A Study of Nadia Anjuman's Life and Poetry

2013 Taleghani Fellowship Report

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Nadia Anjuman was in eleventh grade when the Taliban captured Herat in 1995, and had already been writing and reciting poems at home and school for years. As her older brother Mohammad Shafi Noorzayi tells the story, Nadia's first impetus for writing poetry was her indignation at an injustice. She was in the fifth grade at Mahjūba Herawī School when she came home from class one day in tears. To her mother's inquiry, she replied, "It's not fair. My history teacher lowered my grade because I'm younger than the rest of the students, even though I answered all the questions correctly! And then he raised the grade of one of the lazy boys in the class—the one who is his nephew." Deeply disturbed by this unjust treatment, she stayed up that night filled with anxiety, and apparently poetic inspiration. The next day, Nadia went to school armed with the first poem she had ever written. It was about the corrupt grading incident, and she read it aloud in front of the headmaster. In addition to recognizing the young student's talent, the headmaster confronted her history teacher about his blatant corruption and favoritism. "This was all the motivation Nadia needed to write more poems," said Noorzayi.

The purpose of my journey to Herat, Afghanistan, in May of 2013, aided by the Taleghani Fellowship, was primarily to learn about this Afghan poet, who adopted "Anjuman" for her writing name in honor of the literary society that she loved: *Anjuman-e Adabīy-e Herat*. During this moving and educational journey, I learned many more details about Nadia's story, a young woman whose life and writings left a deep mark on her fellow poets, the literary group, the city of Herat, the nation, and even beyond. Nadia Anjuman died in 2005 after an incident of domestic violence perpetrated by her husband and shortly after releasing her first book, leaving behind a six-monthold child. Her death stunned admirers of her poetry, particularly the young female writers of her city. In Herat, I spoke with Nadia's brother, as well as about a dozen of her friends, fellow poets, university classmates, and professors. I was able to attend the Wednesday afternoon young poets' gathering at the Herat Literary Society and visit the bookstores nearby to acquire available books of poetry written by Herati women, including several editions of Nadia's collection of poems, *Gule Dudi* ("Smoke-Bloom").

Over the months following my trip to Afghanistan and based on the research I had gathered, I wrote about Nadia's life and work. I also translated selections of poetry by a number of her fellow poets, collecting them into manuscript of Herati women's poetry in translation with an introduction centered on Nadia Anjuman's story and impact. This manuscript has been accepted for publication by Edwin Mellen Press and acknowledges the Taleghani Fellowship for assisting me in conducting the necessary research. I am so grateful to have had this opportunity and look forward to sharing the published version of this project when it comes out!

¹ From a biographical note about Nadia written by M. Shafi Noorzayi, 23 Jan 2006, used courtesy of the author.