

Survey on the Socio-Cultural Aspects in Bakhtiar Nameh

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Abstract: Sociology of literature studies the interaction between the poet or writer and society. Bakhtiar Nameh contains stories written in Seljuk period adopted new prose under the influence of contemporary social conditions and represented Iran social status at that period. Issues including the effect of the government in society, court posts, feasts, ceremonies and entertainments, marriage ceremonies and jobs have been portrayed in these stories. This research was conducted documentary and the socio-cultural issues cited in Bakhtiar Nameh were investigated. It was identified that when a society is declining the thinkers begin to create outstanding of users to preserve their values. Sometimes, people tend to read stories written in a period and the mission of the writers is to tell stories for preserving cultural values. The results of this research revealed that literature provides a context for representing the societies' best and worst aspects.

Key words: Bakhtiar Nameh, culture, Seljuk period, marriage ceremonies, thinks

INTRODUCTION

Sociology of literature in other words, "social issues in literature" investigates poets or writers' concepts, contents, ideologies, ideas, cultures, communities and social issues represented in their works. Although, a literary work is the product of the poet or writer's personality he or she is also product of the society; hence it is necessary to identify society in order to get familiar with art, since the individuals' personality, behavior and social interactions are somehow influenced by social setting. Each thinker casts his work in the form of the social setting. Since courtiers and artists were advocates of literature in the past their social and cultural conditions have been represented in the literary works. However, the writers have referred to socio-cultural conditions in their works but these citations do not represent those conditions well.

This research aims to investigate the socio-cultural aspects in Bakhtiar Nameh characterizing Seljuk period and its prose features referring to the folk tales and stories and review common beliefs and rituals.

Statement of problem and research goals: Some critics emphasize social principles in literary works criticism. They have investigated the relationship between literature and society. Undoubtedly, a literary work is influenced by social setting and literature impacts on social conditions. "the relationship between the poet and writer with the environment and society specifies the role played by

literature in society. If kings with benefits and clergy men with donations and gifts support the poet and writer so, literature will represent only society. But literature is a social factor. Under such conditions, the writer will criticize obscene materialistic and social conditions and his criticism will be contrary to popular taste demanding change".

The goal of this research is to explain the social and cultural issues in Bakhtiar Nameh. Of other goals of this research it can be referred to followings:

- Examine Bakhtiar Nameh social ideas about society and its various functions such as government, family and penalties
- Review and explain the rituals, beliefs, arts and social ethics in a Bakhtiar Nameh

Research questions:

- Does Bakhtiar Nameh's culture close to the culture of court or the public culture?
- What are the social ideas about society mentioned in Bakhtiar Nameh and its various functions, such as government, family and penalties?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research method is documentary based on the study of Bakhtiar Nameh and related books. For doing so, it has been tried to extract social aspects through analysis of the valuable works.

Social ego, cultural and sociological literature: “As results of the mutual impact of society and education on each other, directly and indirectly, the “personal ego” becomes “social ego”. For a social man, world is more than being nature and its phenomena it is primarily a social world; in other words, a person sees the outside world through social world. In relevance to the culture, it should also be noted that the “culture refers to the phenomena which human society has created them; culture include show to wear, how to hold customs, marry and have family life with daily work patterns, rituals and entertainment, leisure and commodities. Social life represents behavioral and mental characteristics of groups. In other words, culture represents values members of a certain group have them” (Kafi, 2006).

In Iran literature, the poets and writers have narrated historical events in stories, expressed suffering in poems, life in proverbs and politics through literary-oeuvres. They have written about love and hate, pain and pleasure, attack and defense, victory and defeat, anger and reconciliation. Literature is a mirror reflecting our lives, history, culture and society, family, character and social life.

Basically, in every period, the group supported poetry and literature has determined the poets and writer orientation. Except a few poets and writers they were dependent on the aristocrats and this dependency was disappeared when the society was changed. Professor Sadighi, the founder of the sociology wrote the first sociology book on literature entitled “Social Aspects in Persian Literature” (Salim, 1998). The issues on sociology of art and literature were considered by Amir Hussein Aryanpour at University of Tehran in 1962 and these discussions were published in a book entitled “Sociology of Art” and then Jamshid Mesbahipour aided the researchers of this field in the book entitled “Social Realities and the World of Story”. He offered an exquisite example of this research method in Persian novel based on his theoretical foundations in the sociology of literature (Afshari, 2010).

Characteristics of Seljuk period and Bakhtiar Nameh:

In Iran post-Islam history, Seljuk dynasty was the most powerful government. They had combined political governance and religious governance and ruled out by slogan of “Sultan is the shadow of God on the earth”. Although, they were immigrants they had learned the culture and civilization of the dependent Asian countries. The rulers were familiar with Islamic cultures and civilization and managed their military affairs and appointed Iranian ministers. They constructed schools and trained teachers and managers for controlling their

broad territory. Each member of the royal family ruled out different areas (Ravandi, 1965). One of the features of this period prose was closeness to verse as a real indicator of Iranian literature this issue deserves to be contemplated compared to other periods. In this era, literary prose had an eloquent style combined by Arabic words and verse. The literary works filled with figures of speech, exaggeration, verbosity and meaningless concepts.

Bakhtiar Nameh is one of the Islamic period stories written in rhythmic prose. Apparently, it was translated from Arabic to Persian and in late 6th century, Oufi referred to the researcher of Bakhtiar Nameh. This book contains ten chapters and each chapter includes instructive hints mentioned in the form of story. One day a king and his queen ran away because of the rebellion of the officers and the queen gave birth to a son. They tied a gem on his arm and threw him inside a well. A group of brigands found him and took him to their head and he knew that he is from royal family. He adopted him as his son and taught him techniques and knowledge. Bakhtiar began to banditry and later he became a merchant apprentice. Then he went to the palace and attracted the attention of the king. Years later he was appointed as a treasurer. One day he became drunken and slept in the king bed and the king condemned him to infidelity and the jealous ministers persuaded the queen (his mother) to scandal Bakhtiar and the king ordered to kill him. In order to prove his innocence he told ten stories.

The behavior and impact of the government on society:

Government guides the society on specific cultural path and exerts desired social conditions. Literature influenced by social conditions reflects specific form of culture. In the past centuries, the governors and rulers supported literature and encouraged the poets to write their desired poems. “Sociology of literature tries to identify the influence of social aspects on the poets and writers and the impact of their works in social, cultural and political institutions and represent the role of social and cultural constructs in specified period in progress or confinement, quality and quantity of the art” (Torabi, 2008).

The rulers, aristocrats and the rich advocated and encouraged the poets and writers and they appointed them in their institutes and according to Islamic tradition they tried to promote their formations by appointing the poets and writers, so this movement led to encouraging people to learn knowledge and literature. The kings accepted the poets and they accompanied the rulers in their feasts and meetings (Safa, 2005). The researcher of Bakhtiar Nameh was the court poet and he wrote this literary work by recommendation of one of the ministers.

Court officials and social classes: Court consisted of different sections and each section was managed under supervision one or several officers. The court officials mentioned in Bakhtiar Nameh included:

- Shah (king): the first person of the country supervised all affairs. "The fundamental political, religious and governmental beliefs were manifested in a person and this person was king" (Amir, 1997)
- Viziers (ministers): since, ministers were intermediate between the king and the people their good will and intents were effective in the country destiny (Ravandi, 1965)
- Esfahsalar (generals): the generals were responsible for all or some part of the military force and they were also responsible for providing security against domestic and foreign enemies
- Akhar salar (wardens of stables): they were responsible for the king horses and animals
- Khazanedar (treasurer): he was responsible for expenditures of the court and military officers and properties entered and exited from the treasury and he reported the king all expenditures
- Hajeb (doorkeepers): they were responsible for transferring people messages. In Bakhtiar Nameh when a person was offered a gift, the door keepers accompanied him: "they wore him a robe and returned him by the court doorkeepers"
- Nagib (headmen): they were heads of groups. They were responsible for recalling the troopers and the head of soldiers was called head man
- Agent: apparently this word had common meaning and it was used to call the officers in charge of collecting tax

Also different social classes have been mentioned in this book:

- Dehghan (landowners): they had land and palaces: "he saw a great palace with broad porch and door. The owner of that palace was a rich and generous landowner"
- Roaya (peasants): most people were peasants including peasants in the rural areas and artisans in the cities. They were poor and the officers oppressed to them
- Servants and slaves: all people and pagans captured by Arabs and Muslims were servants and slaves. Generally, the servants were not behaved violently and according to Islamic thoughts, some of them were released (Ravandi, 1965)

Celebrations and entertainments

Celebrations: Celebrations, drinking wine and feasts were common rituals in the kings' courts. The kings hold feasts and drank wine and the singers sang in the courts of Bakhtiar Nameh: "the governor of kerman ordered to hold a feast and invite the singers to sing. When they arranged the feast they began to drink wine and living in pleasure".

Polo: "Polo is one of the oldest plays and its origin is unclear. Some believe that it was an Iranian play (Quoted by Dehkhoda). "The kings played polo in the battle field to show the people that could not fight in the battle field their victory and beheading their enemies heads and threw them as polo depicting that they could not escape the battle and it was an astrolabe for fighting".

"It was the time that the king was in the field and played polo on the horse back and they played with him surrounding him".

Hunting and horse riding: Hunting and horse riding were the most interesting entertainments in the courts. They had specific rules: "sitting on the horse back and hunting were loyal affairs. "Do not sit on the small horse since the people disdain you and do not ride fast horse except for journey. Sit on the horse straightly and do not ride it rapidly in the hunting place since it is dangerous. If you are interested in hunting, chase cheetah, falcon, eagle and dog since what you catch it will be beneficial".

Customs of welcoming guests: When a king or other great men or a messenger came to a city, the people welcomed him by specific rituals and the grandeur of this ceremony was dependent on the place and post of the guest.

Welcoming the king: "When heard the news on arriving the king he ordered to welcome him and asked officers to protect him and prepare royal room".

Welcoming the great men and messengers: "When the king knew that a great man has come to the city with many servants and horses he ordered to accept him openly".

Taxation and its impact on the society: Taxation was done according to specific rules and the tax payers paid it in some intervals. The first session was at the time of harvesting. It seems that there was a problem in levying tax and numerous factors caused to problems including inability of the government in taxing on the influential people and the other problem was heavy taxation. The officers forced people to pay tax and these factors caused

to destructing agriculture. Heavy taxes and insecurity led to chaos. The people reaction to taxation and the officers' oppression has been mentioned in Bakhtiar Nameh depicting the mutual reaction of the people and the government. The big problem was arisen when some groups appointed in official posts exempted from paying tax and the second problem was oppression of the financial officers and also sometimes the king ordered to discount tax or aid the peasants to promote agriculture. "An officer came to receive tax and he was tyrant and forced people to pay tax and oppressed the poor".

Writing letter and letter types: Various letter writing styles have been mentioned in Bakhtiar Nameh employed by kings and governors. The letters were written for different purposes on different issues. This book refers to some letter writing styles.

Letter of congratulation: It was written when a good event was happened and the different countries kings and rulers wrote these letters to each other: "when the contract was concluded and signed and they unified, the governors and heads of the officers wrote letters of congratulation".

Letter of acknowledgment: When a king got married with a person's daughter or appointed him in a post that person should acknowledge the king: "the general wrote the king a letter to acknowledge his happiness for his arrival".

Letter of glad tiding: When they gave glad tiding to somebody or informed arrival of an important person, a messenger was sent to that person: "the woman sent a letter and gave the glad tiding of delivery of two sons".

Letter of invitation: A letter of invitation was sent to the person to invite him for ceremony or meeting: "the jeweler wrote a letter to his wife and asked her to bring his child".

Letter of complaint: When a person claimed against some body he wrote a letter to the king: "the man was upset and eager to see his children. He had not seen them for three years and he wrote the king a letter and complained about his condition".

Letter of request: When a king demanded a bride from other country he wrote a letter and sent gifts and servants because of long distance and demanded her from his father. "The king of Aleppo wrote the Egypt king a letter and praised him and requested her daughter to marry her".

Letter of victory: At the time of victory the letter of victory was sent to the court giving glad tiding of triumph: "his message was letter of victory".

The place of woman in the society: In this period due to arrival of the beautiful slaves from Rome and Georgia and attendance of Turkish women in the courts, beauty was considered as the main feature and even in the stories the beauty of women are praised relative to being wise and power and efficiency.

Women as the beloved: Although, the women lived behind veils, the men fell in love with them. "In the mystical literature, beauty has a close relationship with love. In the Phaedrus, Plato expresses beauty and love: "the strongest desire is desire to beauty and possession and since this desire reaches extremes it is called love" (Afrasyabpour, 2001). The stories of Bakhtiar Nameh filled with such mystical atmospheres. Beside spraising woman as beloved, the men tried to veil her and some times considered her superior to men: "the general had a beautiful daughter. One day the wind blew and the building was destructed and the king saw her and fell in love with her".

Women as a sufi: Quran has not considered the superiority of the men but it has emphasized that there are women who have passed the steps of perfection and surpassed men. In Sufism, women were allowed to participate in the sufis meetings and for this reason, after Islam we find women gained ultimate position among Sufis but the women were not allowed to reach religious positions and leadership after Islam. We find a woman who prayed and worshiped the almighty Godin Bakhtiar Nameh: "some camels had lost and the cameleer sought them. Suddenly he came to a well and saw a beautiful woman saying prayers. He waited her to finish and asked her to say prayer to find the camels and after a while he found them and went to the city happily. The king was in the field and asked him about the camels. He replied that he found them for the sake of prayer of a pious woman".

Women in the Harem: It was common to veil the women and consider them incomplete and deceitful. "Harem was a place including yard and garden with porches and fountains where women lived there and nobody can enter

except the owner and the men of the family and only servants could enter there and they lived in the interior rooms" (Azkaei, 1973). In Bakhtiar Nameh, most of the women were considered incomplete and they were hidden: "women from the royal family could meet the king and nobody could see them or hear their voices".

Politics and common penalties: In that period the penalties were based on the Islam juris prudence and religion. "Religious affairs included private law and some part of criminal law and they were enacted in the scope of the religious scholars and conventional affairs included affairs such as establishing security and order, organizing financial and administrative affairs and there were other affairs which were in the domain of the ruler and his officers". The government considered penalties and policy making essential for survival and empowerment of the country and the king and in other case it caused to destruction of the country. "Politics is a nail to tie the string of the governance tenetwhich needs to establishment".

"When the king was informed about death of the agent he sent a troop to destruct the city and kill the people". "Then he ordered to cut the hands and legs of the thieves and punished them".

"In the situation that crime is an apparent act, making policy is necessary and any delay in punishment causes to neglect. The king should be just and secure his people and enforce the religious rules. The country should be managed by religious orders and politics and the guilty should be punished". "The justice of the king protects him. As the body without soul dies, the country without justice is abolished and the consequence of justice is punishment of the guilty and training of the saviors. When the king delays in establishing justice the people defeat corruption. So, the king ordered to release Bakhtiar".

Rituals and ceremonials of marriage: In any society the primary duty for enacting social customs and moral codes is to establish a firm relationship between man and woman, since marriage is the root of disputes, violation and decline. Marriage ceremony was done differently in different times and places. In Bakhtiar Nameh reflecting marriage ceremonies held in the court, the king married every woman voluntarily and forcibly and this ritual was conducted according to Islam rules and the clergy men read the contract of marriage at presence of witnesses.

Sending messenger for suiting bride: Sometimes messengers were sent to request the daughter of other country: "at first a messenger should be sent to learn the rituals held in China and got familiar with serving the rulers and kings. They appointed Botamam. He came to the king and said: for long time I wanted to meet the king of China and talk about marriage and I know this is your wish".

Sending gifts: When a messenger was sent as a suitor to other king court he took many gifts to the king: "the king

said: prepare and ornament the treasury properties. I want to send them to the king of China and suit his daughter. The ministers told whenever there is no contract it is not possible to send the gifts. We should send a messenger with gifts. They prepared the gifts and dispatched him with jewelries and expensive garments".

Compulsory marriage: Sometimes marriage was done compulsory and the bride could not reject proposition for marriage: "the king asked the daughter of Kamkarthe vizier and persuaded her with properties and wealth. Kamkar came to his daughter and said: marriage with king brings happiness and prosperity butthe daughter rejected and asked his father to inform the king. He came to the king anxiously and told him about his daughter but the king got angry and threatened her. Finally, she married forcefully".

Marriage of convenience: Sometimes a king lost the battle and inevitably gave his daughter to the winner: "he wrote letters: it is obvious that I conquered from Syria to China and I had ordered the messenger to read the letter to the daughter of the king. When the messenger arrived there and gave the Czar the letter he tore it and said: I do not let my daughter to marry him. The messenger came ashamed and said: we are inferior and the king opened his treasury and sent expensive gifts and the Czar persuaded and accompanied his messengers by old wise men for apology and finally they got married".

Dowry and marriage portion: It was common the father of the bride give dowry and the bridegroom give the father of bridethe marriage portion: "he is a great and honorable king. I have provided little dowry and he has paid so much".

Jobs: We find some loyal jobs and common jobs in Bakhtiar Nameh and it is obvious that learning skills and gaining experience in long time caused to succeed in these jobs. These jobs include:

Jeweler: There was a market of jewelries in any city. In chapter three of Bakhtiar Nameh it is mentioned that: "there was a skilled jeweler. He was asked to make jewelry for the king and calculate its cost. When the king saw his skill he chose him as his accompanier".

Astrologers and astronomers: Astrology and fortunetelling through the stars has history as long as human life. "The king returned wounded and his hands and legs were bleeding. The fortunetellers told him that his orders were false. They looked at the stars and told his

fortune and gave glad tidings of his son. He replied that his son was killed by lions. The fortunetellers emphasized the movement of the stars and living of his son”.

Mercantile: The second chapter of Bakhtiar Nameh describes a merchant whose trade was lost. Mercantile had own rules and the merchant should learn these rules. “The merchant should not be greedy and transact by credit and he should be aware of his capital in other cases he loses. The merchant might account his capital and avoid unplanned purchases and for hope that he will be benefitted and he should not lie to the Muslims and unbelievers since lying is a blameworthy act”. The merchants sometimes hoarded grains and products. “At that period, the people were poor and sometimes the products price increased and the merchants hoarded the products and food” (Ravandi, 1965).

Other jobs: Many jobs have been mentioned in this book including:

Diving: The divers were skilled in swimming and they searched undersea to collect shells and pearls. “When the divers saw the merchants recognized them and went to undersea to collect shells and gave them to the merchants. They found six expensive gems deserving the royal treasury and crown and they gave him the gems”.

Attorney and accountancy: In the past the person who was literate and knew mathematics was called attorney and he might be trustworthy. The king and also the aristocrats had attorneys and accountants and they managed their financial affairs. “He appointed him the attorney of his properties and asked him to account his expenditure and he was responsible for loss”.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The role of brigands in the society: In the middle of the second century AH the Iranians rebelled against Umayyad rulers in all over Iran especially in East and Sistan and Khorasan by surveillance of the brigands (Bonab, 2005). This word has similar meanings in various dictionaries. Brigands had specific rules in their lives and gradually they were combined by Sufism (Moein, 1983).

Brigands were respected and they lived differently. On Sorolmali writes: “they were brave, patient, generous, honest and they helped people and never oppressed to others and behaved kindly with captives and protected women”. Berthels writes: “in the Abbasid, Ghaznavid and Seljuk Periods, the brigands were citizens lost their lands and lived in the cities and most of them lived among

common people”. Bakhtiar Nameh has negative attitudes towards this group and visualizes them as robbers, thieves and murderers; however they were brave and chivalries: “that brigand had learned knowledge and literature and he was master in Arabic. The prince had hunted continuously and lived with brigands on the deserts. When he was young the head of the brigands sent him to robbery and when he attacked on a caravan protected the children and took a few properties and returned others”.

“That night the thieves came to the market and killed the merchant and plundered his properties. In the morning the brigand was captured”.

Virtues and obscene: The good and mean people live in a society and virtuous acts are as much as evil acts. Some evil conducts seen in Bakhtiar Nameh include:

Rebellion: The officers sometimes disputed with the king and asked the officers to rebel against him. In this book when the commander in chief knew that the king wants to marry his daughter he got angry and tries to dethrone him: “the commander in chief told: I have served him long years and I am respected one and when he ended his speech all officers told him: we were anxious and now it is time to dethrone him. The commander opened his treasury and gave them gifts and garments and gathered soldiers and suddenly they attacked on the king and surrounded him”.

Secret and illegal relationships: Sometimes a man fell in love with a woman and since he could not marry her he tried to accuse her. In this book we find numerous examples of men and women accusations caused to death: “it is better to say the king that he had sinister intention and had proposed her to come to her bedroom”.

The officers oppressed the people and plundered their properties and captured their wives and daughters: “a drunken officer saw a woman alone and tried to catch her. She said: I am a foreigner and my husband has gone to the village. He took his sword and told her: come with him otherwise I beheaded you”.

Other customs and rituals: Some rituals and customs mentioned once in this book include.

Offering robe: This custom was one of the honored rituals in the past. When a person did a good act or appointed in a post, the king ordered to offer him a robe or garment. These robes and garments differed according to the person’s position and act. “The king ordered to give him a robe and put a special hat on his head”.

Preaching: The kings and governors preached and read sermons when an important even was happened. The sermons included praising and adorning of God and prophet and orders of the king. Some similes refer to specific rituals such as “anyway they read a sermon in the name of the shah”.

Naming and training children: The people liked to have sons so they chose good names for their sons resorting to fortunetelling and they were insensitive to girls: “if the baby is a son call him Rozbeh and if it is girl choose a good name for her”.

Taking refuge of a king in other king: When the soldiers rebelled against a king and dethroned him he took refuge in other king: “now they rebelled against me and there is no hope for rescues in the morning. The queen told it is better to go other country. They will protect us”.

Religious beliefs: The beliefs mentioned in this story are Islamic. “He came to the creek to perform ablution and say prayer. When he ended prayer began his journey”.

CONCLUSION

Any literary work narrates the characteristics and qualities of its time. It should bear in mind that ideas and talents are dependent on the social conditions and for this reason, literary settings and oeuvres are affected by social status. The share of literature in this influence and being influenced is more than the role of philosophers and historians as Philip Sidney points out: “a philosopher deals with abstract issues and a historian tries to find the reality of events without justification and a creative artist complements their incomplete affairs. Indeed, what a philosopher knows should be manifested through the power of imagination and judgment of an artist. Not only literature is an expression of beauty but also a tool for expression of ideas authentic from social perspective. Since literature evaluates human experiences so it has a close relationship with thoughts and ideas background. Literature has illuminated the human intellectual and cultural history and objectified the past ideas”.

In this research, Bakhtiar Nameh has been investigated from socio-cultural perspective and all social aspects have been extracted. This book contains tales and narratives which the author has offered images of the people lives and their social aspects. Manner of marriage, various jobs, men attitude toward women, common penalties and the role of brigands and slaves have been mentioned through these stories which aid us in knowing the Seljuk period. Enrichment of Persian literature with its prose and verse has provided a context that rules, orders, values, cultural and social norms, social classes and ruling bodies can be investigated. Therefore, it can be said that the ideas, personalities and works of the writers and poets are influenced by society depicting people social and cultural characteristics in a period.

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