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Comparison of the Wise and Philosophical Ideas in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh and Nasser Khusraw's Book of Poems

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Abstract

History of Iran has deep links with Shahnameh and Persian literature. In fact, it is not possible to talk about Iran as a rich culture and disregard Persian literature and brilliant works of Persian literature. According to most scholars in the field of literature and culture, Iranians have been people of wisdom, thought, and philosophy. Ferdowsi and Nasser Khusraw hold a special place in this regard because we are faced with ethical, philosophical, and religious ideas in the works of both poets. Different effects of the Iranian Wisdom are presented in their poems; the effects include ethics, philosophy, logic, medicine, music, determinism and free will, fate, arithmetic and geometry, astronomy etc. Ferdowsi's Shahnameh and Nasser Khusraw's Book of Poems are sublime manifestation of ideological and philosophical ideas of Iranians. Apart from the similarities and differences, Ferdowsi and Nasser Khusraw's poems represent praise of wisdom, God, and human freedom as basic elements in the ontology of Persian culture. Hence, in addition to understanding and explanation of Ferdowsi, Nasser Khusraw's day and age, and the importance of these two poets in Iran's development of wisdom and philosophical thought, this research tries to describe their similarities and differences in ideological and philosophical subjects.

Keywords: Philosophy, Poem, Ferdowsi, Nasser Khusraw.

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Introduction

Persian language took on a sacred aspect gradually from the 5th century onwards, especially with the composition of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. The reason for this issue can be found in the fact that Iranians have included their spiritual experience within Arabic since the beginning of Islam in Iran and presented it to science and literature lovers. The reason for survival of Iranian proverbs and wise words relies on its deep philosophical and wise concepts. Historians had limited knowledge on Islamic period of philosophical thinking to the age when philosophers and scholars were writing in Arabic. Disregarding great philosophical works such as Nasser Khusraw and others is the mistake by this group. Moreover, consideration of Persian language capabilities is equal to disregarding depth of thought in works of the great Persian figures. Many orientalists have not addressed Muslims' thoughts because they started to observe Muslims' intellectual and wise speeches from Arabic perspective. The historical ignorance has led to merely literary attention to many works.

According to historical evidence as well as written works, importance of the role of Iranians in the history of thought and civilization of the world is undeniable. Thus, foreign conquerors have never had definitive victory in the land and they have lost their power very soon since they have resolved in the stream of Iranian thought.

In addition to present an introduction about Ferdowsi and Nasser Khusraw, this research tries to uncover the ways philosophy, wisdom has been included in poetic form by them, and what instruments used by then to describe their goals in this regard. Moreover, the article compares and contrasts the ideas of the two poets.

Abolqasem Ferdowsi

It would definitely be said that Ferdowsi is one of the greatest epic poet in the world. Abolqasem Ferdowsi was born in 940 in a village called Bazh, near Tous in Khorasan. He was a farmer in Tous. Farmers were rural aristocrats because they had land and water and they were intermediary between peasants and owners. He married at the age of 28; his wife had mastered music and his son died at the age of 37 when Ferdowsi was 65 years old. Ferdowsi died in the age of 82 and his body was buried in his personal property in Tous (Agha Alikhani, 2009: 6-7).

Nezami Oroozi is the first researcher who wrote on the life of Ferdowsi. He stated that Ferdowsi was born in Bazh. Recent references have counted Shadab and Razan as the place of Ferdowsi's birth; but this idea has been rejected by most contemporary scholars. His name has been mentioned Abolqasem Ferdowsi in all references. His first name is mentioned Hasan in oldest sources such as *Strange Creatures*, *Selected History*, and introduction to *Shahnameh*.

Other sources such as Bendari's Arabic translation, Felorence's introduction, and Introduction to Shahnameh by Baisonqori have named him Mansour. After investigating all sources, Muhammad Amin Riahi has accepted the name of Hasan ibn Ali for him and argues that this name is more appropriate to his religious thoughts; however, he purifies Ferdowsi for all religious bias the same as other scholars (Doostkhah, 2005: 24).

In Shahnameh, when he finishes description of war of eleven warriors, he admires Mahmood Ghaznavi who had become king; he also talks about himself at the age of fifty-eight years old. Since Mahmood went the throne in 387, Ferdowsi was born in 329 (Anwari, 1997: 11-12).

Shahnameh

Ferdowsi's childhood and youth were spent at the time of the Samanids. Samanid kings were lovers of Persian literature. The start of composing Shahnameh based on Abu Mansour Shahnameh is regarded as when Ferdowsi was at the age of thirty. Attention to Ferdowsi's mastery in composition depicts that he had composed verses in youth; some verses of Shahnameh based on ancient folklore may be composed when he was a young boy. This idea can justify much heterogeneity in editions of Shahnameh manuscripts. In this regard, same older versions of the manuscripts may be copied by recorders. The Story of Bijan and Manijeh, Rostam and Esfandiar, Ekvān Div, and Story of Siavash may be composed at the Ferdowsi's young years of life.

After hearing about Daqiqi Tousi's death and knowing that Goshtaseb Nameh was remained unfinished, he understood about composition of Abu Mansouri Shahnameh and traveled to Bokhara to find the book and compose the continuation of the book (Riahi, 1996: 91). In this trip, Ferdowsi did not find unfinished Abu Mansouri Shahnameh; in his return to Tous, Amir Mansour who was one of his friends and Abu Mansouri Shahnameh had been edited under the rule of his father, gave a version of the book to Ferdowsi (Doostkhah, 2005: 36).

Shahnameh is the most famous composition of Ferdowsi and it is one of the biggest writings in Persian literature. Ferdowsi wrote Shahnameh according to Abu Mansouri Shahnameh in 370 AD; it was finished in 384 Hijri with these lines:

*The story of Yazdgerd finished now,
In the month of Sefandarmaz,
After three hundred and eighty-four years,
In the name of holy God (Ferdowsi, 1966: 1943).*

Nasser Khusraw Qubadiani

Nasser Khusraw Qubadiani, the great poet of the fifth century AD, is remarkable and recognizable in many ways such as firm belief, combination of poetry and thought in his book, efforts to spread his ideas, social perspectives, mastery in Persian literature, and sad fate (Yusefi et al., 1990: 5). Among Iranian poets, Nasser Khusraw's story is amazing and unique. Abu Mo'in Hamid ad-Din Nasir ibn Khusraw al-Qubadiani was born in Qabodiyon, a village in eastern Iranian province of Khorasan in 394 AD; he died in Yamagan in 481 AD. He began to learn sciences of his age from childhood; he entered the court of kings in youth and earned much money and assets. At the age of forty-two, he changed totally and began a pilgrimage to the House of God. For this purpose, he left his property and occupations and spent seven years in travel (Qubadiani, 1991: 508).

Before the travel, the life of this passionate thinker was devoted to world and pleasure and he spent his life by serving the court of many Ghaznavian and Seljuk Turkmen kings (ibid: 506). In fact, thinking on introvert and extrovert signs of God as well as observing strangers and wonders of different lands in addition to habits, customs, and religions made him more capable for spiritual transformations. Most importantly, he became familiar with missionaries of Fatemi religion. The influence of their speeches, especially the words of his direct guide Al-Daat Shirazi, as well as his mental fitness directed him to accept their religion. Since he was master in Persian, Arabic, and intellectual and traditional sciences, he was appointed as a missionary in Khorasan by the eighth Fatimid caliph of Egypt; he was titled as "Proof of Khorasan Island". In his return to Iran, he started a deep fight against caliphs, kings, and governors by his powerful expression and language. Consequently, he blamed jurists, narrators of hadiths, and poets who were in favor of them. He took a refuge in the valley of Yamagan, which had an independent rule, to be safe of the harms by them; finally, he died in Tamagan (Muhaqiq, 2007: 10-11).

In the youth of Nasser, Khorasan was a center of poetry and mysticism; persons who seeking name and money traveled to Khorasan. They traveled to Khorasan and its dreamy cities like Neishabour, Balkh, and Marv (Zarrinkoob, 1990: 78). Nasser who was born five years after the rule of Sultan Mahmood Ghaznavi spent his young days at his court and the court of his son Soltan Masoud. Then, Ghaznavids defeated from Seljuk dynasty in Tash Robot near Marv. In this way the Ghaznavids left Khorasan forever and went to serve Marv Shah Jahan where Amir Chaqri Bei Davood, the brother of Tugrul, was ruler. Marv was a beautiful city and one of the most pleasant cities of Khorasan with flowing waters, trees, and gardens as noted in Schools and Countries (Estakhri, 1989: 208). In this way, all kinds of pleasure and prosperity were provided for Nasser.

This should be considered as a social and political characteristic of bureaucracy systems in the history of Iran that individuals occupying court affairs have been relief, comfortable, and secure to perform their tasks in peace of mind. Therefore, persons with few taste, talent, and eagerness to court affairs were attracted. In this system, Nasser was searching for an appropriate position in the court since he had taste, literacy, talent, and other qualifications (Soltani, 1999: 160).

Nasser Khusraw's Itinerary

Historically, Nasser Khusraw's Book of Travel is the oldest, most important, and most serious itinerary available in Persian literature. It was authored in the fifth century. It is the result of long journey to the most important civilized parts of the world in its own age. Writing style, the object style of observation and the documentary structure has placed Nasser Khusraw's Book of Travel in excellent examples of travelogues (Abdollahi & Poorgiv, 2004: 24).

Almost all scholars agree that Nasser Khusraw's Book of Travel is not the full description of his journey. It is more likely to be a selection of the full text (Feraï, 1984: 164). This issue is mentioned in the book once where it describes the wall of Miafaraqin (a city), "[the city] has a Friday mosque that its description will be so long although the author has written a description" (Qubadiani, 1995: 10).

Tradition of Wisdom and Advice among Iranians

In contemporary words, Iranians were ethical people. Amin Marselen, a Greek historian, wrote about the morality of Iranians, "Iranians does not allow extravagance in feed; except the food of kings, rulers, and courtiers that is served in a specific time, other people eat when they need; they never eat more than the required amount...Iranians are very self-mastery and they try always to eliminate every kind of badness and evil deeds. Very hard punishments had been predicted for guilty of perjury (Mashkoor, 1999: 49).

As known, Iranians were calm, brave, courageous, loyal to the contract, and friendly both in Achaemenid and Parthian and Sassanian periods. Such characteristics were manifested in written traditions of Iranians that was flourished during the Sassanid era. In addition to the religious orders and the philosophical, social, and political subjects, epistles emphasize much on ethics and practical philosophy. A common style in the late years of Sassanid era and first centuries of Islamic age (in Pahlavi language) is writings known as advice; they mostly contain order to communication, life style, the behavior of powerful persons with subordinates, piety, and religiosity or ethical grounds in other words. This series of books should be regarded as practical philosophy of that brilliant age (Moin, 1985: 181).

Iranians were presented wise and philosophical ideas in the form of advice due to their moral perspective that resulted from the Zoroastrian mood and style. Moral and narrative works, and epistles as well as many books on history, religion, and religious traditions were created throughout Iran, particularly in the Sassanid era (Zarrinkoob, 1996: 43-44). Indeed, the epistle writing style is considered as one of the main grounds for inclusion of Iranian nationality in the history of Islamic Iran. Therefore, numerous foreign raids to Iran including the invasion by Muslim Arabs and Mongols in addition to migration of Turks led Iranian intellectuals and elites to formulate practices of governance and management of lands by motivating Iran-city ideas through epistles (Sharafi, 2011: 93).

Wisdom and Philosophy from Viewpoint of Ferdowsi and Nasser Khusraw

For ancient thinkers, wisdom refers to truths and sciences that are capable of being recognized by reason; they are divided to theoretical and practical wisdoms. Theoretical wisdom is divided into divine wisdom (or supreme wisdom), math wisdom (middle wisdom), and natural wisdom (lower wisdom).

For Islamic philosophers, the issues related to God including existence of God, His Unity, positive and negative attributes, generality and particularity of His power, predestination, good and evil, issuing a large number of units, general worlds of existence, and some other discussions are called “theology in its particular meaning”. This expression is used in contrast with “general affairs”. They form divine or supreme wisdom (Motahari, 1995: 294-295).

Such as encyclopedia, *Shahnameh* contains accurate, Islamic, and human issues that assure the human life of every person in a so eloquent and expressive manner. All arguments about various fields of moral edification, unity, praising the Lord, the praise and glorification of the Prophet (pbuh) and his Household, the importance of knowledge, wisdom, eloquence, etiquette, civil manners, justice and equity, determinism and freedom, discredited world, etc. construct a book of five thousands verses, which is a thick book and indicates that Ferdowsi represents Islamic issues, good, and bad within his epic poems.

Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh* is one of the rare books attracting the scholars in each field of good ethics and good character. In the book, reason, knowledge, wisdom, and science are preferred to other tools. Writer’s self-esteem is evident in every aspect; it is empty of vulgar and uncouth words. Although it is known as an unparalleled epic in Persian literature and it contains Iranian wars and military expeditions to revive Iranian ancient history, it is very important in terms of religion, ethics, and wisdom (Ranjbar, 1984: 10).

Nasser Khusraw's Book of Poems is a collection of advice, words of wisdom, and criticism of lewdness wrong doings. He seriously blames panegyrist poets and admirers; moreover, he explains his philosophical and ideological beliefs (Muhaqiq, 2009: 15).

History of Islamic thought shows that in the fourth and fifth centuries, wisdom referred to a system of divine thoughts that rising from gathering of religion and philosophy. Wisdom is indeed a Quranic expression. Reflection on the meaning of wise person in Quran indicates that the wisdom of a wise person is manifested mostly in his action and behavior. In Shahnameh, Ferdowsi calls himself wise appropriately. He is qualified for the name because he is firm belief, knowledgeable, and wise (Kazazi, 2005: 185).

In fact, philosophy and wisdom had been oral before they were in written form. Hence, considering culture, and especially proverbs and parables, is very important in the study of wisdom. In the written form, wisdom should be investigated in literary texts. Besides, many religious and philosophical works written by wise persons are important in literary aspects. Some great men of literature are known as "wise" (for example, Hakim Abolghasem Ferdowsi, Hakim Nasser Khusraw, and Hakim Nezami). Many literary works are considerable in terms of wisdom and philosophy (Hosseini, 2009: 12).

In other words, the concept of wisdom and philosophy in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh refers to a moral system. Shahnameh regards wisdom as adjustment of human behavior with eternal rules. Perhaps, the words wisdom and philosophy has been mentioned in few lines of Shahnameh; the terms wise and persons have been used in some few lines. In the story of Ekvand Div, the poet attacks philosophers and sophists. He states:

Be away from talkative philosopher,

Walking in a path as if does not walk.

Like Ferdowsi, the terms wisdom and wise has a high frequency in Nasser Khusraw. In fact, Nasser Khusraw has used the terms in more than two hundred verses. One of the references for Nasser Khusraw's poetry is Quran so that his adoption is indirect usage of Quranic doctrines. Since he had a wide knowledge of the sciences in his age (especially philosophy), he apparently employs the terms philosophy and philosopher in the arrangement of his verses. In some verses, he talks about Greek wisdom and its philosophers.

In the verse, Nasser Khusraw speaks of a wise person's characteristics and having wisdom; one characteristic is independence of king's authority.

Wise person is one who does not think from king, not from the silly,

To compose verses for king to give him an award (Qubadiani, 1991, B 18, 41).

Recognize wisdom from its Iraq place,

It will never announce submission message (Ibid, B 22, 106).

Philosophy in the Words of Ferdowsi and Nasser Khusraw

Philosophical understanding or scientific thought occurs everywhere in language; in this regard, language is the manifestation of thought and speech is manifestation of thought and wisdom. Talking about the emergence of thought in language, one refers to the emergence of the universe and the cosmos because science indicates an object always according to the principle that science is an additional truth of essence; it is not possible to talk about science without consideration of an objective thing. Science without known and knowledge without object have not recognizable and correct meanings; it is also impossible to imagine one without considering the other one.

These words do not imply that there is no mistake in science and comprehension and every understood form corresponds necessarily to the reality and a real object because mistake occurs frequently in human perception. In some cases, perceptual form does not correspond to the real form of an object in world. In this manner, human perceptions are classified in two groups of wrong and right or true and false. The criterion for the correctness and accuracy of perception is its correspondence to reality and objectivity of an object (Ibrahim Dinani, 2013: 1).

Philosopher is not dependent on a specific intellectual school because one who defends a specific school of thought makes himself much far from the world in order to maintain his defense of the specific school. When one speaks of activity of philosophical thought, he indicates that man is involved in worldly affairs and he creates his essence as much as he understood the world and its practices. Essence makes himself and transforms its truth (Ibid, p.5).

Hence, it is reasonable to argue that well-known poets like Ferdowsi and Nasser Khusraw had been able to give a deep philosophical and wise aspect to it. In the words of Nasser Khusraw and Ferdowsi, language and speech are sacred affairs. Therefore, poets do not ever make dirt and inappropriate words. Their speech is full of fresh, creative, philosophical, and ethical thoughts.

In the story about kingdom of Kasra, Anoshiravan refers to some sciences including chess, medicine, literature, mathematics, and so on.

Then, they set off to a crossroad,

Face, horse, king, elephant, and army (Ferdowsi, 1999: B, 1293, 3326).

A composer doctor is well qualified,

He was master in speech (Ibid B, 3342, 1793).

He asked for the ideas of the elite people,

He is one who guides people due to his knowledge (Ibid B, 3373, 1793).

At the beginning of his book, Ferdowsi raises an important issue beautifully. This is maybe the most important issue and conflict between philosophical schools. Theology is a known subject.

The creatures' perspectives,

You cannot see the sufferings of both eyes.

Though should not be addressed to it,

Since he is higher than fame and position.

One who is a seeker does not need admire,

He should be found the relationship of servitude (Ibid B, 5-7, 17).

As it is conveyed from the life, intellectual content, poetry, and other books, Nasser Khusraw is familiar with philosophy. He had been master in its techniques that a large part of his imaginary elements is philosophical concepts. This is manifested in his poetry in such a way that there is no sign of manifesting hypocrisy. Without saying a word about philosophical debates, he disregards philosophical discussions; these parts contain wonders of nature, images, and poetic imaginations (Shafiei Kadkani, 1999: 558).

Nasser Khusraw regards philosophy in an opposite point to the knowledge of religion and blames philosophy in addition to admiring religious speeches. He invalidates philosophy and regards the knowledge of Socrates and Plato against the scientific knowledge that has come through the Prophet and the Imams because religious science is linked with the sea of God's knowledge. Nasser Khusraw considers religious words as sugar and philosophy as opium.

Oh, you seeker of Platonic science,

All these expressions are platonic,

That is philosophy and this is words of religion,

This is sugar and that is opium,

This is from the family of Muhammad,

Not the words of Farigoun and Omar (Qubadiani, 1991, B, 29-31, 257).

Conclusion

In ancient Persia, wisdom had a particular place. Rich Iranian culture has been full of moral, ethical and wise thoughts. After conversion of Iranians to Islam, wisdom and philosophy grew rapidly in Iran. Since the fourth century onwards with the emergence of translation movement, poets, philosophers, and Iranian theologians added the richness of Iranian culture. In this regard, Hakim Abolghasem Ferdowsi has a remarkable place. Ferdowsi could reflect a great part of ancient Iranian philosophical and wise tradition in written form in his masterpiece *Hashnameh*. After Ferdowsi, many poets continued the approach used by *Shahnameh*. Nasser Khusraw Qubadiani is one of the poets who could express the ideas in another style.

There are many similarities and differences in the wise and philosophical ideas of the two persons. The differences results from the spirit of age and social conditions of the society. Similarities between the ideas of these two poets in terms of practical wisdom such as refinement of ethics. The main differences between the ideas of both poets are observed in theoretical Wisdom; for example, the ideas of anthropology, determinism, and freedom have been employed in a moderate mood. In this situation, fate is beyond human understanding and comprehension. Man has no way to remove this mask; but Nasser Khusraw believes that fortune and misfortune are created by every person by himself; the guilty should not be related to other sources. Their similarity is more in rationalization and intellectualization.

With respect to the influences on the ideological and philosophical attitudes of both poets, it should be said that Ferdowsi's wisdom is derived from the Shiite Iranian Zarvani wisdom and Nasser Khusraw's wisdom is derived from the ideological opinion of Ismailians. *Shahnameh* and Nasser Khusraw's *Book of Poems* have found the main signs of wisdom by attention to philosophy, logic, music, wisdom of religion, ethics, literature, and astronomy.

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