



An Anthropological Perspective: the Impact of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh on the Rituals of the Iranian Tribes

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ABSTRACT: Thinking about the manners, names, and rituals of the Iranian and other societies reveal that Shahnameh and similar works have had significant effects on the concerned nations. Indeed, rituals in every culture, reflect people's beliefs. The value and importance of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh and its epic feature, has been influential among people from different tribes in Iran. It has turned into an inseparable part of people's culture. An attempt is made in this paper to make an anthropological approach to those rituals rooted in Shahnameh. It has not only been influential among the Fars tribe, but also among such tribes like the Lor tribe, that has occupied a great part of Iran ranging from South Azerbaijan to the Southern parts of the Persian Gulf. Most of the rituals are connected with the events mentioned in Shahnameh. The dramatic and structural characteristics have contributed to the introduction and advancement of art and rituals. The impact of Shahnameh on the people has been to the extent that it seems that its heroes belong to the people of the tribes in Iran. An attempt is made in this article to trace the impact of Shahnameh on the culture and rituals of the tribes in Iran, Lor tribe in particular.

Introduction

Ferdowsi's Shahnameh¹ is one of the most important Iranian epic works, which is quite influential in the awakening of Iranian culture. It is not only known in Iran but it has also been known to the people of the world, and has been endowed with functional characteristic.

Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, mirrors the history of the Iranian people and tribes. It represents the identity of the Iranian people. Some historians believe that, it is thanks to Shahnameh that Iran has kept its language and culture after the Arab conquest in the 7th century. Shahnameh is the essence of Iranian nationhood. The origin of the Shahnameh, goes back to a thousand years ago, to the 10th century, when a poet named Abol Ghassem Mansor Ferdowsi collected oral stories, folklore, myths and history of Iran, and put them into verse. As far as the reflection of people's beliefs and rituals is concerned, it has been likened to the Iliad and Odyssey of Homer, or to the Hindu epic Ramayana. It took 30 years of hard work by Ferdowsi to accomplish it. The work dealing with myths, legends, and people's beliefs, focuses on the Iranian historical endeavors, beginning during the period of Persian Empire before the Arab conquest that took place in the 7th century.

It recounts the tale of Jahan Pahlavan Rustam, a hero whose father Zal was abandoned at birth and brought up by a mythical bird; Rustam does not want power, although he has successfully defeated several kings. There's also the story of Kaveh, a blacksmith who saves the nation, by killing the evil king Zahak, who has snakes growing on his shoulders. Every day, beautiful maidens and adolescent boys were slaughtered to feed the snakes, including Kaveh's own son. Shahnameh covers the reigns of different hierarchies and dynasties including Pishdadians, Kianians, ashkanids, and Sasanid dynasties, and has ended up into three different mythological periods (Kiomarth to Fereidoon's kingdom), and historical (Bahman's kingdom to the emergence of Alexander the Great or the end of Achamenidae" (Ghaffari, 2009).

Then there are the love stories. Bijan, the son of a famous knight from one kingdom, falls in love with Manijeh, the daughter of an enemy king from a rival kingdom, and war ensues. When the king exiles the lovers to the wilderness and throws Bijan down a well, Manijeh secretly follows to bring him food and recite words of endearment. Rustam and a band of knights, disguised as merchants, travel the kingdoms to save Bijan.

Despite their age, the stories of Shahnameh remain alive in the Iranian psyche. Couples turn to its pages to name newborn children. Parents read it to their children as bed-time stories. It forms an integral part of the Iranian school

curriculum. It has been considered one of the main sources for the Iranian culture. Ferdowsi has properly depicted the social lives and other anthropological dimensions of the Iranian people in Shahnameh in a very clear language. That is the reason why he is considered as one of the most favorite anthropologists by the Iranian people. This interest has been culminated among different tribes in Iran, because of the clarity of its language and its epic quality; moreover, the epics used by Ferdowsi. However, in spite of Shahnameh's epic quality in portraying wars and the defeat and victories of different heroes, there are other social, cultural and anthropological traits in Shahnameh which are welcomed by the individual tribes in Iran, Lor tribes in particular. Shahnameh has turned into a stable traditional form among the Iranian people;

It has been used in different fields like education, leisure times, motivating the fighters to fight, maintenance of language, establishing connection with other tribes, collective psychotherapy, and finally registering names of people. The tribes in Iran, much before the other societies, have been dependent on Shahnameh. Even the uneducated members of the tribes are interested in Shahnameh. (SalehPoor, 2001)

Although Shahnameh has been the source for many scholarly researches, but its impact on the tribes in Iran has not yet brought to surface. Perhaps the reason for this shortcoming is that researchers working on Shahnameh, have not been familiar with the tribes. It is necessary to know the few individuals who have focused on Shahnameh and its influence in the tribes, have themselves been members of the same tribes. (Amanulahi, 2012)

Ancient Iranian myths of the kind the Shahnameh recounts, are also the basis for what became known in the west as "Fairy Tales"; these ancient myths often involved stories of fairies (Peri), Jinns (Genie) and Divs (Daeva) and Ghouls. The word "fairy" itself is derived from Peri (Persian) (Parvati in Sanskrit), when after the Arab Islamic invasion of Persia, the word was taken west with the Moors as Feri (Arabs had no letter P in their alphabet). These myths then inspired some of the heroic fairy tales of Medieval Europe. After the Arabs' invasion of Iran and the Persian Empire, Ferdowsi created the Shahnameh as a way of preserving these tales and the language that had been banned by the Arabs, and were secretly passed on among Persians to their children. Ferdowsi did not just recount the myths, but he did so in Persian, creating a written reference for the language and ancient Persian myths and customs after Arab invasion. He succeeded, for Iranians speak, read, and write Persian, not Arabic, and many name their children after ancient Persian Kings, Queens, and various characters from these same mythologies

Methodology

The method used in this article is a field-based research and for this purpose, the author has raised questions and interviewed people. The author has also made use of library data and documented theories of relevant and reliable critics.

The Geographical Location of Lorⁱⁱ Tribe in Iran

The place where the Lor tribe lives is placed in the Central plateau in Iran, and adjacent to Zagros Mountains. It covers parts of Khozestan, Fars, Charmahal Bakhtyari, Isfahan, and Lorestan Provinces.

The Impact of Shahnameh on the Rituals and Lives of the Tribes

There seems to be some important customs in Lor tribe, which is similar to the life of a hero in Shahnameh; these similarities are found in language, battle skills, movement from one place to another, the method of migration, social structure and finally the way people behave in the rituals of life. Next to Quran, which is a holy book for the members of the Lor tribe, one can find Shahnameh; both of these books are found in every dwelling place in the Lor tribe.

The language Ferdowsi has used is so comprehensible and simple at some stages that even the illiterate people are able to follow. This simplicity has made those members of the tribe who know Shahnameh's characters well, to even identify themselves with those characters, and make use of those characters in the daily proverbs and conversations.

The influence of Shahnameh has been to the extent that it seems that these tribes have based their moral and social life styles on its mythical stories and heroes. "Whatever the members of the tribe used to do was based on the myths introduced in Sahnameh" (Akasheh,1987). It has been so influential among the members of the tribes, that most of the children, who happen to read it, turn out to be fighters as adults. It has also been a custom while going for war, the members of the tribe used to read Shahnameh, in order to get proper inspiration for victory over their enemies. Rostam has been favored by these fighters as a model. (Nikrooz, 2011)

Ritual is a communicative means for uniting spiritual and material, scientific and special, uranic system, daily expectations, past and present, and other principle structures contributing in the development of individuals' lives. Ritual, as formal modes of conduct, is equally ubiquitous appearing in everything and everyday life, from modes of talk and rules of politeness to elaborate protocols for events of state. Ritual is symbolic social action, mode of communication that implicates individuals in the social order, creating realities whilst expressing ideas and attitudes about them. Rituals are represented through symbols, the performance of a ritual has its own characteristics. Thus, the characteristic of performance can guarantee the certainty of a ritual. (Rothenbuhler, 1988)

Ritual is a kind of behavior that is designed in a serious manner in order to have a symbolic influence on serious life. Ritual is not only a way of thinking, but also a kind of action. It is a kind of performance. It has an aesthetical characteristic and it is a means of communication, in a way a kind of performance. It is performed in order to establish a relationship between the audience, the people, and the concerned ritual; it represents human virtue. It is not rational in any way.

Rituals are not meant for entertainment, but they form parts of serious life. It is not meant for individual satisfaction but is for social and collective satisfaction. It represents social communication and relationship, and it introduces social symbols and orders. The symbols used in the rituals are influential and powerful. (Rothenbuhler, 1988) Rituals are forms of traditional behaviors; it is related to the past of a nation. It is a means of mass communication.

There are many cultural similarities between the mythical and heroic society of presented in the Shahnameh and that of the tribes in Iran, especially among the migrating members of the tribe. These common traits include the boundary between love and lust, the ways men and women mourn their lost beloved, cutting of the hair, tearing one's shirt, scratching their faces, pouring dust over one's headⁱⁱⁱ and cutting the tails of the horses.

Thus most of the rituals and customs present in the Shahnameh, such as, the close relationship between the relatives, simplicity, hospitality, faithfulness, bravery, forgiveness, respect for justice, fighting against cruelty and injustice, are also present in the lives of the members of Lor tribe. These similarities are to the extent that the lives of the people in Lor tribe, seems to be a reproduction and revival of the Iranian mythic period.

Shahnameh has served as a strong means of strengthening the bond among the men and women in the tribe during their fight against the invaders; for it used to arouse the epical feeling of the warriors and help the heroes with their heroic deeds. It has also served as a means of improving Persian language and poetry among the people. (Amanollahi 1374) Perhaps the reason is that these people have felt that they can better identify themselves with the characters in Shahnameh. As it is clear, "manhood and bravery of the men in the tribes has been an important characteristic known to the people of Iran" (Sarami 2001).

Adaptation of Names from Shahnameh Among the Members of the Iranian Tribes

It has been a custom in among the members of the Iranian tribes to adapt names for the newly born children from Shahnameh; these names includes such names like Rustam, Ardeshir, Sohrab, Ardowan, Arzang, Esfandiyar, Zal, Sasan, Syavosh, Farhad, Fereydoon, and so on.

There are names of women chosen from Shahnameh; these names include such names like: Tahmineh, Pooran, Tooran, Rudabeh, Shirin, Golnaz, Pari, Gorafarin, Katayoon, and so on. In most cases, these people choose the virtuous names like: Rustam, Fereydoon, Hajir and Tahmineh, and the wicked names like: Zahak, Gorgin and Goshtasb.

These people in the tribe, sometimes use the names of the places in Shahnameh for their children; these names are like: Iran, Alborz, Khavar, and Zagros. Sometimes, they use the epithets of the characters used in Shahnameh; these are like: Tajbakhsh, Sepahdar, Golshah (Kyomarth), Jahanbakhsh (Fereydon), Nahid (Katayoon)

The Function of Eulogists in the Tribe

In spite of the fact that there were many illiterate people in the Lor tribe, but the shepherds and other farmers used to read Shahnameh. The rich people and the political leaders were the ones who were literate; the latter used to send their children to school to be educated turning them into so called Mullahs. It was a privilege to become a mullah in tribe, because they were able to read Quran and Shahnameh proudly.

There were some women in the tribe that used to read Shahnameh aloud but its epic feature has reduced the interest of these women in the book. The reading of Shahnameh aloud, requires a masculine voice to narrate the victories of the brave heroes and their stories for the audience; thus the lack of women's interest in Shahnameh.

The people in the tribe used to read Shahnameh in order to mourn the death of their beloved; the way mourning took place in the tribe was similar to the way mourning took place in Shahnameh. This was performed mainly for the death of the Iranian heroes and elders.

Those Eulogists who read Shahnameh, new exactly where to make their audience excited; the former are good actors and understand how to communicate with their audience. They knew how to create suspense among the audience by striking their hands together and read loudly.

Those who used to read Shahnameh, were similar to those storytellers who used to tell stories in the cafes, in that they all had the capability to perform and use similar methods of narrating stories.^{iv} These methods of narration enabled them to turn into skilful actors and narrators.

Conclusion

The significant rituals commenced by those tribes living at the Zagros area, are rooted in Shahnameh. People of this region have been living in accordance with what Shahnameh has been teaching them. It has been so influential that the lives of

the people living in the tribal regions has been greatly affected. Shahnameh has been used as a media through which many rituals like festivals, mournings, battles, maintenance of agricultural products, and hunting took place.

Those who used to read Shahnameh did it in different forms, which made the audience either laugh or cry. It made women and young daughters shout with joy. Thus Shahnameh has played an important role in the lives of people living in the tribal areas, and it is because of identifying their life stories with those in Shahnameh, that it has been so important to these people.

Recommendations

The tribes in Iran have been following many traditional rites that have been protecting the Iranian culture and customs. Like the ancient society, the tribal society in Iran has had a great glorified such characteristics like bravery, physical strength, horse riding, shooting, sacrifice, hospitality, tribal prejudice, and many others. Therefore, there are many stories in Shahnameh that are related to the values and culture of the tribal societies in Iran; this can help the modern Iranian society establish a relationship the ancient societies in Iran.

Notes

It was first written by the great Persian poet, Abol Ghassem Mansor Ferdowsi, who was born in the city of Toos, placed in the Northern Province of Khorasan in Iran. It took thirty years for him to complete his work. *Shahnameh* deals with myths of old Persian kings and heroes.

One of the oldest tribes in Iran, lives near the Zagros Mountains.

A way of mourning the death of a beloved or an elder in the Lor tribe.

There are some storytellers who narrate epic tales of the great Iranian heroes while others drink tea in a teahouse.

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