

Persian Literature in the Light of the Legacy of Mysticism, Morality and the Ethics

Dr. Ahsan Raza
(Assistant Professor
India Arab Cultural Centre,
JMI, New Delhi)

Introduction

Morality and ethics have been a highly discussed topic in all the civilizations throughout history, and it has played a contributing role in the development of humanity. Moreover morality has been a driving force to rule over the society justly in the eras of empires and dynasties. The cultural philosophy based on ethics and morality prompted rulers to compete with each other for the supremacy by capturing minds and hearts of the people, some to make the world virtuous and sometimes mere political gain. On the world stage Persian has been an imminent player throughout the history politically as well as culturally. And literature contributed well in making this participation visible for the audience and of the world. When it comes to the literature wisdom, morality and ethics always remained crucial for the Persian intellectuals. As it has been witnessed the Sassanian Zoroastrians competed with Greek philosophers in the field of philosophy and wisdom in the pre Islamic Period. And in the post Islamic period though the cause of Islam acquired the prominence but it was for very short period. Therefore from the 10th century CE onwards those ethical writings resurfaced starting from the Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. Moral *hekayahs* of Sa'adi, ethical poetry's of hafiz and mystical *Ghazals* of Rumi and mysticism of Sanai won the hearts and minds of the entire World. Here in this brief paper I would try to bring the continuity of those ethical writings and moral lessons which have been preached by the Persian intellectuals to the world time and again.

Depiction of Ethics in Pre Islamic Persian Literature

Before discussing the scholars it is to bear in mind that there was a competition between the Sasanians and the Greek philosophers to claim and rule the virtues of the world like their political rivalry. Even they claimed not only to impress the Islamic ideologies but

also to make it complete through its ethical lessons by the Orientalists and Persian intellectuals alike. It was witnessed that the birth of Islam in the seventh century Arabia astonished the whole world by defeating all the ideals and overpowering all the powerful and mighty kingdoms of the time. Islam also focused well on the topics of morality and ethics among the human society through the scriptures and *Hadiths*. Though it has been debated time and again that Islamic ideals and moral philosophies are based on its preceding philosophies like Greek and Sassanian principals and Persian wisdoms, but it remained a driving force in the Islamic era to maintain the decorum of a just society throughout its history. And it is totally a different topic that who influenced whom and the topic requires a thorough investigation to be elaborated. But here my concern is that the Islamic history tells us that it has been contributed by the Persian cultures and its scholars hugely since its capturing the Persian world in the beginning of Islam's Emergence. It reached its zenith in 11th, 12th and 13th century where the Persian scholars preferred to write in Persian and refocused on the topic of morality and ethics again on the basis of wisdom. Among the scholars whose name shines on top of the list are Ferdowsi, Avicenna, Fārābī, and Sa'di Shirazi who have been celebrated throughout the Persian and Islamic world due to his marvelous works in this genre. Here it is said "This movement reached its apogee in the second half of the 13th century in the work of the poet Sa'dī of Shiraz, who argued that the decisive moral act was persuasion and that it was to be accomplished through literary excellence."The ethical lessons of Persian literature successfully re-imagined themselves and reappeared like a phoenix in the different epochs of the history to serve the human society whenever the humankind needed it.

It is very tough to explore the morality and ethics into the Persian literature without taking into account the historical influence of Sassanian period and its contribution towards it. As the literature review provides us with two major phases of the Persian literature, one is pre-Islamic and other post-Islamic. The interesting point is that the pre Islamic Persian literature is too much influenced by the didactical writings and ethical understanding based on wisdom and virtues because the struggle between goodness and evil was principle point of teaching in the Zoroastrian period of Persia. It has been witnessed that the principles of ethics have been the

driving force for the society and the morality was the axis of cultural conceptions. *Andarsnam* the compilation of short and long works and the works related to *Bozorgmeh* the vizir of Sassanian king are the examples of the pre Islamic didactical writings whose wisdom has been celebrated throughout the Persian history.

Depiction of morality and ethics in Post-Islamic Persian Literature

With the advent of Islam which took over the Sassanian Empire and put an end to the Persian power politically but it has been enriched culturally by the same. Islam in its first century focused on the theological figure and intellectual vitality and on the spirit of inquiry. Though it has been witnessed during that period the rise of Arabic prose literature with its rich vocabulary and the development of poetry into a cosmopolitan literature, but the arts and architectures paintings, ceramics and calligraphy could not get momentum until the thirteenth century. In this regard Persia, Anatolia, Central Asia and India played the imminent role to accommodate, demonstrate and develop these segments of cultural manifestations. And interestingly it took place long after the Golden age of Islam.

The wisdom, the ethics and the political acumen are the Persian remnants and contributing factors which helped the Islamic rulers to establish the Khilafat and even Grand Empires during the Islamic period in different parts of the world at different historical epochs. Persian philosophy and wisdom and the literary works dwindled and has been pushed back by the Arabic language and literature to acquire the center stage till the 9th century CE. Again in the tenth century the Persian scholars and the lobby of intellectuals refocused on its indigenous literature, culture and wisdom. Example of these kinds of works are Ferdowsi's *Shahname* which has been written in the late 10th century CE. Ferdowsi here goes back to his roots and tries to unearth the Persia's historical past and its grandeur through his beautiful couplets where he celebrates the Zorastorian kings of Pre Islamic era. It was the appreciation of the past and inspiration from it which prompted some scholars of the time to call the book *Khiradname* {the book of wisdom} instead of *Shahname*. Here again the wisdom reappears after almost four hundred years and is

being welcomed by the rulers and masses alike to demonstrate the *Hikmat* in the society on the basis of morality and ethics.

Apart from this aspect, the body of literature produced by Ferdowsi (tenth-eleventh century), Nizami (twelve century), Rumi (thirteenth century), Sa'di (thirteenth century), Hafez (fourteenth century) are the most brilliant pieces of Persian literary works which provided the inspiring models for generations in Indian, Anatolian and Central Asian cultural and poetic figures. These Persian literatures produced the paradigm of thoughts, artistic models and philosophical outlooks for the people of Persia as well as the newly conquered regions of India. As the shining Empires of Asia Ottomans, Mughals and Safavids philosophically and culturally was driven by the ideal and ethics of the Persian intellectuals. And it ruled over these lands till the modern notions of west with its philosophical understanding and ideological parameters compelled the people of these parts of the world to rethink the idea of development and civilization.

When it comes to the didactical writing and ethical literatures it continues with the contributions of Sanai, and Unsori. As the morale anecdotes and ethical lessons of Unsori's collection and Sanai's didactical poetries can be attributed as the continuation of the root cause of morality in the Persian literature. If the mysticism of Sanai is well established attribution to the poetry of classical Persian, the "mirror of princes" such as *Qaboosnamah* by Unsor al Ma'ali in prose can be counted a great work to the field of ethics. The contribution of Nezam al Molk the vizir of Seljuq dynasty through his *Siyasatnameh* is another piece of writing which established the socio-political ethics of the time. These works put a great impact on the Persian didactical literature and paved the way for the upcoming marvelous pieces of the ethical writings.

Ethical writings and moral literatures reached its peak with the coming of the Sa'adi Shirazi's *Golestan* and *Bustan*. Here he focused on the ethical writings and didactical literature though his *Hekayah* and *pands*. Though he has produced many other writings but these pieces have made him eternal. Because the aura created by these two books could not be resisted within the boundaries of Persian land it reached to India conquering whole northern plane

of it reaching the bay of Bengal and on the other side created ripples among the literary fragments of the society into Anatolia till Marmara sea. These two books engaged many authors and writers in the Mughal India as well as the Ottoman Turkey. In this genre of literature *Mathnavi* and *Divane* hafez too played the crucial role to spread the literary fragrance of the Persian world to the far flung areas of the world.

The topic of Ethical literature cannot be completed till the mystical writings are not discussed. Though this mystical writing originated from the Islamic thinking based on its spiritual philosophy, but it has been propagated through the idea of Sufism throughout the Islamic world and serves the cause of didactical virtues and ethical values for the human society. This mystical philosophy like other kinds of literary works flourished well in the land of Anatolia and India. And it contributed well to the both cause of Islam and ethics.

In the medieval Persian history a lot of works have been produced on mysticism like other subjects of literature. The bright figures who championed this cause can be enlisted in the following manner. Rumi, Hafiz, Attar, Sa'di, Baba Taher, Najmuddin Kubra, Shams Tabrezi, Bayazad Naastsni, Abul Hasan Kharqani, Shahab al Din Suharawardi, Mansur Al Haj, Omar Khayyam And Jami.

Here it is believed that mystical thoughts are analyzed critically. One can witness the fear-based mysticism in its most detailed and eloquent form; in Rumi, love-based mysticism; in Hafiz the pleasure-based mysticism. Under Rumi's influences, the ethical works of Sa'di (*Bustan* and *Gulistan*); the mystical *Mantiq al-Tayr* of 'Attar, the *Masnawi* of Rumi, and the *ghazals*, or mystico-erotic poems, of Rumi and Hafiz all Pressurizes a thorough reading and analytical approach to the texts and their historical, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

Then comes the broad area of representation to the audience and mystical structures which engaged the audience. Believes E M Ebrahimi and E A Khani "Mystical literature presents a broad area of symbolism to the audience. The feature of symbol is its ambivalence. Mystical symbols have two structures of heavenly and earthly."

Of course the earthly manifests the love *Ishq* where the poet not worships the beloved but also enjoys the grief and sorrow of love. Love's supremacy in Persian lyrics is quite palpable. Explains Bahman Solati, "It is {love} illustrated in a half-lyrical, half-mystical fashion, not only as the almighty dominating all beings but also as God's reason and tenacity." Love and longing demonstrates some of the precious tales in the Persian poetry and forms the choice, layout, and composition of images to portray the primary mystical and morale themes in literature.

Conclusion

Ethical and moral writing has been always a crucial part of the Persian literature and evolved itself with time in different methods of literary format in different phases. It was expressed sometime through the stories while some other time it quenches the thirst of the human soul through *Hekayahs* and *Mathnavis* and even takes the shape of mysticism and ghazels but the message always remains the same. It was the need of this kind of literature which made it so popular and enduring that it reached the half of the world at the time of its zenith and even till date the human morality and virtues cannot be addressed without peeping into the Persian contributions in this regard. But it would be true to say that the present materialistic time needs it more to calm the human greed and selfish attitude.

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