



“Fear” in Persian Proverbs and Sayings

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Abstract: Proverbs and sayings constitute a major portion of a society's cultural heritage and are considered amongst the oldest literary products of human thought. Persian proverbs are a national treasure and a source of pride of our culture and history which reflect our customs, social life, dreams and thoughts, our culture and our people's psychological characteristics. Studying these social-cultural signs from a "psychological literature" point of view, will familiarize us with different types of social development and judgment, and also our ancestors' characteristics. Proverbs provide us with valuable information about learning, social behavior, personality, individual differences, excitation and motivation, humans' various mechanisms against problems and difficulties. Most of these psychological fields are verifiable with scientific theories today. By studying proverbs, it can be concluded that many of people's psychological features such as hope, fear, anxiety, caution, are manifested in Persian proverbs.

Keywords: Persian Proverbs and Sayings, Fear

INTRODUCTION

Proverbs and sayings constitute a major portion of linguistic treasure and each proverb is replete with ideology, beliefs, knowledge, experience, and customs of all the humans. Proverbs and sayings reflect a society's thoughts, manners and habits .

“ one of the symbols of a country's culture and civilization is the wise proverbs and sayings said by great scientist or men of letter, or laymen of that country. Persian language has proverbs and wise sayings more than any other live language in the world, each of which include a world of good taste, thoughts, and wisdom with excellent wording to convey what it intends to say. Aristotle, thousands of years ago, had believed that proverbs and sayings are like grapes of ancient wisdom which have remained intact in the light of brevity, rightness and virtue¹.”

In Persian, there exist a lot of proverbs and sayings each of which is a world of taste and thought and sweetness of expression. “One of the manifestations of laymen's knowledge and culture are proverbs and sayings. With little ponder, we realize that the wisest pieces of advice, sweetest wits and the most excellent

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sarcastic remarks each of which often can be the subject of a great book in literature, morality, economy, social sciences, etc. is entailed in a concise but melodious sentence. This way, we are bestowed with an invaluable treasure and great capital for behind these proverbs, sayings and expressions laid the bright face of our ancient nation, our brilliant ancient civilization, and our forefathers' vast view and ambition².”

Literature in any society represents its thoughts, language, culture, manners, and moods in the course of history. Persian language and literature also represents its history, civilization, thoughts and past and present culture. And it seems that, due to its vast content, separation of the field of Persian literature from other fields of study such as human sciences is a mistake. Appropriate understanding of aspects of history, culture, politics and social facts depend on a more scientific analysis of our literary heritage. This requires a revision in research methods especially, the deployment of interdisciplinary research in areas such as psychological literature, literary sociology, ties between art and literature and so on. Psychology as a science has a long history and has strong ties with literature. In the present study, among different scientific and cultural aspects of Persian proverbs and sayings, one psychological aspect, that is “fear” and its different kinds are examined in a number of proverbs form the book Proverbs and Sayings by Dehkhoda .

Significance of the study

Along advancement in different fields of science, literature and psychological literature are in search of finding new unexplored horizons. In this study, many of our people's feelings and thoughts have been revealed through examining Persian proverbs. Regarding the psychological aspects of Persian proverbs or their scientific analysis, not much has been done; however, important and hidden issues such as beliefs, traditions and peoples' various personality traits can be traced in proverbs' deep and hidden layers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, proverbs which contain the concept of fear from a psychological aspect are extracted out from Dehkhoda's Proverbs and Sayings, which is the main pivot of this research, and some types of fear have been examined .

1. Reflection of “Fear” in Persian Proverbs

One of the commonest psychological problems among humans is fear - also called phobia in psychology, further more referred to as dread or awe in Quran or Imam's quotations. Fear is not age- or group-specific and some people in the society suffer from it to some extent .

We are engaged in learning since birth. We learn what to love, what to avoid or be scared of, and how to behave others. To what extent we pick up these things, distinguishes us from others; thus it has a great role in our life. Worry anxiety and fear, are all because of a danger that we are not aware when and how will take place. Since old times, instability in daily affairs has been tangible and it has been

quite probable that hopes and plans could go wrong and things could collapse at the kings' indulgence and their interferences. Thus it would be no surprise to see these worries and fears have dominated our minds and thoughts. Proverbs in which the whole society's life can be seen and illustrate our high frequency social life, reflect the image of culture and society.

In this research a number of proverbs which refer to some types of fears are mentioned:

1. Fear of God

Not all fears are adverse. Some fears which result in spiritual and material development are in fact positive fears. The most positive fear is the fear of God which prevents humans from sins and leads them to perfection. In Quran there are numerous verses about fear of God. In chapter "the tablecloth" god says: ". . . fear not men, but me . . ." ³.

Such fears are reflected in proverbs, too. For instance :

- Fear of God will save you from other fears
- The core of wisdom is fear of God ⁴

Some of these proverbs emphasize on the fact that people who are not afraid of God and do not avoid any wrongdoing, must be feared .

- fear the one who does not fear God. Mysticism is one of the pillars of spirituality in Iran and its widespread effect on people's thoughts and social relations till the present day can be seen. One of the dominant issues in theology is the fact that human creation and his constant dread of sinning, are all for the purpose of getting to know God's greatness and mercy. Humans are tools to materialize wishes of God who has no partner; thus the most natural reaction to such God is fear .

2. Fear of Death

The basic reason why many people are afraid of death is their view point and understanding of it. People usually see death as an end to their existence. They are not so certain of life after death. The holy Quran deems this world and all its blessings meager, and introduces the other World better and superior: "short is the enjoyment of this world; the hereafter is the best for those who do right."³ "Imam Ali said, "be sure that humans will finally get bored with all the enjoyments of this life, except the joy of living itself; for no one sees serenity in death"⁵." Example:

- Even the one with a heart of stone or iron is afraid of death⁴.
- If there were no fear of death, life would be easier³.

Religious beliefs should be considered the most important pivot of Iranian life. Iranian national heroes, even in ancient and legendary eras, were known to be moral and religious. Islam is considered to be fundamental to Iranian national identity. Our ancestors have adjusted our major national elements with religion and trimmed off those customs and traditions in contrast with it .

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3. Fear of Future and Destiny

Many people are afraid of future and such fears have adversely affected their lives, future and personality. Lack of knowledge about future will increase our fear. Those with a true faith in God enjoy such quiet and tranquility that one else does, for such a person believes that God who is sage, wise and almighty manipulates the world and our lives is in his hands. God manages all the affairs wisely. Fear of future and destiny has been widely reflected in Persian proverbs:

Example:

-do not postpone for tomorrow anything; you do not know what will happen tomorrow⁴.

The robber of life is not asleep, beware. What he has not taken from you today will take away tomorrow.

He who knows this world better is more afraid of it.

Iranians’ oldest tendency facing hardships inflicted upon them by tyrannical governments was fatalism. It was a strategy to get along with the government. Fatalism originates from religious beliefs; the fact that whatever happens in this world is God’s will. According to this belief, future has already been determined and our will plays no role .

4. Fear of Enemy

In the history of Iran, few events could have been as effective as neighboring or farther countries’ invasions to unite layers of the society and make their hearts get closer to each other in order to avoid defeat and preserve their original identities. Iranians have always been worried about enemies’ invasions. Iran had been invaded by big or small powers such as the Mongols, Alexander. It also has faced a lot of internal turmoil and civil wars and ethnic clashes. Tyrannical kings and rulers and their bloodsheds have also been the source of instability of the country’s affairs. These have been reflected in proverbs since the past, and have been transferred from generation to generation.

- Be wary of a weak enemy at war; for when one fears not death can even slay a lion.

- Don’t feel safe if you have wounded enemy.

In some other proverbs, tolerating the enemy has been insisted on .

- Be conservative harming your enemy; he might befriend you one day.

- Better treat your enemy tactfully; tolerating the enemy is better than confronting him.

5. Fear of Rulers and Kings

Kings have always been a source of terror in the society. They have symbolized oppression, arrogance, and indolence. “The most successful rulers were the ones who would shed more blood, and for smallest excuses, would slay the suspects. Powerful and oppressive invaders and rulers were many in history. The weakest ones were those who could not kill easily due to kind-heartedness and low self-esteem. Iranian reigns were often individualistic, tyrannical and self-reliant. Dictatorship is an indispensable part in the history of our nation and has

affected our manners, customs, and rules of social life. Thus, fear of tyrants is visible in Persian proverbs. Example:

- Beware of kings' cheerfulness.
- Serving a king is fearful and dangerous.
- Being close to King is fire, beware.

6. Fear of Women

There are a lot of proverbs about family whose main cornerstone is woman. Most of these proverbs are devised by men against women. The reason is male domination and women's education level being kept low in our society in the past. Thus, many negative adjectives have been attributed to women such as ignorant, unfaithful; stupid . . . this is well depicted in the following proverbs:

- Beware of a woman's evils, even if she has descended from heaven.
- He who is not afraid of women's hands has lost his mind.
- Do not seek knowledge in he who is not afraid of women.

Women in the past were considered an inferior being and sometimes sordid, not only in Iran but also in many countries. Judging women's character and value is combined with many prejudices; sometimes she has been called the most elegant creature and sometimes disgusting and evil.

7. Fear of Bad Company

The incredible effects of companionship both positive or negative are undeniable as great people have always being known by this factor. Poets have warned against bad company:

- Lot's wife kept bad company; her affiliation with the prophet was lost.
- The Cave Men's dog kept company of the good for a couple of days and became as respected as humans.

The holy Quran mentions people who were led astray due to keeping company of corrupt and mischievous humans: "Woe to me, I wish I had not made friends with that (mised) guy. He did lead me astray from the message (of Allah) after it has come to me³."

Example:

- Beware of bad company, beware!
- Get away from the vile; Do not allow you nature to get vile.
- If you wish for no trouble, avoid trouble makers.

Some people prefer to be alone and work alone. And some prefer to live in the community and socialize more. Psychologists call the former introverts and the latter extroverts. Some people believe that silent and quiet people are wiser and more knowledgeable yet sometimes more harmful. For example:

- Do not watch for he who is boisterous; Be wary of he who is reserved.

Tendency to cover up themselves and remain veiled is so intense in Iranians that each one remains an unfolded secret to others. Distrusting others in

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general, seeing all as enemies and dreading danger have made Iranians become so reserved and secretive.

8. Fear of Informers

“Woe to every backbiter slander-monger³.”

Example:

- Fear not seven-headed dragon; Fear backbiters.

In history, there are many whom their gossiping has cost somebody's life. Reactions, manners and words are mostly to save one's life, pleasing somebody and avoiding his or her dissatisfaction. In such situations, the best way is to resort to a man in power. And this is when pretense and snitching appear in behavior, and anxiety shows up in daily life and social affairs.

9. Fear of Failure

Failure in life has always been a matter of concern to humans. Therefore, some people prefer to experience less and even try to appear in way so that they will feel less like losers. If humans do not gain new experience, they would rather wait for others to experience something new and follow him. This will prevent the society to be a forerunner and thoughtful. For example:

- He who has once bitten by a snake from a hole would barely get around that hole again.
- Once bitten by a snake, he will dread even a coiled rope

10. Fear of the Jealous and Ill-natured

Jealousy leads to disturbance, weakness, vulnerability, and intense fear in a person. A jealous person not only wishes for something that someone else owns, but he also wishes that the other person would lose it. He takes pleasure to see that person's grief. We have this saying in our literature and folklore that, “A jealous is never at peace.” or “Jealousy is a malady with no cure.” Fear of the jealous has been reflected in proverbs and it has been warned against them. For example:

- Be wary of the jealous and the vengeful. Do not stop pursuing your goal for what somebody tells you.
- If you are afraid of malady, avoid jealousy for the doctor compares jealousy to a malady without cure.

One of the causes of immorality in our society, was our country's social and economic instability in some eras, for instance, in the era which Mongols reigned, the oppressed and underprivileged people in order to survive and escape hunger and the oppression of the current rulers, became negligent to many moral issues and thus, lying, flattery, betrayal, jealousy, and many other vile manners became common .

11. Fear of the Greedy

Humans are greedy by nature. At the time of hardship they are impatient and at the time of blessing prevent others from enjoying it. People whose goal is

this world and are materialistic go to extreme in making money and covet for what others have. For example:

Do not be avaricious, and fear no one.

- this world is like a well full of fear and greed. Try to pull yourself out of it.

One of the factors leading Iranians to greed was the oppressive reigns which have led our society to moral degeneration. In a socially closed society where the government is in the hands of a distinct class who rely on power and deception, greed and guile will spread as acceptable ways to defend themselves against men of power .

12. Fear of Sin

Sense of guilt is the result of a person's awareness of the fact that his behavior does not match the norms and rules of the holy moral system he believes in. This system can be religious or not. The person obliges himself to act according to those systems. When he becomes aware of the fact that there is a mismatch, he feels guilty .

In a religious society like Iran, fear of sin has been greatly reflected in laymen culture, literature and sayings for example:

- He who has done nothing wrong, why should be afraid of judgment.

- The traitor was fearful.

- Be righteous, and fear no king or ruler.

- If your heart is clean, Filthy garments do not matter.

As mentioned before in a religious society like ours, since past eras even in ancient times, the role of religion has been quite significant and fear of deviation from morality is obviously seen in Persian proverbs .

13. Fear of Boldness and Bravery

Courage is a great human virtue and history of mankind has always been in debt to the role of courageous people in turning points. Unfortunately, history has always dealt with a different type of courage all over the world including in our homeland, which was exclusive to those people in power. Those who benefit the advantages of power and do not care about common sense. They are neither truth-seekers nor moral. Psychologically speaking, their main feature is self-conceit, self-righteousness, and in short, absolute and undoubted confidence in themselves. This type of boldness is unlimited and since they cannot stand common sense, will relentlessly fight any different or opposing voices to display their courage. They won't stop until absolute silence or disappearance of the opposing voice for example:

- A brave person does not go to grave in one piece.

- He is not afraid of even a two-headed giant.

- Although agile, the hawk is afraid of the eagle.

- If you set the savanna on fire, beware of the lions if you are wise.

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This type of courageous person is afraid of the slightest failure inside as much as he is showing courage, faith and determination outside. Thus, he resorts to different sorts of despotism to succeed .

14. Religious Fear

When people are threatened by others, they resort to confidentiality to survive. “Confidentiality as a self-defense method, was one of the features that since ancient times has always been advised to Iranians in religious practices (for instance taqiyya) or mystic practices (for example itikaf) or social manners (such as prudence)⁶.

“Pretense” is to cover one’s real beliefs and manners and being falsely and pretentiously faithful to beliefs and manners which save a person’s life in certain situations especially against a tyrannical government. In fact it has been a tool for people to exonerate themselves from accusations such as disobedience, rebel, blasphemy, misleading innovation and heterodoxy to survive. Examples include:

- He is a Muslim for the fear of his life.
- Beware of the enemy who has become your friend; beware of the magus who has become a Muslim

15. Fear of the Pretentious and Hypocrites

Hypocrisy means gaining credit and honor through pretentiously praying God. Therefore, this worshipper is called pretentious. In other words, hypocrisy is ostentation, boast and presence in order to attract people’s attention and earn their appreciation. Hypocrisy and ostentation are dispraised in our culture and people are warned against them⁷. For example:

- Fear the magus when he converts to Islam.
- Beware of the dog which acts like a fox.
- A sinful man who is afraid of God, is much better than an ostentatious worshipper.

One of the results of being in jeopardy is presence and hypocrisy. In any condition, confronting the government or people he has already taken as his enemies, the person displays a false and hypocrite personality to save himself. He hides his true feelings and expresses those which he is expected. He guarantees his safety this way. Most people cannot have a solid and uniform personal identity. Iranians, as a nation under constant suppression of dictators, have always had to resort to hypocrisy and presence to save their lives.

DISCUSSION

Humans’ style of life and their social behaviors are among things determined in accordance with personal needs in different situational and historical circumstances. Persian proverbs and sayings include experiences, thoughts, hopes and internal dreams of people since old times. By studying and investigating them, we learn about thoughts, ideas, and many of mental psychological issues affected by the events of their time. By studying these sayings form a psychological aspect,

some information can be obtained about their characteristics and psychological issues such as “fear and anxiety” –which are important issues in psychology. These issues are expressed in the most beautiful and eloquent way, that is proverbs. Most psychological concepts concerning human behavior and mental emotions are reflected in Persian proverbs in various forms. Fear has been reflected in various forms such as “fear of God”, “fear of death”, “fear of enemy”, “fear of destiny”, etc. in people’s lives, as proverbs have been reflective of laymen’s thoughts and beliefs throughout history.

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