

A Study of People's Beliefs in Saadi's Anthology *Golestan*

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ABSTRACT Folk literature has been an important media through which people's beliefs and dreams are expressed. These beliefs have been displayed through different literary forms including prose, poetry and narratives. *Golestan* written by the Persian poet, Saadi, is one of such outstanding literary works which on reading brings to surface people's beliefs. The work is not only endowed with literary advantages, but it also makes use of anthropological and historical issues relevant to the contemporary society of the poet. *Golestan* has been written during one of the most troublesome and controversial periods of the Iranian history. In writing this article, and in order to gather data, the researcher profits from qualitative research and instruments such as observation and interviews with Iranian elders. The narratives in Saadi's *Golestan* reflect lives, customs and beliefs of the people living in the seventh century A.D. In this article an attempt is made to trace the beliefs of the Persians in *Golestan* and the way it reflects people's cultural and aesthetic characteristics.

INTRODUCTION

Folk literature, also called folklore or oral tradition, denotes the lore (traditional knowledge and beliefs) of cultures having no written languages. It consists of prose and verse narratives, poems and songs, myths, dramas, rituals, proverbs, riddles, and so on. The folk literature of each nation deals with its culture, thus reflecting the social and cultural realities of people's lives and beliefs; it is considered as an evolution of people's thoughts and manners. It has survived because it consists of stories, poems and songs which are entertaining and which embody the cultural system and fundamental human truths followed by people for many centuries.

Folk literature, regardless of its place of origin, seems clearly to have arisen to meet a variety of human needs, including the need to explain the mysteries of the natural world, to articulate people's fears and dreams, to impose order on the apparent random, even chaotic, nature of life, and finally entertain people and societies. Persian folk literature is not an exception. It has acted as a fruitful tree whose root has origin in the lives of people and has been quite important in the development of people's talents. Persian folk literature does not only share its traits with the written and formal literature, but also displays the anthropological perspectives.

In almost all of the societies, people's beliefs have established themselves as inseparable parts of people's lives, thus a need for a deeper research into the unknown social and psy-

chological aspects of people's lives. Folk literature is not only entertaining but also influential in educating people. Since ancient times our ancestors have been responsible for informing their children of moral and conventional principles and subsequently encouraging the great thinkers of the past to express bitter truth in the forms of sweet tales, narratives, proverbs, interpretations and common idioms. That is the reason why such prominent figures like Ave Cina¹, Shahab-ul-din Sohrevardi², Rumi³, Saadi⁴ and so many other Persian poets and philosophers have turned to legends, allegories and folk tales in order to express their didactic thoughts.

The pioneers of folk literature belonged to the common people and they were familiar with people's way of life, choosing subjects dealing with common issues. As far as history, anthropology and sociology are concerned, it is important to focus on such literature, and as indicated earlier "folk literature has emerged centuries before the beginning of historical endorsement of man's life"; this is the only hope which enlightens the dark history (Anzabinejad 1975). Those who have written the history of our country, have rather described the events pertaining to conquests, defeats and victories of kings and rulers than the lives of the ordinary people.

Folk culture and literature in Iran are one of "the intact and valuable sources that throw light on the spirit of life and philosophy. Using symbols and metaphors, it shapes the sense of creative and artistic men and shows them in action" (Anasori 1980). Different societies have

different ways to show beliefs and opinions. Iranian folk culture, through the exciting and sensational fictions and folkloric songs, transfers the message and voice of its nation to the modern generation (Anasori 1980). Thus whatever studies done on the folk literature could be relevant to the researches done in the field of sociology the result of which is influential in anthropology and development of our ancestor's thoughts. In this article the author has made an attempt to analyze different aspects of people's beliefs in Saadi's *Golestan* which belongs to one of the most controversial periods of the history of Iran (Mongol period).

Jamal Khansari was the first Iranian writers who referred to people's customs in a book entitled *Aghayed-ul-Nesa*, also named *Colsum Naneh*. Dekhoda and Jamalzadeh were two writers who introduced common expressions used by people into prose. Sadegh Hedayat was one of the prominent Persian writers who skillfully produced Persian folk literature and introduced people's beliefs and their effects on the latter's culture. His two major works are *Osaneh* (1930) and *Neyrangestan* (1932).

Katozian has made an appropriate reference to Saadi in his work. He has summed up Saadi's humanistic attitudes towards man and his position in the world by describing the latter vividly (Katozian M 2010). Another Persian literary critic, Kavous Hassanli, has presented a subject-based guide to Saadi's works which refers to many other works including articles and books ranging from the year 1967 to the present time. He believes that Saadi's *Golestan* is an outstanding work which cannot be compared with any other preceding literary work. "It functions not only as a reflection of Saadi's greatness in professing man's identity in a complicated world but serves as a manifestation of man's quest for truth" (Hassanli K 2012). In another work Hassanli points out to the role Saadi has played in promoting culture among different classes of people including the ordinary and the educated. He considers Saadi as the most influential Persian poet, after Ferdowsi, who has paid attention to the cultural upheaval of people in Persia (Hassanli K 2012).

Some prominent European literary figures have referred to Saadi's *Golestan*. Chief among these writers is the German poet Goethe whose *West-Oestlicher Divane* has made an appropriate appreciation of *Golestan*. The French writer

Andre du Ryer was the first European to present Saadi to the West, by means of his French translation of *Gulistan* in 1634. Adam Olearius followed soon with a complete translation of the *Bustan* and the *Gulistan* into German in 1654. The great English poet and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson who read Saadi only in translation, compared his writing to the Bible in terms of its wisdom and the beauty of its narrative. Saadi is well known for his aphorisms, the most famous of which, *Bani Adam*, calls for breaking all barriers: The poem is translated by M. Aryanpoor as: "Human beings are members of a whole, / In creation of one essence and soul. / If one member is afflicted with pain, / Other members uneasy will remain. / If you've no sympathy for human pain, / The name of human you cannot retain!" (Aryanpur 1973). Praising Persian literature as outstanding, Edward Browne believes that there has been "an inadequate judgment of the intellectual activity of that ingenious and talented "Persians (Browne 1960).

Theoretical Framework

Gulistan is mainly in prose and contains stories and personal anecdotes. The text is interspersed with a variety of short poems, containing aphorisms, advice, and humorous reflections. Saadi demonstrates a profound awareness of the absurdity of human existence. Following Iranian Sufis and dervishes, he believes that the fate of those who depend on the changeable moods of kings is contrasted with the freedom of the dervishes. One of the important characteristics of Saadi is his attempt to make a profound anthropological approach in his *Golestan*. He has referred to the shortcomings and weaknesses of people in the narratives in *Golestan*. All these tales and details reflect Saadi's realistic attitude towards people's lives; he intends to display the bitterness and sweetness of people's lives. Saadi's words throughout *Golestan* and other works show his experience and knowledge of people's passions: "Whoever sits with the wicked, although least affected, is accused of the latter's ways, and if he goes to a taphouse he is accused of drinking" (Saadi 2004).

Saadi's friendship with different types of people and his familiarity with their conducts has encouraged him to write about people with different status including kings, beggars, virtuous, naked, merchants, torturers, drunks, and so on,

and even women. Most of Saadi's works are inspired by folklore and this is the reason why his works have remained fresh and lively.

Objectives

1. Investigating people's beliefs in Saadi's *Golestan*.
2. Investigating the importance of Persian folk literature in Iranian people's culture.
3. Investigating the effect of narratives in Saadi's *Golestan* on life of ordinary people.

General Purpose

The general purpose of this article is to study people's beliefs as used in Saadi's *Golestan*

METHODOLOGY

As an Iranian, the researcher, in order to gather data, has used such instruments like observations and interviews with Iranian people who are familiar with Saadi's *Golestan* and his intention in writing the narratives in *Golestan*. The author has used library and descriptive – analytical method and has used works written by other scholars pertaining to Persian literature. The researcher has also made use of such valuable works like those of Sadegh Hedayat and Ali Blok-bashi.⁵

RESULTS

Although religions all over the world forbid lies, Saadi, following people's beliefs, considers expedient lies more acceptable than seditious truth which might be dangerous. In one of *Golestan*'s narratives he states:

"When a man is in despair his tongue becomes long and he is like a vanquished cat assailing a dog. I heard a padshah (king) giving orders to kill a prisoner and in turn the helpless and despairing fellow began to insult the king using foul expressions" Saadi adds: *Who washes his hands of life / Says whatever he has in his heart. / In time of need when flight is no more possible, / The hand grasps the point of the sharp sword.*

When the king asked what he was saying, a good-natured vizier (minister) replied: 'My lord, he says: Those who bridle their anger and for-

give men are favored; for God loved the beneficent.' The king, moved with pity, forbore taking his life, but another vizier the antagonist of the former, said: 'Men of our rank ought to speak nothing but the truth in the presence of padshahs. This fellow has insulted the king and spoken unbecomingly.' The king being displeased with these words, said: 'That lie was more acceptable to me than this truth thou hast uttered because the former proceeded from a conciliatory disposition and the latter from malignity; and wise men have said: "A falsehood in conciliation is better than a truth producing trouble." 'He whom the shah follows in what he says / It is a pity if he speaks anything but what is good" (Saadi 2004).

The legend of "The fur making wolf" is a famous narrative used in *Golestan*; it confirms the idea that this story has been prevalent among the people of that time. It is accepted that sitting with devil leads to wickedness. Both the fur making wolf and the wicked men are expected to teach evil.

Most of the people from Fars⁶ province believe that the term "*kheir*" (meaning "no" in Persian) is used in conversations in order to bring blessings. Saadi uses this word when he recalls: "Once I was talking to the scientists living in Damascus when a young boy approached and asked: 'Is there anyone who knows Persian?' People pointed at me and I said to the boy '*kheir ast*'" (Saadi 2004) the word "*kheir*" has ambiguity, serving as a way of negation and also displaying blessings.

"Dakhil bastan" (Tying a piece of cord on a tree)⁷ in order to have one's wishes fulfilled is another important action which conveys the beliefs of Saadi's contemporary people. In a narrative Saadi refers to this belief and recalls:

Once I was invited to an old man's house. The old man was rich and had a son. He said that he had always desired a son, so he used to visit to a tree and tie a cord and God finally fulfilled his desire. Meanwhile I overheard the conversation between his son and his friends; the boy said that he wished he could find that tree and tie a cord wishing for the early death of his own father. The old man happily thought of his son as a smart boy not knowing that the latter wished him dead.

Saadi adds: *Years passing by / But thou never visit father's grave / What did thou do for thine father / Expecting thine son to do for thee!* (Saadi 2004).

People in most of the countries consider owl a sinister and ominous bird, and believe that if an owl appears in a prosperous land, it will turn the land into a ruined place. Another belief indicates that owl is always the carrier of bad news. This belief has been persistent during Ferdowsi time too and Ferdowsi,⁸ the Persian poet, has referred to this bird in his famous epic *Shah-nameh*. The origin of this belief goes to the ancient Persian myths. Saadi says: "A heart breaking news thou may / O Nightingale, be silent that the other brings / Thine duty is to inform us of news spring / Let the owl bring the bad news" (Saadi 2004). The nightingale is advised not to bring bad news but it should let the owl do it, since the latter is the carrier of dark news.

Saadi refers to another belief pointing out the ring men wear on the left hand which is believed to bring luck. In one of his stories he says: "A sage was asked: 'why should people wear ring in the left hands, while the right hand is believed to be virtuous?' he replied: 'You don't know that the virtuous are deprived'" (Saadi 2004).

Raising pickles and sour products was believed to be ominous; it was believed that this act would lead to unpleasant results. In a maxim, Saadi points out to this belief and says: "the teeth of all men are blunted by sourness, but those of *qazi* (judges) by sweetness." He adds: "The ghazi whom thou bribest with five cucumbers / would prove that ten mellow-fields are due to thee" (Saadi 2004). In other words, it was believed that at that time some judges were so corrupted that they would take pleasure in owning forbidden properties and wealth.

People were in search of eternity and survival, therefore this belief also persisted in the culture and even folk literature of the Iranian people. This attitude towards life was presented in different forms: The fountain of life, the water of survival, Khezzr water, and so on (Yahaghi 1990). In the Persian legends it is believed that Alexander and Khezzr have reached the water of eternity after crossing many obstacles; this increases the importance of this water. Saadi makes use of this belief in *Golestan* when he says: "The sages believe that the wise would not buy water of eternity, since a reasonable death is more preferred to a contemptuous everlasting life". In another place Saadi points out to this belief and says that Alexander tried hard to find the eternal water, but instead it was someone else who drank

it and gained eternal life: "Thou heard of Alexander's trial in the dark course, / But drank another of the eternal water" (Saadi 2004).

Peacock is considered a heavenly bird. The Jews and Muslims believe that peacock has been helpful in tempting Adam and Eve, thus they rarely raise peacocks (Javan A 1988). Saadi has also referred to peacock in *Golestan*: "Last night I was in love, as gay as a peacock / But today as agonized and writhing as a snake". Last night I was so gay in love, excited and happy like a peacock, but today I am in loss and far removed from my beloved, suffering and writhing like a snake. It was also believed that peacock was endowed with such a beauty given by God, that it was created with a pair of ugly legs so that it would not turn proud of its beauty. Saadi refers to people's belief about the beauty of peacock and says: "A sage was invited to a party and people began exaggerating while describing him and his greatness; the sage told the people: 'I am great because I am knowledgeable'". Saadi intends to say that people should avoid exaggerating the beauty of individuals and other creatures, for every great man has a flaw and no one is perfect. "Admired is peacock for its beauty / But ashamed it is of its ugly legs" (Saadi 2004). Peacock's feather is also considered sacred by people, that is why they keep it in between the pages of their holy books.

Other animals like dogs are also used by Saadi in *Golestan* in line with people's beliefs. Dog possesses two characteristics, positive and negative. As far as the negative aspect of dog is concerned, it stands for dirt and wickedness, and the positive aspect of dog is its loyalty. Saadi says if a dog falls into a pool of mire, the pool turns dirty. He further says: "If a pool is filled up of mire / With a dog within, it turns dirty". As far as dog's loyalty is concerned, he says that: "A dog never forgets a piece of food / It never turn its back to thee" (Saadi 2004).

There was a belief among people that whenever family members missed a dear one, they would write his or her name on a horseshoe and throw it in fire; in this way they believed that as long as the horseshoe remained in fire, the dearly missed individual would love and miss his or her country and family (Hadayat S 1963). Saadi has also referred to this belief in *Golestan*: "It is related that the *qazi* of Hamadan, having conceived affection towards a farrier-boy and the horseshoe of his heart being on fire, he sought

for some time to meet the latter, roaming about and seeking for opportunities." Here Saadi states: "That straight tall cypress my eyes beheld, / It robbed me of my heart and threw me down. / Those wanton eyes have taken my heart with a lasso. / If thou desirest to preserve thy heart shut thy eyes (Saadi 2004).

Ogre has been prevalent among the people of Middle East since old times. The origin of this monster goes back to the time when devils were active tempting men and "God decided to send them away; some were burned, some were thrown into the oceans and transformed into whales, and some were thrown into the deserts and were transformed into ogres" (Ghazvini 1995). The masses of people know this monster as a monster with a "horrifying mouth and teeth whose body is covered with black hair and his dwelling place is the dry deserts and the ruined buildings. His hands and legs resemble those of panthers, strong enough to kill a person with a sudden blow. The monster used to wait for the travelers in the dark of night and kills them (Hedayat 1963). It is also believed if a human being stabs an ogre in the head with a sharp pin, the monster becomes his obedient slave forever, fulfilling his master's wishes (Zandi 2004). Saadi has also made use of ogre in *Golestan* when he refers to a story of a pilgrim who happened to sleep under a kind of thorn named Moghilan, not knowing that this place was the dwelling place of ogres. "It happened that one night while traveling towards Mecca, I decided to sleep but a cameleer tried to persuade me not to sleep there and keep walking towards Mecca, since it was safer for me leaving the place. He advised me to continue on my way lest I might be killed by an ogre there."

Canopus is the second brightest star in the sky which is seen rarely (once in a year) and it disappears immediately. It was believed that those who were seen rarely were called "Canopus star". According to people's belief, this star has been responsible for the color of Edim and some fruits (AbadiBavil A 1976). Saadi also makes use of Canopus in a story dealing with the effect of education. One of his narratives deals with this effect.

A *padshah* entrusted a tutor with the care of his son, saying: 'this is thy son. Educate him as if he one of thy own children.' He kept the prince for some years and strove to instruct him but could affect nothing, whilst the sons of the tutor made the greatest progress in accomplishments

and eloquence. The king reproved and threatened the learned man with punishment, telling him that he had acted contrary to his promise and had been unfaithful. He replied: '*O king, the instruction is the same but the natures are different.*'

Although both silver and gold come from stones,

*All stones do not contain silver and gold
Canopus is shining upon the whole world
But produces in some places sack-leader
and in others adim (Saadi 2004).*

Saadi's *Golestan* also contains some morals shared by his contemporary people. In one of such stories he talks about man's journey to the other world. He says:

I noticed the son of a rich man, sitting on the grave of his father and quarrelling with a dervish-boy, saying: 'The sarcophagus of my father's tomb is of stone and its epitaph is elegant. The pavement is of marble, tessellated with turquoise-like bricks. But what resembles thy father's grave? It consists of two contiguous bricks with two handful of mud thrown over it.' The dervish-boy listened to all this and then observed: 'By the time thy father is able to shake off those heavy stones which cover him, mine will have reached paradise.'

An ass with a light burden,

No doubt walks easily.

A dervish who carries only the load of poverty

Will also arrived lightly burdened at the gate of death

Whilst he who lived in happiness, wealth and ease

Will undoubtedly on all these accounts die hard.

At all events, a prisoner who escapes from all his bonds

Is to be considered happier than an Amir taken prisoner (Saadi 2004).

An important moral behind people's belief is friendship and loyalty. Saadi says: "*The friendship of pure men, whether in thy presence or absence, is not such as will find fault behind thy back and is ready to die for thee before thy face. Who brings the faults of another to thee and enumerates them will undoubtedly carry thy faults to others.*" He adds: "*In thy presence gentle like a lamb / In thy absence like a man-devouring wolf*" (Saadi 2004).

The belief in fate has been a persistent issue in the lives of people in different cultures. Most of the people believe that each phenomenon in life is related to fate which is considered as an inevitable flow that carries whoever happens to be in its way. Man's fate is predetermined and it is believed that man has no power to escape it. Saadi's *Golestan* is not an exception. Saadi believes in fate and refers to it in his work. He says: "The elders have said that affluence is not due to endeavor but to fate". He adds: "None can obtain riches by force / One endeavors but to no avail / If thou be wise as thou canst / Dark fate outdoes bright wisdom" (Saadi 2004).

Another important belief among people is their opinions of stars. It was believed that stars played important roles in determining people's fates. People considered sky a mysterious place where God and other angels were present and each man is assigned with a certain star; the star is believed to determine fate of the concerned individual. It is based upon this belief that such maxims like "our stars are not alike" or, "he has no star in the sky" persist in our culture. In one of his stories in *Golestan*, Saadi refers to cruel people whose fate and stars do not match: "There is no worse a star than a masochist / who will be left alone and helpless in the end" (Saadi 2004).

DISCUSSION

An important feature of *Golestan*, which is not displayed so far, is its strange connection with people's beliefs, lives and environment. Saadi's personal experiences and wonderful culture of his own contemporary people have been used in the book. It is through these elements that *Golestan* has been known by the people almost all over the world. Saadi's *Golestan* has been the most influential work in Iran. Most of the poems, tales and maxims used by ordinary people in their daily lives are included in Saadi's *Golestan*. Saadi's distinct use of words has been so effective that his work has not only portrayed a world of beauty, experience and knowledge for his contemporary people but it is still considered as a model for us who live in the 21st century. The work is endowed with such a wonder and excellence that it forms an inseparable part of Persian language. In order to understand Saadi's work better, it is expected that the readers of the work know the beliefs shared by them all.

CONCLUSION

Saadi is an anthropologist who knows the characteristics of different nations and cultures. He has made a wonderful attempt to present evils and virtues of his contemporary people. In *Golestan*, we encounter two types of people: those who are Godly and consider all creatures of the world obedient and living in the ways of God, and those who are hypocritical and possess different ideas and thoughts. This book also refers to different subjects: spiritual love, physical love, those who devote themselves to humanity and are endowed with greatness, those who are selfish and low, and finally those who have dark characteristic and they are ignorant at the same time. *Golestan* also refers to different places; this shows that what Saadi has tried to show in his book is a reflection of realities of life. Saadi does not intend to show utopias, like the other philosophers. What is most important for him is to reform the present conditions of his contemporary society and people. However, he does not approve of the dominating conditions in his society; he recommends a moral reform, morality that is practical. Therefore the type of utopia which is not practical cannot be found in *Golestan*. Saadi touches the real.

Saadi has also created his works based on the ruler-ruled relationship, therefore, in *Golstan*, he refers to the rulers' duties and conducts and then pays attention to other social groups. He tries to admonish these rulers to reconsider their conducts. These advices have been useful during Saadi's times and later on. He does not only describe the relationship between the rulers and ruled but he addresses the whole society. He talks about those characteristics people ought to stick to. He does not intend to define justice but to preach social injustices. He insists upon people's equal rights and, thus taking up the duty of criticizing the rulers in the first section of *Golestan*.

Saadi indicts cruelty and injustice; this is done by highlighting virtuous conducts. This kind of highlighting encourages the reader to be good and virtuous. He does not negate anything, because such negation might produce unpleasant reaction on the part of people. He gives hope to people, this is evident in what we have earlier mentioned about the preference of expediential lies to incensive truth. What is important for Saadi is what pleases individuals and societies. He ex-

tracts these pleasant issues from his contemporary people's beliefs and customs and makes use of his eloquent language to transfer them through his work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the world, there are many literary works belonging to different nations which display the beliefs of those nations. Therefore the research on these works can be helpful in a better recognition of people's spirit and identity. It makes people have a better communication with their folk literature.

NOTES

1. Ibn Sîna (980-1037), commonly known as Ibn Sînâ or Avicenna, was a Persian philosopher, who wrote almost 450 treatises on a wide range of subjects, of which around 240 have survived. In particular, 150 of his surviving treatises concentrate on philosophy and 40 of them concentrate on medicine.
2. Shahâb ad-Dîn Yahya ibn Habash as-Suhrawardî was an Iranian philosopher, a Sufi and founder of "Oriental Theosophy", an important school in Islamic mysticism that drew upon Zoroastrian and Platonic ideas.
3. Rumi (30 September 1207 – 17 December 1273), was a 13th-century Persian Muslim poet, jurist, theologian, and Sufi mystic.
4. Saadi, was one of the major Persian poets of the medieval period. He is recognized for the quality of his writings, and for the depth of his social and moral thoughts.
5. Sadegh Hedayat (February 17, 1903, Tehran — 4 April 1951, Paris, France) was Iran's foremost modern writer of prose fiction and short stories.
6. A Province in the Southern part of Iran, once the capital of Achaemenids.
7. It is a custom amongst some sects of Muslims who believe that if they tie pieces of cord on certain trees, their wishes will be fulfilled.
8. Hakîm Abu'l-Qâsim Ferdowsî Tûsî (940–1020 CE) was a highly revered Persian poet. He was the author of the *Shahnameh*, the national epic of Iran and related societies.
9. He is believed to be a holy individual who happened to have drunk water of eternity and in this way he seems to have outdone Alexander who was supposed to have been the first one who had found the aforementioned water.

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