

An Anthropological Insight into the Folkloric *Haronaki* Ritual in Iran

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ABSTRACT Rituals in every culture reflect people's beliefs. They have the capacity to be performed in the form of drama. For the purpose a deep insight into a ritual is required to trace the dramatic elements. Ritual has been considered as one of the main sources for theatre and dramatic performance; by the recognition and presentation within the folkloric perspective of a country, these rituals can be considered as important sources for establishing relationship with their audience. An attempt is made in this paper to make an anthropological analysis of the dramatic elements in the *Haronaki* ritual of the *Bakhtyari* tribe in Iran. The authors intend to recognize the functional abilities and possibilities of the dramatic ritual of *Haronaki*, and for the purpose, a qualitative and library based methodology is used for collecting data. Based on the theories of ritual communication offered by some anthropologists, the present study examines the dramatic features of the *Haronaki* ritual, including plot, character, dialogue, music and conflict. It also examines the impact of folkloric culture on the performance of the rituals in a dramatic mode in the *Bakhtyari* tribe, and the way these rituals establish reflect people's beliefs.

INTRODUCTION

The role played by rituals in Anthropology has been inevitable, and the anthropologists have always been aware of the importance of rituals. Durkheim believes that "society uses certain methods to bind its different constituent parts; rituals is one of such things" (Rothenbuh 1998).

The cultural heritage and other national arts that are brought to us by our ancestors, is considered as our valuable and rich culture. Iran, as a vast country, is endowed with special characteristics related to social, cultural, philosophical, and political issues. We should not forget that culture is not the only surviving heritage we possess, but history, and cultural art of our ancestors which have been introduced to us orally, and have represented our values, and national art and cultural heritage; these have been forgotten by the generations before us. Knowing the true nature of the Iranian identity necessitates a prior knowledge of culture of the country.

Folklore refers to the traditional beliefs, customs, and stories of a community, passed through the generations by word of mouth. Folklore is endowed with three important features; it is related to the heritage of the ancient civilization, it lacks a theoretical perspective, and it protects the cultural elements of the past. Folklore is concerned with people's beliefs, birth and marriage

ceremonies, sacrifices, mourning, proverbs, and other rituals pertaining to people's customs. Folklore, the Iranian folklore in particular, is not registered as a written manifesto, but is brought to us orally from one generation to another. It is through works of art that we are acquainted with folklore. Every area and tribe in Iran, has its own folkloric culture. On the other hand, rituals and other forms of plays, rituals, music, dance, have been the focus of the attention of the anthropologists; this shows a close mutual relationship between art and anthropology.

Ritual is an important media through which we are acquainted with a nation's folkloric culture. This is possible through proper presentation of people's beliefs and custom through art, and drama in particular. Durkheim believes that ritual is a media through which people experience their collective beliefs; that it is through such ritual that mind and body are united, and participate in the meaning" (Rothenbuhler 1998). Durkheim attempted to answer the question of what holds the society together. He assumes that humans are inherently egoistic, but norms, beliefs and values (collective consciousness) form the moral basis of the society, resulting in social integration ritual and ceremonial, as formal modes of conduct, are equally ubiquitous appearing in everything from modes of talk and rules of politeness to elaborate protocols for

events of state. Ritual and rite, ceremonial and ceremony are symbolic social actions, modes of communication that implicate individuals in the social order, creating realities whilst expressing ideas and attitudes about rituals. If ritual should function in a society, it should display the hidden customs (Rothenbuhler 1998).

Since the folkloric culture is manifested through rituals and drama in Iran, it should be added that drama could not be effective without reflecting people's beliefs and lives; it should fall within the cultural and ritual perspective, for "ritual is connected with custom and culture of people and tribes, in particular. It is in this kind of ritual that the audience feels at home" (Anasori 1380). If those responsible for bringing about these ritualistic dramas do their responsibilities properly, then the greatness of the rituals and traditions can be traced. Theatre is originated from rituals, and it is the ritualistic elements that create a unity between performers and the audience. Thus, we should turn to the roots of these rituals and realize their significance.

On the other hand, rituals play important roles in bringing different generations together. Rituals are symbolic and common acts performed in different human societies, paving the way for the people to relate to the metaphysical forces. These rituals can be directed by special people of a society; these people include magicians, sorcerers, witches, and showmen. These rituals might as well take place in open areas or in secret. (Payne 2015)

Bakhtyari Tribe

The culture and history of every tribe reflects the background of that tribe. This background introduces the structure and the basis of the lives of people in the tribe; it shows the passage of time. The tribes in Iran possess long histories, and each one of them carries the heritage of the country as a whole.

Bakhtyari tribe is one of the most prominent tribes in Iran; it possesses a very long history. It has played a crucial role in the promotion of the Iranian culture. Walther Hinz,¹ in his book entitled *Das Reich Elam* (1964) points out to the characteristics of different tribes including Illam tribe that is associated with the *Bakhtyari* tribe. He maintains: "The members of the tribe have survived many wars, and they have held important place in the history of Iran before even the

arrivals of the first Aryan race in Iran near Zagros Mountains; they have held important position in the *Achaemenid* dynasty" (Hinz 1964). Jane Dieulafoy² in her book entitled *Iran, Chaldea and Susa* (1881), maintains:

These courageous women living on the mountains of Iran's *Lorestan* are well known throughout the world. It was believed that whenever *Darius* (The great king of *Persia*) happened to leave *Susa*³ for *Takht-E-Jamshid*⁴, he used to pay them some money in extending his gratitude to them; It was also believed that Alexander (who invaded Iran), could not bring these people under his subjugation. Even today, these people are somehow independent, and they do not surrender to the demands of the present kings. (Iran, *Chaldea and Susa* 1990)

Thus in order to trace the importance of rituals and folkloric culture in Iran, it is essential to point out to the important characteristics of different tribes in Iran, with an emphasis on one of the most important tribes, *Bakhtyari* tribe.

Theoretical Framework

As far as ritual is concerned, it is a means of communication used to "integrate mind and matter, general and particular, past and present, and the basic structures of individual's life" (Rothenbuhler 1998). Rothenbuhler further adds that the basic principles and the meaning ritual is obtained through the presentation of symbols, what matters for a ritual is performance which is essential for the manifestation of ritual. This opinion falls in line with that of Durkheim who believes that ritual is a media through which people experience their collective beliefs; that it is through such ritual that mind and matter are united.

Another important viewpoint concerning ritual from the dramatic perspective is the theory of ritual communications. It clearly points out that the manifestation of rituals and ceremonies requires audience and stage for demonstration. An attempt is made in this article by the authors to make use of this theory to show the importance of rituals in Iran. The relationship between ritual and performance is inevitable.

Ritual is not a form or process of thinking; it is a form of action. People use their bodies to enact rituals and their thoughts to perform them; ritual has an external form. It is rather performed than discussed. Rothenbuhler considers performance as "an issue that is determined in an

aesthetical manner and an important form of communication" (Rothenbuhler 1998).

One of the important theories dealing with the ritualistic origin of drama, belongs to Oscar Brockett maintains that the interest in the place of theatre accelerated by the end of 19th century, because it was then that the anthropologist turned to be more curious to know things. As a result, the modern societies can have access to the theatre of the past thousand years. Ritual and theatre use common medias including: music, dance, dialogue, mask, dress, performers, audience and stage; each one of these elements has its own specific function in the modern world. (Brockett 2013)

Another important the orician that is considered here is Antonin Artaud. Considering salvation and resurrection of man two things important in the development of man's life, Artaud believes that we should consider the atmosphere of the stage sacred, and fill it with the powers that horrify people. He supports ritualistic theatre and intends to create a theatre far from storytelling and characterization based on reality. For him, ritual helps releasing the destructive forces present in man's unconscious; theatre has also the same effect on the audience. This is the same catharsis, taking place in a ritual, helping man achieve solace (Artaud 1926).

Another important anthropologist who, collaborating with Richard Schechner, has developed the practice of ritualistic symbolism in the form of performance based local rituals is Victor Turner. Schechner believes that there is a strong relationship between ritual and theatre, because both reflect a common activity of performance; this activity is characterized by the combination of two main elements of entertainment and effectiveness. This combination is inseparable, and none of the elements can exist separately. When the element of entertainment outdoes the other, it results in the formation of theatre; and when the element of effectiveness outdoes the other, it results in the construction of ritual. He believes: "Aesthetic theatre reaches its climax when the two elements interact" (Schechner 1995).

There are others who support the anthropology of theatre. One of such figures is Eugenu Bareba, who emphasizes the importance of performance. "When the artists perform rituals, they become interested in the personalities involved in the concerned ritual" (Hosseini 1384).

Augusto Boal⁵ was another theatre director who realized the importance of the anthropology of theatre. Acquainted with the anthropology of theatre, he used it in his folkloric theatre. In this kind of theatre, "song, dance, customs, and other folkloric rituals were used, because mixing customs and traditions with theatre lead to the promotion of both". In this kind of theatre, the folkloric stories were used (Boal 1979).

As far as the use of music in folkloric rituals is concerned, some anthropologists consider music an important part of the cultural mentality of every tribe. Franz Boas⁶ is one of the anthropologists who considered the study of music as an important responsibility of the anthropologists, because "music persists in all of the activities of some of the tribes and cultures; these activities include: battles, games, works, customs, rituals, and so on" (Boas 1989).

Alan Parkhurst Merriam⁷ (1923 - 1980) was the first anthropologist who made a study of music from an anthropological perspective in his book entitled, *The Anthropology of Music* (1964). In his book, he promoted ethnology and its methods and, in his later studies, he amended his original concept of "music in culture" to "music as culture" (Merriam 1964). He believes that people are involved with music, without paying attention to society, culture and its complications. He offers some objectives for the function of music in the social orders: 1- the expression of feelings, 2- the pleasure of beauty, 3- entertainment, 4- the symbolic expression and manifestation, 5- influencing the general institutions and rituals, 6- to help the consistency of culture, 7- to help obtaining a social integrity. (Merriam 1964)

Considering these theories of ritual communication and other relevant theories, the authors here focus on the dramatic characteristics of rituals and their functions in Iran, with an emphasis on *Bakhtyari* tribe. By an analysis of these elements, the authors will be able to help the recognition of the potentialities and significance of the folkloric culture and rituals in the countries like Iran.

Objectives

In this study, an attempt is made to analyze the dramatic features of *the Haronaki* ritual in the *Bakhtyari* tribe, according to theory of "ritual communication" offered by the anthropolo-

gists. The main question here is that whether a ritual based on the folkloric culture of the *Bakhtyari* tribe can have dramatic features. The paper intends to investigate whether the beliefs held by *Bakhtyari* people are reflected in their rituals.

METHODOLOGY

An important issue discussed today in the modern societies, is the issue of folkloric cultural heritage one nation might use in order to find possibility of reconstructing rituals of the past; this requires an analysis of the nation's culture and rituals, and the beliefs these rituals reflect. This study is based on a qualitative and descriptive research methodology; it also uses a library-based analytical study of the theories propounded by the anthropologists on the issue of rituals.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

People's beliefs and rituals are inseparable. In the beginning, human life was dominated by horrors, the horrors of the unknown forces and other phenomena like lightening, famine, disease, and storms. Thus, man was forced to find ways to make up for these horrors; he turned to dances and, in this way, he was able to overcome his disappointments. This led to the performance of religious rituals. There is no doubt that all religious rituals, traditions and cultural rituals are manifested in the forms of dramas. Most of these dramas are rooted in people's beliefs and other rituals, and are somehow related to the folkloric culture. They reflected people's beliefs.

Indeed, in a theatre the actors are not more important than the audience is. During such ritualistic demonstrations, the daily happenings, people's lives, their needs, sorrows, happiness, their beliefs are brought to the surface; the prayers, invocations, singing and dancing, all create an atmosphere where people are inclined to thank God and glorify the souls of the dear lost ones. A theatre based on rituals, is used for creating connection. It connects man with his past; the stage is the stage of life, and the scene of challenges represents the scene of battles between good and evil, life and death. Such a theatre is not meant to "entertain, but it is a kind of theatre that dominates our lives; here we, as the audiences, supervise over those characters who reflect us" (Anasori 1358:9). Those who play in these ritualistic theatres are committed to their

own cultural heritages; they enact rituals of death, life, resurrection, mourning, and other sacred events. Sometimes they are united in order to defend the thirsty earth.

It was in the late 19th century that the anthropologists focused on the importance of theatre and its elements, especially those theatres based on the people's beliefs and rituals. This perspective took place in three phases:

1. The first phase 1875 – 1915, when the anthropologists lead by Sir James Frazer (1898) claimed that cultures follow an evolutionary model; thus the primitive societies in the modern age, can provide us with reliable sources on the theatre of the thousand years ago. It was believed that man in the beginning, started to believe in forces which appeared to have control over food and other materials essential for the formers; survival. Since these people were ignorant of the supernatural forces, they associated afore mentioned forces with magic; thus they tried to find ways to glorify these forces, and it was only possible through certain methods which further developed into rituals.

2. The second phase began from 1915, when a new school the school of social anthropology known as Functionalism originated by Bronislaw Malinowski⁸ (1884–1942) who rejected Frazer's notion of rituals. Malinowski's approach to social theory was a brand of functionalism emphasizing how social and cultural institutions serve basic individual's needs. (Malinowski 1944)

3. It was after the World War II that structuralism was constructed. The founder of this school was Claude Lévi-Strauss⁹ (1908 – 2009) who believed that that the "savage" mind had the same structures as the "civilized" mind and that human characteristics are the same everywhere. He believed that different societies might have institutions that were similar in many obvious ways and yet, served different functions. Nevertheless, he maintains that every society creates its own cultural course. What is important for Strauss is the way brain functions; he finds the answer in the analysis of myth. He concludes that "there are two kinds of thinking: the first one is magical – mythic thinking, and the second one is the scientific thinking" (Brockett 1377: 30).

From an anthropological perspective, culture has played an important role in establishing people's identities in a society. Cultural anthropology has indulged itself in various types of rituals,

customs, and social entities dealing with such institutions like marriage, social issues, art, magic, behaviors, and beliefs (Asgari 2015).

Brockett points out to the important characteristics of rituals in this way: First, ritual is a form of knowledge that tries to define man and his relationship with the world. Second, it can be considered as a way of teaching, because one of the important characteristic of a primitive society is lack of a written language; thus the performance of ritual as a means of transferring knowledge from one generation to another. Third, ritual can be performed to control the future happenings. Fourth, ritual is usually used to glorify supernatural forces, victories in war or hunting, the past of a tribe, or a hero. The fifth one is that, ritual can be entertaining and pleasant. (Brockett 32) Today, ritual and theatre use common basic things like, music, dance, dialogue, and so on.

Haronaki

It is also known as *Halhalahkusa*, *Kalalikuseh*. It is a kind of dramatic ritual that is performed during night, and in a rainless season (winter, in particular). It takes place in the famine stricken land where there is no rain. Men perform this ritual; *kuseh* symbolizes the demon of drought. One person is selected to serve as a *Kuseh*; he plays the main role. People dress him in black and place two horns on his head; he is surrounded by the young and the old, and finally decides to run away. In this way, people have been able to overcome the evil of drought. During the dark night, those surrounding the man keep on singing praying through the following songs:

Hale hale halooneh

Khoda bezan baroneh (God help us with rain)

Se del gele ndaran (for the sake of those who complain)

Khoda bezan to baroneh)God help us with rain)

Ze raste qalae daron (for those who own corn)

Ha har haronaki

Meanwhile the people in the house offer a bowl of wheat flour to the group, it is here that suddenly another member of the house, usually the mother of a girl in the house, appear and throw water over the group. Having paid visits

to different houses and tents, the group make a big *Nan* out of the flour, called "*Gerdeh*". Prior to cooking *Gerdeh*, they hide a piece of wood or a red color bead so that the one who hides it, is unaware of its whereabouts. Once the *Nan* is cooked, they start dividing it between the members of the group; the person who happens to get the piece of wood or the bead, is expected to wear the dress of the *Kuseh*. The latter is beaten by the other members (the beating, of course, takes the form of a dramatic action). Once the beating starts, the old man of the group requests them to stop beating the *Kuseh*, promising them to pray for rain; the old man keeps on praying and asking God to give them rain and help him save his face among the his people, for he does not want to be embarrassed. In case the prayer is not fulfilled and it does not rain, the old man is prone to becoming *Kuseh*, himself, to be beaten by the group until someone else is found to help him out. The process is repeated as long as there is no rain.

Dramatic Elements in the Haronaki Ritual

Haronaki is one of the most dramatic *Bakhtyari* rituals. In analyzing these elements closely, we can clearly establish a connection between this ritual and a native drama. *Haronaki* is a ritual filled with signs that are rooted in the people's beliefs and culture.

1. Water and Flour: The element of water in this ritual, particularly when it is poured on the *Kuseh*, symbolizes rain. The tribe needs water and flour for survival. The people offer flour as an important gift given to them by God, and then they throw water at the group, as a sign of a wish for rain, because it is rain that produces flour. It was believed among the ancient Iranian people that sky was muscular and earth was feminine. It is clear that rain causes fertility of the earth that is why there are many rituals dealing with a wish for rain to come. The performance of drama in front of the sun, calling for storm by beating an anvil, and different kinds of dances, are examples of such rituals. As per the beliefs of the American Indians, rain is the seed of the god of storm and lightening; in the connection between sky and earth, rain plays an important role as fertilizer. In the *Bakhtyari* tribe, it is the women and girls who carry water from the fountains, and it is also women who watch their own reflec-

tions in water; again, it is women who pour water on the *Kuseh*'s head during the *Haronaki* ritual.

2. "Kuseh": "Kuseh" symbolizes drought; since *Kuseh* is the name of a person who is without beard or mustache, therefore this character is considered as the central character so that God might bless him. Thus, in the *Haronaki* ritual, *Kuseh* has two functions: 1- a person to be sympathized, 2- the demon of drought.

3. Bailsman (Zamen): In fact, the bailsman is the person opposite the *Kuseh*; the former is one of the most important characters of the dramatic ritual of longing for rain. After the performance of innocence and misery of a pitiable creature in the ritualistic-dramatic form, a respected person, who is usually an elder man, is found as bailsman who guarantees that it would rain, provided that the group let go of the *Kuseh*. The bailsman represents a decent and good man for whose sake God might pour his blessing, here rain, for the people. He represents the virtues and positive features of man that can help him overcome problems.

4. "Bell": The bell is tightened on the top section of a piece of wood and it is carried by the *Kuseh*; it represents consciousness and awakening. The sound made by the bell does not only represent warning to people that the *Kuseh* is approaching, but it is also a sign of people's awareness of faith in God.

5. "Rope": Rope is used in this ritual as means of tying the *Kuseh*; it also represents domination, because the *Kuseh* is lead by people using the other end of the rope. This dramatic action shows the attitude that people finally overcome the demon of drought (represented by *Kuseh*), consider themselves victorious over the dark forces by praying and invocations.

6. "Belief": One of the most important motivating factors in the tribe that makes them turn to the ritual of *Haronaki*, is faith and belief in what their ancestors used to do. Those who turn to these rituals possess a simple and honest hearts. It is this belief in what they intend to do that brings them together. Belief is an element in the dramatic performance.

7. "Time": The performance takes place at night, and it is believed that the ritual is a means of overcoming darkness.

8. "Plot": The plot plays an important role in *Haronaki*; everything in the ritualistic play is clear and the people present in the ritual, or even the audience, know everything, except the result

that is in the hand of God. They are optimistic that God will answer them, and this makes the play more interesting because at every time different people perform the ritual, different actions take place; this leads to suspense.

9. "Conflict": The main conflict in the ritual is between the people and nature, because it is nature that is to be blamed for the lack of rain.

10. "Actor": In this ritual all of the people are actors, some are in motion and some motionless, awaiting the result, those who are active, are believed to be of sky, and all of them are men and the young boys of the tribe. There is no woman acting here, because men are considered responsible for fertility.

11. "Instruments": The most important instrument and device used in a dramatic fashion is the bead or the piece of wood in the Nan, because it is this device that determines the fate of the performers. Whoever picks up this bead, he is destined to be dressed a *Kuseh*, and punished.

12. "Dress": The members of the group wear their own dresses, but the only one who wears a different dress is the *Kuseh* who is expected to dress in a way that he would be represented as the demon of drought and he would be punished.

13. "Music": During the time of the ritual, the people try to sing songs informing God of what they want. Since they do not carry any musical instruments, they would rather beat two pieces of stone together to produce the rhythm of the songs they sing.

CONCLUSION

The rituals are considered as performing means of what people are thought as far as their beliefs are concerned. Since these teachings include moral teachings, and they are far from any extreme for the members of a society, one can make out the direct relationship between the rituals and moral values; these are displayed when the members of a society perform the relevant ritual. The moral values that are transferred through rituals include: respect for the elders, respect for one's culture, faith, protection of children, patriotism, rejection of evil, challenging cruelty, friendship, and so on.

Religious ritual is a way used by people to make connection with the sacred creatures. These ritual are not only considered as means of getting rid of anxieties, but also a way for preparing for such disastrous happenings like death and

other catastrophes. *Bakhtyari* tribe, with a deeper insight into the world through their rituals, intends to express the sorrows and happiness brought to them by nature, and share these with their fellow tribe men. Considering the theory of ritual communication and the attitudes of theatre directors and other the origins towards ritual, one can notice that these attitudes are applicable to the *Bakhtyari* tribe. By using dramatic elements, rituals intend to provide their audience with a meaning that can easily be applicable in their lives, so that in this way, a stronger bond between the people of *Bakhtyari* tribe is achieved and the dramatic capacities of these rituals will be determined.

According to Oscar Brockett, and with a look into the ritual of *Haronaki*, the *Bakhtyari* tribe tries to control incidents and other catastrophic events. According to Artaud, the performance of rituals can be used as means of releasing human instinct, getting rid of destructive forces from the unconscious. Schechner believes that the best way to establish a close relationship between ritual and drama, is the reflection of human life. It is this reflection that has manifested itself in the *Bakhtyari* tribe's rituals that, according to the ritual communication theory, are meant to be both entertaining and effective. Since, according to Schechner, a performance is based on realities and the purpose of which is to bring people together, this is applicable to *Bakhtyari* tribe. A local performance with signs and acceptable beliefs leads to a tribal belief.

There are common features between ritual and drama can be noticed in the *Bakhtyari* tribe. The relationship between signs in both drama and ritual, which leads to catharsis in people, the presence of directors and actors, the presence of particular time and place for the performance of rituals, all have their own impacts on the people of the tribe; all of these establish a relationship between the performers and the audience. All of these factors help making a closer relationship between rituals and drama in the tribe.

Comparing the attitudes of the different the origins towards ritual and theatre, it can be inferred that there are capacities for the formation of a perfect drama within the rituals. There are also different elements influential in the process. These elements include: plot, dialogue used by the characters, instruments, dresses, certain place and time, and the last element is the presence of

the audience who sometimes participate in the plot.

The other important point is that people of *Bakhtyari* consist of different social classes; during the performance of the rituals, all of the classes come together and each plays its role based on its social position. Even the "*Teshmals*"¹⁰, who are of lower social class, contribute in the performance by playing music.

All of these characteristics are originated in the rich culture of *Bakhtyari* tribe; the tribe tries to visualize its feelings and anxieties in the form of performance. The tribe has the capacity to present its traditional rituals in the form of drama.

NOTES

- 1 Hinz (A.) Walther (1906 - 1992) was a German scholar of Persian and Elamite studies; he was drawn increasingly to the people and culture of Persia.
- 2 Jane Dieulafoy (1851 - 1916) was a French archaeologist, explorer, novelist and journalist; she travelled to Iran to do explore the country's archaeological varieties.
- 3 Old name for *Shush*, an important city near in Iran; it was an important city for the *Achamanid* Dynasty in old Persia.
- 4 The Persian name for the throne of *Jamshid*, the capital city of the *Achamanid* Dynasty; it is located near Shiraz, in the southern part of Iran.
- 5 Augusto Boal was a Brazilian theatre director, writer and politician. He was the founder of Theatre of the Oppressed, a theatrical form originally used in radical popular education movements.
- 6 A German-American anthropologist and a pioneer of modern anthropology who has been called the "Father of American Anthropology".
- 7 Alan Parkhurst Merriam (1923 - 1980) was an American cultural anthropologist and ethnomusicologist.
- 8 Bronisław Kasper Malinowski was a 20th century Polish anthropologist. He has been also referred to as a sociologist and ethnographer.
- 9 Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) was a French anthropologist and ethnologist.
- 10 A very low class social group in the *Bakhtyari* tribe.

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