

Dramatic Elements in the Savar Chaseh among Bakhtiyari Tribe

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ABSTRACT In this paper, an attempt is made to study the *Savar Chavaseh* ritual among *Bakhtiyari* people. *Savar Chavaseh*, which means a person sitting in a reversed position while riding an ass, is a ritual, which is intended to punish a convict or a criminal who happens to disturb and bring accusation to his / her family. The author has chosen *Bakhtiyari* people, located in the Southern province in Iran, Khuzestan, to commence the study. He has made use of a qualitative ethnographical method and interview devices. The result shows that the *Savar Chavaseh* is not only a dramatic ritual but also, as far as performance is concerned, it uses such elements like plot, actor, dialogue, stage, music, costume and audience.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between anthropology and art has been an important debate in the recent years. Anthropologists have focused on the role played by art in societies; they have been interested in folk rituals, music, dance, etc. For example, the drama, which is based on rituals, has come from people of a land with a deep history (Shahbazi 2014).

The variety of societies and rituals “necessitates a better understanding of elements and other factors forming each nation’s rituals, for the people of different places have their own special beliefs. Ritual, as a kind of drama, has been turned into a media for communication through its depiction of people’s feelings and traits” (Anasori 2006).

In order to trace the dramatic elements of rituals through collection of proper data, one must focus on the background of these elements with special attention to mythical, imaginary, social, economical and religious aspects of these rituals and their themes. It should always be remembered that these rituals are based on people’s beliefs although they might not have been written in books and might have come to us orally through our ancestors. Another thing to be studied in this perspective is the relationship between people’s beliefs and songs and dramatic actions; it is here that we come across dramatic elements and become curious about the nature of rituals.

Objectives

The general purpose of this paper is a survey of the dramatic elements of Rituals of *Savar Chaseh* among the *Bakhtiyari* tribe.

1. To determine the status of plot and story of *Savar Chaseh* among the *Bakhtiyari* tribe.
2. To determine the status of actors in of Rituals of *Savar Chaseh* among the *Bakhtiyari* tribe.
3. To determine the status of Director of Rituals of *Savar Chaseh* among the *Bakhtiyari* tribe.
4. To determine the status of the instruments used of Rituals of *Savar Chaseh* among the *Bakhtiyari* tribe.
5. Determining the status of stage of Rituals of *Savar Chaseh* among the *Bakhtiyari* tribe.
6. Determining the status of Dialog and songs of Rituals of *Savar Chaseh* among the *Bakhtiyari* tribe.

METHODOLOGY

The method used in this paper is a field-based research, and for this purpose, the author has interviewed members of *Bakhtiyari* tribe in the regions, like Khuzestan. Since the author is a member of the *Bakhtiyari* tribe, he has focused on the observations made by him. The author has also made use of library data and documented theories of relevant and reliable critics.

Theoretical Framework

According to Brockett (1977), dramatic elements can be found in any pre-humanistic society. Such elements are visible in daily events such as political championships, sport festivals, religious ceremonies and even in children’s games as well as dancing and other ancient ceremonies.

Little information about the origin of theatre is left. The most common theory available for the origin of theatre is "Ritual theory" which states that theatre comes from the ritual, myth and ceremony. From the late 19th century up to now, anthropologists' theory about the origin of theatre has survived three stages. The first stage starts from 1875 to 1915, James Frazer claimed that all cultures obey incremental patterns; based on this theory and as a result, the primitive society could be a basic resource for the latest theaters. Early societies perceived connections between certain actions performed by the group or leaders in the group, and the desired results of the whole society. These actions range from habit to tradition and then to ceremony and ritual. The formulation of these actions, and the consequent repetition and rehearsal, initiated the formation of theatre (Brockett 1977).

In the second stage which started from 1915, Bronislaw, an anthropologist, rejected the posteriori method and suggested a deductive approach. According to Malinowski (1951), in contrast to the former one, here culture is special in particular societies, and so there is an uncertainty about the origin of the cultural institutions such as theater. Malinowski believes such institution has developed from different processes.

After World War II, in the third stage, Structuralism lead by Claude Levi-Strauss, as well as Functionalism, believed that each society has a special culture, whereas Frazer believed in the universal pattern. What is important for Frazer is the answer to the question: "How does brain act?" He found the answer in the analysis of myth. Considering myth as a kind of logic, he introduced two kinds of ideas: scientific mind and mythical mind (Brockett 1977). The term which Levi-Strauss (1966) used for mythical idea, deals with signs and symbols rather than concepts; it appears in mythical garb and settles on the mask and rituals. According to Brockett (1977), despite different anthropologists' perspectives in the past century, all of them agree on the primitive ceremonies as the origin of theatre. He believes that most of the critics and historians believe that ceremony and ritual is just one of the factors in the emergence of theatre.

Bakhtyari Geographical Situation¹

The Bakhtyari land is located in the central plateau of Iran and surrounded by the high moun-

tains. It includes such provinces like Khuzestan, Chahar Mahal-e-Bakhtyari, Isfahan and Lorestan. It is located at the foot of Zagros Mountains. It is named after the people residing there (Khosravi 2007). The people living in this area have many things in common although they are located in different provinces.

"There are mountains and rivers in this area the most important of which are the mountains of Asmari, Mangasht, Zardkooh, Koohrang, Ash-tarankooh, Haftanan, Sabzkooh and Koohsefid which are of the height of eight to twelve thousand meters high and are the sources of long rivers like Zayandeh Rood which is originated from Chahar Mahal Bakhtyari" (Ahmadi Oorak Bakhtyari 1998).

The Role of Women among *Bakhtyaries*

Among *Bakhtyaries*, and based on the rituals of the past, women play major roles in the family life besides their routine homemaker duties and taking care of children. Some of these families keep on moving from one place to another, and women are too active in the process; the latter participate in activities like helping their husbands in moving their cattle across rivers and other dangerous crossing points, or, they encourage their husbands to fight their enemies or invaders belonging to other tribes. These women are highly respected by *Bakhtyari* men, and they are protected by their husbands. Women are not abused in any way. The respect for women is to the extent that they sometimes reduce tension between men and resolve problems. However, this does not mean to say that women have lower positions in family lives and are inferior to men. It does not also mean that women are endowed with less ability to play their roles in family life; it is the structure of the patriarchal structure of the society that makes women so faithful (Shahbazi 2014). Women function indifferent roles in the family life. Besides playing the roles of mothers and wives, they participate in such duties like taking care of cattle, producing different kinds of milk products and handicrafts. Women are considered as strong pillars of Bakhtyari society.

Another important issue to be considered here is marriage. Since old times it has been a custom that the elders arrange everything and a bride is expected to give in to the demands of the groom's elder family members.

Compared with the range of divorce among families in cosmopolitan cities, there is a low range of divorce among people living in villages, and it is not because of the mutual understanding among couples but because the matter of divorce is considered an unpleasant subject and almost impossible. The social texture of the tribal society is less institutionalized than urban societies where one finds a variety of institutions, governmental or non-governmental. Therefore, it is less probable than women turn active in society. The male dominated culture of Bakhtyaries reduces the possibilities of women's activities and keeps the latter in the houses. "Unlike those living in the cities the families in Bakhtiari circle are founded on economic activities. In a *Bakhtyari* family all the members, both men, women and children are active in their houses and respect the division of labor, i.e. everyone does what is assigned to him or her" (Mahoodi Bakhtyary 2003).

Each member of the family is expected to help the family financially and is not expected to work alone he is not independent either. Every member of the family is expected to protect the family's wealth, situation, status, and property; he or she feels responsible towards the welfare of his or her family.

Women play major roles in the promotion of their families, taking care of those activities concerning the household and production. They form important part of the *Bakhtyari* tribe. Men are unable to take care of their cattle without the support of their women. It is because of the importance of women in the *Bakhtyari* society that men remarry soon after their first wives die; in this regard, they differ from those living in the big cities.

"There is variety of marriages among *Bakhtyari* people. These include: *Nafbori*², *Khoon Bas*³, *Family*⁴, *Ham Beri*⁵ and *Ga Be Ga*⁶, which are based on the time, place and status of the families in the tribe. All of these marriages are based on special social rules and applications" (Shahbazi 2013).

Offence, Forgiveness and Punishment

It happens that people might protect some offenders who are prone to severe punishment. Whenever an offender, chased by the offended, takes refuge in a family in the tribe, the host is expected to humbly implore the offended to for-

give the offender. It sometimes happens that the offender might take refuge in the house of an old woman having a high social status; in that case, the woman covers the head of the offender with a scarf, used by native *Bakhtyaries*, in order to have the offended forgive the offender.

It also happens that the elders might even kiss the hands and face of the offended to make him forgive the offender. The offender might also take refuge in the house of the offended and ask the latter to forgive him.

One of the ways for giving an end to quarrels is to swear in the names of those things sacred to people.

Whenever a person is unable to prove his or her innocence or to prove that someone is guilty, he is expected to swear. It was a custom in the past that the concerned person, after cleaning himself, entered a sacred place and swore in the names of the sacred things in the presence of the others that he was innocent, or, he has been witness to an offend committed by another person. People were so committed to the sacred that the offenders were determined to confess to their offences and ask for redemption. If, due to distance, the person could not go to the sacred place, he swore in the presence of other people in order to prove himself guilty. Sometimes the person was accompanied by people towards the sacred place so that he might confess to his offence or prove his innocence on the way (Srlak 2006).

Women play major roles among the *Bakhtyaries*, and they are highly respected by men; this respect increases as the formers grow older. However, this excessive respect for women sometimes turns out to be problematic for women. Whenever the latter offends someone, they cannot compensate. In the past, the only way for men to protect their women and have the respect of people was to participate at the ritual of *Savar Chevaseh*⁷⁷

A person sitting in a reversed position while riding an ass.

This ritual happened when there was no way for forgiveness and the person charged with an offence could not prove himself innocent; thus, the decision of the elders in commencing such ritual was not to be defied.

Savar Chevaseh

If it happened that, in the areas resided by *Bakhtyaries*, a woman betrayed her husband and

established a relationship with another man and thus exposed, then in order prove such guilt, the elder were determined to take some decisions in this regard. The latter gathered and consulted with each other and decided to find a way to punish the woman and keep her away from her husband's family; they decided to commence the ritual of *Savar Chevaseh* and informed the people of the time and date of the commencement of the ritual. Then some people were assigned to inform people of time and date of the ritual and invite them. On the scheduled day when all the people are present, the convicted woman was brought to the spot where she was approached by three other women, the first the wife of the elder of the village, the second a women expected to be holy and religious, and the third one a newly wed woman. These three women surrounded the convict and cut the latter's hairs and applied cow excrement on the former's head. Then they had her sit on a mule in reversed position and made her ride around the area where people gathered, singing this song:

Saret vatoshi vatigo mashin / Giga zard be saret bazeni savareh / narahi har dizh men mal vagardi.

(Your hair is cut with a blade and some cow excrement is applied on your hair, and you are seated on a mule with a dark line on its back.)

Once the ritual is over, a member of the woman's family approached and took her to her father's house and ended the ritual.

Dramatic Elements

By analyzing this ritual, we come across some main elements, which have dramatic values. These are as follows:

1. Plot: It follows the pre-determined conventions based on the form of the ritual, a plot that shapes the story and the characters and attributes to the latter special characteristics.
2. Actors: each actor is attributed with a certain characteristic and role to play (like the newly wed bride who tries be loyal to his duty as a wife after watching the ritual.)
3. Director: he is the one responsible for supervising the ritual and its relevant issues. He along with the others decides when and where the ritual takes place.
4. The instruments used: In the ritual, the instruments are used based on the function

they have in the ritual; they also function as signs.

5. Stage: The stage of this ritual is like the stages of other dramas. It is a place where the actors play for the audience in order to make the best effect on the latter. Since those in the audience are well aware of the events and the reason for the ritual, they attend the ritual in order to show their contempt for the same.
6. Dialogue and songs: the dialogue and songs used by the actors and accompanied by the audience are all based on conventions of drama; these are used by the audience to show their contempt for the act of betrayal.

Whatever described above about the ritual clearly shows that besides evaluating it as a traditional ritual, it is considered as one of the rituals that is represented and performed in the best way. It does not only expresses an incident but also makes the audience acquainted with a concept of catharsis which can be of the utmost importance in their lives, a kind of catharsis caused by the combination of such elements like plot, actor, music, dialogue, stage and finally audience.

CONCLUSION

The cultural difference among people in Iran and even other parts of the world is caused by the difference in environmental, climatic, and biological conditions of the country. Arts, dramatic arts in particular, are not an exception in this regard, and it is also dependent on the above-mentioned conditions. Drama manifests the needs of men and women living in special places and under certain circumstances; these kinds of dramas occur in public places and for serious purposes like those of feasts, mourning ceremonies, dance ceremonies, implanting and reaping ceremonies. The structures of these kinds of dramas and native rituals are solid and have serious natures created by the people who are although limited to small places but are endowed with great cultural origins. These native dramas based on the old rituals are rather instructive and didactic than entertaining; since they are endowed with fixed values and conventions, therefore they are seldom affected by the cultural and social crisis. These rituals can be of greater importance than

the other dramas, in that the former could establish a closer connection with the audience than the latter.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These culturally dominated rituals have greater effects on their audience than the other conventional dramas, and they can be considered as prototypes for the modern artists in order to make a closer connection with their modern audience. It is also suggested that in order to have a better national drama, it is better to use such dramas based on rituals.

NOTES

1. Bakhtyari is an old tribe in Iran located at the southern part of Iran. The *Bakhtyaries* have different rituals and rites.
2. Choosing a girl for a boy from the time, they are born.
3. It a kind of marriage in which a girl from the murderer's family is forced to marry a boy from the family of the deceased.
4. An interfamilial marriage

5. The marriage of a boy with a girl who has worked for the family and thus become as a member of the same family.
6. In this kind of marriage, a girl from the bride's family is exchanged for a girl from the groom's family.
7. A person sitting in a reversed position while riding an ass.

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