence, highlighting the difficulty of overcoming existential isolation. The shepherd, representing the human aspect, becomes an unknowable and potentially threatening figure.

Return to Jahan: Makhmal’s return to Jahan’s lifeless body signifies a complex relationship with familiarity. Despite the oppressive nature of his connection with Jahan, the baboon seeks solace in the known, even in death. The familiarity of the master-baboon dynamic, no matter how abusive, becomes a more comforting prospect than the uncertainties of the external world.

Existential Angst: Makhmal’s actions and reactions throughout the narrative reflect a sense of existential angst – a deep, often irrational anxiety about his place in the world. The inability to establish genuine connections with others contributes to his existential alienation, leaving him in a perpetual state of unease.

2.6. Existential inquiry based on Jaeggi and Seeman’s perspectives

Examining the narrative through the lens of Jaeggi’s and Seeman’s perspectives on alienation can offer a more nuanced framework for understanding the protagonist’s experiences. The story resonates with multiple dimensions of alienation, highlighting the profound struggles of the character Makhmal:

Powerlessness: Makhmal’s chaining symbolizes his lack of agency and control over his own destiny. The physical restraint around his neck becomes

a metaphor for the perceived inability to determine his own fate. The chain restricts his actions and decisions, emphasizing a powerlessness that extends not only to his immediate circumstances but also to his broader connection with the world.

Meaninglessness: Makhmal's journey, marked by a lack of clear purpose or direction, aligns with the dimension of meaninglessness. The narrative suggests that Makhmal is adrift, unable to perceive the organizational functions of the world around him or to find significance in his own existence. The violence and encounters with the shepherd boy and woodsmen contribute to the sense of unpredictability, further deepening the theme of meaninglessness in Makhmal's experience.

Normlessness: Makhmal's interactions with the shepherd boy and the woodsmen highlight the challenges of fitting into societal norms and values. The violent and non-conforming nature of these interactions reflects a rupture with established norms, placing Makhmal in a state of normlessness. Moreover, the protagonist's actions, such as biting at the chain, suggest a defiance of conventional norms, contributing to his sense of alienation from the larger social context.

Isolation: The narrative encapsulates Makhmal's isolation from the societal goals and values of the community. His solitary journey, both physical and existential, underscores a lack of mental connection to his surroundings and a feeling of profound aloneness. Makhmal's inability to establish meaningful connections with others, as seen in his encounters with the shepherd boy and woodsmen, reinforces the theme of isolation.

Self-estrangement: Makhmal's biting at the chain and his return to Jahan's lifeless body signify a sense of self-estrangement. His detachment from his own identity, values, and well-being is palpable throughout the narrative. The internal conflict and the inability to find satisfaction within himself underscore Makhmal's profound self-estrangement, echoing Seeman's dimension of alienation related to detachment from one's own sense of self. In essence, Makhmal's journey becomes a powerful allegory for the human struggle with these facets of alienation, reflecting the complexities of the individual's relationship with oneself and the surrounding world.

3. Conclusions

As a concluding remark, as Jaeggi claims, “The alienated subject becomes a stranger to itself; it no longer experiences itself as an «actively effective subject» but a «passive object» at the mercy of unknown forces” (Jaeggi 2014: 3). Alienation means indifference and internal division, but also powerlessness and relationlessness with respect to oneself and to a world experienced as indifferent and alien. An alienated world “presents itself to individuals as insignificant and meaningless, as rigidified or impoverished, as a world that is not one’s own, which is to say, a world in which one is not ‘at home’ and over which one can have no influence” (Jaeggi, p. 3).

The characters in Chubak’s novels struggle with isolation and alienation. If social pressure is the main root of such a feeling, the characters themselves are ill-fitted in society and feel deeply different from average people. Their sensitiveness makes them suffer but also creates their consistency.

Makhmal’s struggles, as depicted in the story, resonate with the various and complex aspects of alienation outlined by scholars such as Jaeggi and Seeman. The protagonist embodies powerlessness, grappling with a sense of agency and control that is elusive, symbolized by the chain around his neck. The meaninglessness of Makhmal’s journey mirrors the societal upheavals during Iran’s modernization, where individuals found it challenging to perceive the organizational functions of the changing social system. Normlessness is evident in Makhmal’s defiance of established norms, reflecting the broader societal instability and challenges to traditional values. Isolation emerges as a deeply emotional theme as Makhmal navigates a world where he struggles to connect with societal goals, emphasizing the profound mental disconnection and solitude experienced by the character. Finally, self-estrangement unfolds as Makhmal grapples with his own identity and values, echoing Seeman’s dimension of detachment from one’s sense of self.

The modernization of Iran, marked by the Constitutional Revolution, played a pivotal role in shaping the intellectual landscape, giving rise to the *intelligentsia* and *literati*. Sadeq Chubak, as part of this literary movement, contributed significantly to the discourse on societal change and individual struggles. His short story *Antari ke lutiash morde bud* explores the concept of alienation against the backdrop of a changing society, intertwining with the historical currents of Iran, and offering a profound meditation on the human condition and the struggles of individuals who find themselves at odds with a world that is transforming around them. As reflected in Makhmal’s journey, the individual is left to ponder the transience of identity and the impermanence of belonging.

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