



Attar's Social Thought and His Role in Introducing the Culture of Iran to the world

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Abstract

Considering the widespread cultural competition among the world countries, investigation of Iranian culture in universal system of the cultures is very important. Strong poets and writers help the people of the other societies to get familiar with Iranian culture by their manuscripts. Attar is one of these poets. Attar's sensitivity in this regard has caused to intensify cultural effectiveness among foreign readers. Our mystical literature in the most chaotic social periods of Iran also shows the same live images. Existence of vulgar stories which are out of courtesy and ethics in Attar's masnavi and works are the most artistic image of moral decay of the society which has been showed. Even the literature of the Safavi dynasty (Indian or Esfahani style) sometimes states the major political, social and cultural issues and criticizes governmental organizations.

Keywords: Attar, Literature, Iranian culture, Western culture, Social thoughts, Logbook.

Introduction

It can be mentioned that, real pulse of Iran society beats in Persian poetry, and this suffered nation has attempted during the history to link its bitter real world which has been along with failures and disasters to its ideal and unrealized world, using poetry tool. Persian poem can be considered as the most artistic and mysterious case of documented history of ups and downs in the period after Islam, and is the truest proof to record culture, society and policy of Iran. In the same context it can be mentioned that, literature of Iran is one of the most political and social instances of literature throughout the world. Attar is a committed and patriotic poet who always demands intellectual, economic and cultural growth of Iran. In his poems, the poet's protest voice is heard which is about oblivious by the masters of the country to the people problems and widespread corruption in different governmental spheres.

His sense of responsibility about the people fate and his emphasis on discrimination elimination and justice is highly due to his religious spirit and beliefs. Attar is a mystic poet with religious beliefs, who considers help to eliminate inequalities in society as duty of everybody who is present in the society.

1- Culture

Culture is one of the broadest and most accurate concepts existing in the culture science. The first definition of culture was presented by Tablor (1981) in the book of primary culture. According to Tablor, culture is a complicated set consisting of knowledge, beliefs, rules, customs and any other learned of the human.

2- Social heritage is the cause of culture. This heritage is a store on which many factors are effective; so, the culture has different traits in various societies. So that, if we reflect a little about general



culture (the culture existing in a specific society), we will realize that, each society gives the people certain characteristic and presents their behavior as some patterns. The people are replaced by each other but the society is still stable; so the human in each society feels sincerity with the others and considers him/herself different to the other societies' people through getting common culture (sociology of communication).

3- Each social group has knowledge about its cultural nature and represents it in its behavior and speech, and forms its mass and group characteristics and in this way, cultural identity of each group' element becomes clear.

2- Iranian culture

Iranian culture and civilization has ten thousand years of life the first part of which (7000 years) has been spent for ecological, anthropological and ethnographical tasks. The next 3000 years has been spent for configuration of social, economic, political and cultural relationships of Iran's nation. This culture is composed of two part including artistic-literary culture and some part-cultures including philosophical and mystical culture, theological and religious culture, and native - ethnic culture.

Adaptability is the main trait of Iran's nation culture. Hence, this culture has been able to get positive elements and ward of the negative elements of the other great cultures such as Indian, Chinese, Christian and Arabic-Islamic cultures while interacting to them, and has created a new combination which has both Iranian and global traits; hence, it has kept its identity in the cultural interactions. By a cursory glance to Attar's social thought and his role in

introducing the culture of Iran, its truth becomes clear.

3- Persian language and development of the culture of Iran in Attar's works

Language and literature are important part-cultures which are used to transmit and develop Iranian culture at international level. Language is not only a set of written and oral symptoms. These symptoms include specific cultural and artistic messages and contents of a society. Considering that, the main linguistic model and display of a society is manifested in the literature of society. In order to understand a nation's culture, it is good to refer to the literature of that nation.

Nowadays, Persian literature as a cultural effective factor has passed political and religious borders and has reached cultural borders. For instance, Hafez Court has been translated into at least fifteen worldwide languages, or French translation of the Avesta by William Jones is another instance. His interest to the culture and language of ancient Iran was very much so that, he translated Avesta into French language after learning Pahlavi, Avestan and Persian languages. Silvestre Du Sassy who is called Emam Mostashrefin has left a significant effect on French literature by translating some parts of Tazkarat Al-Olia and Pandnameh of Attar, a collection of Iranian mystical writings. Historically, after the middle ages, there was no literal-cultural foundation in these countries due to religious and political disintegration of European countries, and in the classic age, only a little scientific and empirical literature entered the religions area. Since 18th century, European civilization and literature were changed when romantic style also was generated. Victor Hugo who is one of the founders of



Romanticism style, has considered these changes resulted from the literature of India and Iran. He says, we previously attended the literature of ancient Greek and Roma and now, we note the literature of Iran and India; and Attar's social thought and his role in introducing the culture of Iran to the world has attracted our attention to itself. Some theorists believe that, two stories of Poor and Notre Dame Hunchback have been affected by Attar's Tazkarat Al-Olia. Nowadays, considering strong and broad cultural competition of the world countries and increase of intellectual and scientific abilities of the universal culture has made obvious the necessity of cultural release for every nation. Immigration phenomenon is considered as damage for the Iranian writers. Change in writing style, writing level and feeling of marginalization are apparent changes observed in these people. In terms of cultural aspect, identity of the immigrant writer is changed in the new sociocultural environment. Some actions and reactions are generated in the primary period of stay, and he thinks that, the new environment and its people are different.

4- Reflection of variety of cultures in Attar's works

A successful poet or novelist is aware about qualitative changes and overall trend of the literature in the world. He/she must present personal views in a new way in his/her stories considering ethnic, national, social, historical and cultural traits and conditions. In Attar's works, his special cultural view attracts attention. Religious and cultural environment of his family is the main cause of generating such a view.

5- Reflection of Folkloric culture in Attar's works

Folklore is a collection of experiences and knowledge of the ancients which is common among the people. Nowadays, folklore has been developed. Tales, legends and traditions that are learned from word of mouth, and beliefs and customs related to each life stage are considered as subset of folklore science.

Attar has been inspired in his works by common cultural references among the people to reflect a part of culture common among Iranian people to the external world and specially, sensitivity of these works caused to increase the cultural effectiveness among foreign readers. He believes that, our cultural roots are our eternal realities, and successful writers and poets can present some slices of the life with specific cultural characteristics (Dehbashi and Karimi). The elements existing in Attar's works include:

1- Sleep: which has a particular position among public culture; and dream interpretation has cultural-religious origin. Dream in prayer has supernatural powers that can generate a fact in awakening world. In Nezami's Makhzan Al-Asrar and Attar's Manteq Al-Teyr we see some narrations in which sinner dead people are seen in dream and their status is asked there (Manteq Al-Teyr). The dream of Sheikh San'an in Manteq Al-Teyr also shows his problems and plights in the hereafter.

2- Sorcery and fairy

In Egypt the religion was along with magic as everywhere. Morian knew magic and acted to it. They made some fetishes and sculptures that were remedial (Haft Peykar).

Therefore, in Shahname, Zahhak is the origin of sorcery and Fereydoun is its annihilator (Ferdowsi). The belief of fairy and magic have been mixed with



the culture of this land and have been the origin of many narrations and stories. Attar believes that, sorcery is resulted from the inner devil that if enter the human's heart, the human spirit tends to magic. In the 25th bit of Elahinameh where a son told his father: I want to learn a magic by which I can turn any moment into a different form; the father told him: devil has dominated you. In Mosibatnameh also, Attar calls the human and charm and mentioned their being dominated and captive.

Also, in Marzbannameh it has been mentioned that, fairy was captured by the children.

In Hezaro Yek Shab also it has been stated that, jinni and the devil were imprisoned in a copper vat. Sometimes, the people seek help from the wizards to reach their goals; as Bouhafaz asked a Jewish wizard for his beloved maid, and the wizard commanded him not to pray and call the name of Allah and do good works for 40 days.

3- Solar Eclipse

Iranian people believed that, moon and sun eclipse is because, dragon takes it in its mouth, and they must make firework, play an instrument and do archery to afraid the dragon.

Attar's Manteq Al-Teyr emphasize the terms sunlight, sun and lightness, and uses them as opposite of shadow and darkness:

- 1- Sun the face of God and its light is the veil.
- 2- It is incentive that is hidden in the spirit.
- 3- Phoenix
- 4- Death: Attar has rehabilitated completely cultural-religious custom of death and funeral dominant on the distraught family. On if Iranian belief is that, if

someone dies at night should not be alone, and pile should be burned in his/her side. Death is the subject which is repeated very much; particularly in some narrations are stated in the poems that warn the people not to be arrogant and deceived by the world, and he warns the people to ignore this mortal world. All people are equal in death and this subject is interesting when is stated by the nuts. In the past, great stones were put on the grandees' sepulchers strong patterns were carved. Of course, sepulchers of the kings were in a specific place and they mostly had family sepulchers and made disguise sepulchers for their dears. The sepulchers of stealers and poor people were separated from public cemetery. Gebre, Jewish and other religions' followers had their particular cemeteries. It seems that, there has been a specific piece of land in cemeteries for sheikhs and imams and religious leaders; as Mohammad Bin Monavar talks about Heyrah cemetery where Sheikh Bo Saeed went to the sepulcher of the sheikhs (Asrarnameh). Abo Al-Fazl Hasan was told: we will bury you somewhere sheikhs and leaders have been buried (Attar's Tazkarat Al-Olia). The cemeteries always have been the den of wise imbecile people who now the secrets. They have stated many secrets on the graves and have looked at the world and its work as lesson (Asrarnameh); while dervishes and poor people were buried in a different way; as Mohammad Bin Aslam died, and his body was covered by his old cloak and the felt that he sat on it, was put on him (Attar's Tazkarat Al-Olia). Attar asked his father who was dying that, how are you? His father answered: what should I say? I am so wondered and know nothing else. The time was in greatness and I was useless throughout my life (Asrarnameh).

- 5- Intercalating the folk lyrics in Attar's works



Nowadays, Persian folk poems which are mentioned by the people are called lyric. Lyric is one of the most attractive and popular cultural-national effects of Iran that have historical value, artistic and technical trait, specific sociocultural applications and impacts. In order to reflect another part of the rich culture of Iran, Attar puts a lyric among his story which can be considered as lyrics of love or actually, a debate between two persons. Moreover, he uses folk lyrics as a modern theme: ordinary people are the main characters of his stories; by doing it, Attar made a great change in the literature. In Attar's stories, all people categories are involved who talk about injustices, wishes, and suffers. The persons of his stories are the kings and historical characters. In his stories, Sultan Mahmoud is shown with an angelic face and his love is introduced as a heaven love. In fact, love is the source of Attar's stories.

6- Religious culture reflection in Attar's works

Attar has reflected cultural-religious thoughts during his stories.

1- Orisons

A beldam asked Abo Saeed Abo Al-Kheyr to give her an orison for her gaiety since, she could not tolerate the difficulties. Sheikh said: I have done your request but, I found nothing (Manteq Al-Teyr). Sheikh Jarjani was asked about his no tendency to hear; he answered: there is a lamenting in my heart which if comes out, everybody will be lamenting or dead; so, how dance can be my treatment.

God: I am miserable of your way, and I have been involved with you and I do not know that, where I am from and who I am. I am so confused and I do not know what I should do (Manteq A-Teyr).

2- To praise the religion's Imams: Mourning for the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and heart-rending incident of Karbala has a specific position and effect in Iranian culture. In other word, this culture is the symbol of ideology, Shia identity and Iranian nationalism. Sincerity and devotion and praise to the Lord of the righteous and his true faith is based on his great belief. He composed many poems about Imam Hossein (AS) and adulated him for many times in his works. His love about Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) is obvious and he considers Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) as the manifestation of completeness; and it is the reason of his love (Mosibatnameh). This love can be understood by the praises given in introductions of his poems. He believes that, his abilities for reaching the mysteries and facts is due to his spiritual linkage to Prophet Mohammad (PBUH).

Sacrifice causes long life and the purpose of this act is to make a relationship between the human and his/her God (Ferdowsi). In myths, sacrifice philosophy is to increase the power of human and Gods (Ferdowsi).

The story of Ishmael's sacrifice by Abraham which is a divine test, and a sheep was sacrificed instead of him, is also another instance of sacrifice ritual in Torah (Manteq Al-Teyr).

7- Comparison of Eastern and Western culture

In Attar's work, an Eastern culture from West orientation is stated during the story in order to highlight. In Attar's view, the today science is discoverer of unknowns which have been mentioned by the religion; but, the human has ignored it. Most of these raiders are related to a period of his life in which he read and thought and wrote Quran. Attar interpreted many Quran's verses in this period and



attempted to adapt Quran's words and science. For instance, he considers atomic explosions as the resurrection mentioned in Quran.

8- Comparison of the people in terms of cultural depth: importance of scientific and cultural reserves of Iran.

Although, Attar's thoughts and opinions are limited and are related to only specific points, sometimes Attar's thought passes international border and is presented as global thought. Peace and altruism are the personal characteristic of Attar which have been indicated in many poems. Accordingly, Attar asks the human in many poems to eliminate international borders and make a global village. Although, this thought is the same with that is proposed by cosmopolitanism school followers, his thought cannot be limited as a specific school. In fact the principles of Attar's thought is different to cosmopolitanism poets, Attar's thought is idealistic and looks for a world that is fully peace; so that, all humans consider everywhere around the world as their home, and all lands have the same government and law. The greatest concern of Attar is that, civilization is away many miles from morality and spirituality, and he always emphasizes that, knowledge and civilization minus the ethic is equal with the world (Mokhtarnameh). In Attar's view writing is a kind of expressive tool by which durability and globalization power increase. Attar believes that, closeness of the poems to the actual concept of the people life is a main criterion of globalized literary works.

Conclusion

It is found that, the current human society has a great position both at macro and micro level in Attar's thought. He is an Iranian poet who has hardly attempted to show social problems of Iran society and also, he has been worried to modify global society. And has given guidance in both cases. Science and civilization are the most frequent subject in Attar's social thought. His goal in all these subjects is to invite people to human perfection and the revival of religion and ethics. Attar's words are affected by the human's mission being forgotten. If he talks about cosmopolitanism, his thought is not political and does not pursue any specific goal, and if he complains politicians and social corruption, he has no personal intention. In all these cases, he has been a pacifist and altruistic human and has asked justice, truth and human empathy. Attention to Attar's poems shows that, never has considered himself belonged to a specific class of the society. Hence, Attar is a completely social poet whose considerable portion of poems has served humanity. His words are enough to prove this claim.

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