
Debate in Persian prose

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RESUMEN

En términos literarios, debate involucra las obras que un poeta o un escritor conversaciones con el lenguaje de dos o varios personajes al mismo tiempo, y expresa sus especificaciones para demostrar la superioridad de uno de ellos a los demás. Este estilo literario ha sido empleado en la poesía persa en forma de viñeta, qasida y masnavi. Sin embargo, el debate se puede encontrar en la prosa persa desde el siglo quinto. La mayoría de estos debates han sido reconocidos y presentada por los investigadores contemporáneos. Uno de estos debates desconocidos es el debate de Bagdad y Isfahán por Abdul Salam bin Abi Majid famoso por Kamal Isfahani en forma de escritura a mano. Sólo hay una versión de esta obra en Gran Bretaña biblioteca del museo y hay una película relacionada con él llevó a cabo en la Universidad de Teherán biblioteca central y esta versión no ha sido corregido y, sin embargo publicada. Este debate es eufemismo combinado con milagros y versos. Es poco probable, este tipo de prosa era común en siglo VIII. La presente investigación tiene como objetivo investigar el debate en breve prosa persa y presentar este valioso trabajo por primera vez

Palabras clave: la prosa persa, siglo VIII, debate, Bagdad y Isfahán, escritura, corrección

SUMMARY

In literary term, debate involves works that a poet or a writer talks with language of two or several characters concurrently and expresses their specifications to prove superiority of one of them to others. This literary style has been employed in the Persian poetry in the form of vignette, qasida and masnavi. However, debate can be found in Persian prose since fifth century. Most of these debates have been recognized and introduced by contemporary researchers. One of these unknown debates is debate of Bagdad and Isfahan by Abdul Salam bin Abi Majid famous for Kamal Isfahani in handwriting form. There is only one version of this work in Britain museum library and there is one movie related to it held in Tehran University central library and this version has not been corrected and published yet. This debate is euphuism combined with miracles and verses. Unlikely, this prose type was common in eight century. The present research aims to investigate debate in Persian prose briefly and introduce this valuable work for the first time.

Key words: Persian prose, eighth century, debate, Bagdad and Isfahan, handwriting, correction

RESUM

En termes literaris, debat involucra les obres que un poeta o un escriptor converse amb el llenguatge de dues o més personatges a la vegada, i expressa les seves especificacions per demostrar la superioritat d'un d'ells als altres. Aquest estil literari ha estat emprat en la poesia persa en forma de vinyeta, qasida i Masnavi. No obstant això, el debat es pot trobar a la prosa persa des del segle cinquè. La majoria d'aquests debats han estat reconeguts i presentada pels investigadors contemporanis. Un d'aquests debats desconeguts és el debat de Bagdad i Isfahan per Abdul Salam bin Abi Majid famós per Kamal Isfahani en forma d'escriptura a mà. Només hi ha una versió d'aquesta obra a Gran Bretanya biblioteca del museu i hi ha una pel·lícula relacionada amb ell va dur a terme a la Universitat de Teheran biblioteca central i aquesta versió no ha estat corregit i, no obstant això publicada. Aquest debat és eufemisme combinat amb miracles i versos. És poc probable, aquest tipus de prosa era comú en segle VIII. Aquesta investigació té com a objectiu investigar el debat en breu prosa persa i presentar aquest valuós treball per primera vegada.

Paraules clau: la prosa persa, segle VIII, debat, Bagdad i Isfahan, escriptura, correcció

INTRODUCTION

Debate and its types

Debate means discussion, conversation and asking questions and answers. In other words, it is conversation between two or many individuals that each of them tries to prove his superiority by reasoning. In literary term, it is poem or prose that two individuals or two things are discussing on a subject and finally one party wins and the debate is concluded (Anosheh,2002:1276.2). Indeed,deep structure of debate is epic; "Since two individuals or two things are discussing on their superiority and each one tries to prove his superiority by offering reasoning finally one party wins"(Shamisa,2004:241).

Debate is characterized by discerning and reasoning concurrently and presenting what they believe in. Ragheb Isfahani considers opinion as discussion and contemplation and writes that opinion is

general relative to deduction; since every deduction can be an opinion but every opinion cannot be considered deduction."Generally speaking, debate in Persian, Arabic and Turkish languages is used in general and particular aspects. In general aspect, approximately it involves any conversation between two parties whether long or short, hostile or intimate, judged or not; so a short or friendly conversation can be called debate. In particular aspect, the goal is dialogue with particular rules. Each party tries to show his superiority by accounting his advantages and indicating disadvantages of other party. These conversations are ended by interfering third person and usually the judge tries to satisfy both parties"(Pourjavadi,2006:34).

History of debate

Debate has been used in world literature and also Persian literature since ancient times. In world literature, it dates back to Babylon, Acadian and Sumerians in Mesopotamia. This style was employed not only in Mesopotamia ancient civilizations and Iran but also it was used in west countries. In ancient Greece, debate was not used in the form employed in Mesopotamian civilizations, but Plato wrote philosophical debates. Debates are seen in Hebrew and Syrian languages and then used in European languages like English, French and German in Middle Age and renaissance. It can be said that debates have impacted on different civilizations. There are similarities in European and Middle East languages not only from structure perspective but also from characters identity and even the subjects that they express. It can be referred to debates among body parts like eyes and ears, body and soul, fall or spring in different languages"(ibid:35).

"In western literature the date of debates backs to two famous works of Aristophanes, the Greek poet (450-385 BC), *Toads and Clouds* that the former is debate between two poets and the latter is debate between right and wrong. Examples can be seen in some works of Virgil (70-19 BC). In twelfth, thirteen and seventeen centuries debates were culminated in prose and poetry.

Debate in the literature of the West involves discussion about moral, politics, religion and love issues and a final judgment is undertaken by a third party. The theme of most of these debates is dialogue between body and soul, good and evil, God and Satan, and in earlier examples, discussions between the seasons, flowers and animals. Of known examples in the literature of the West can be referred to *debate of Spirit and Joy* by Andrew Marvell, the English poet that led to victory of soul and *Natural Religion* by David Hume and *Socrates debates*"(Anosheh, 2002: 1377.2).

Mohammad Ghanimi Helal in his book "Comparative Literature" suggests that the root of this debate date backs to Plato and Aristotle era and he writes: "Plato and Aristotle thought maybe prevail among Muslims by "Almhasen" (advantages) books as controversies, such dialogues and debates were effective in the early centuries of Islam. Books on moral issues are rooted in the Pahlavi language. In Pahlavi language, there are pamphlets on legitimate and illegitimate subjects. These pamphlets have stemmed from Zoroastrian religious literature. The content of the papers of the seventh and eighth centuries was moral issues and this recent approach was employed in the Arabic books with educational nature. The subject of these books was communication and interaction in the form of equal merits and morality. The earliest Arabic book is *Almhasen* by Omar Farkhan al-Tabari. He had Iranian culture and he was contemporary of Mammon and had friendly relations with Jafar Barmaki. There is other book by this title by Ibn Qtybh and many books were written in Arabic in the

same field. "Almhasen and Alazdad"(Advantages and disadvantages) attributed to Jahiz is noteworthy. These books have been influenced by Pahlavi literature. Besides the influence of Pahlavi literature on these books debates are as questions and answers"(Ghanimi Helal,1994: 345).

Parviz Azkaei writes: "The most prominent scholar and writer of debates is Jahiz Basari (830) who wrote works in prose as "Advantages and disadvantages" and " Khasayesolboldan" and it can be referred to dialogue between a lame and leprous, coquetry of maids and boys, coquetry of blacks and whites, story of lion and wolf, cultivars and palm, debate between winter and summer and some stories on tribes like the people of Kofi and Basra or Hamadan, debate between heat and cold by Ibn Faqih Hamadani included in his geography book(Azkaei, 2007: 7-8).

As mentioned, the first examples of debates can be found in Sumerian literature; since Sumerian scholars paid more attention to this style. "The famous debates on Cuneiform tablets are as follows: 1-debate of summer and winter 2 - cattle and grain debate 3 - bird and fish dialogue 4-discussion of tree and reed 5 -wire and copper dialogue 6- picks and plows discussion 7- mile and stone; in which each of these seven debates involves two hundred or three hundred couplets. The Assyrian tree (palm and goat) debate has been influenced by Sumerian Grain and Wolf dialogue (ibid: 6).

Assyrian tree, as one of the first debates remains of the Parthian Pahlavi is debate between goat and a palm in Parthian Pahlavi language contains hundred and twenty one couplets has written by an unknown poet suggesting the existence of this literary genre in pre-Islam Iran. Assyrian tree begins with a short description of a tree, without explicitly being mentioned its name as a puzzle or riddle (part 1) and the listener or reader would have realized that it is a palm. If your palm (parts 1 to 20) that it contains fruit or tools that are made of wood, leaves and fibers. In the next section (parts 21 to 53) a goat discusses with it to contempt and ridicule it and accounts its benefits as well as feed or its milk used in the Zoroastrian religion ceremonies, and also the tools are made of its organs such as intestines, skin and wool. Finally, according to the poet (paragraph 54) goat wins (Tafazoli,1997: 256).

In this debate the palm is symbol of the customs and beliefs and the goat represents Iranian religion and rituals. Some scholars believe that goat is symbol of Zagros mountain and palm is symbol of Mesopotamia and the conflict between livestock and farming systems (Azkaei,2007:7).

Analysis of debate literary genre

As was stated before, the main objective of debate is discussion between two opposite elements. The main effort in this challenge and debate is proving a philosophical theory and inference moral result. The parties are human or animals, objects and abstract concepts (such as soul and joy) in the form of human characters and sometimes fall into any of the parties to the dispute, manifestation of a particular idea or thought. In other words, sometimes aspect of the debate is fanciful and unrealistic and sometimes it is real. The poet or writer expresses his own thoughts as "I said or he said". Both parties of the debate are either men (like two lovers) or animal, bird, and sometimes objects or different creatures. Each of the characters tries to prove its superiority to the other, and because of this dominance, it is also called boasting poem. In mystical literature, the most debates are presented between lover and beloved. Sometimes lovers and beloveds talk w with each other like stories of candles and butterflies and flower, nightingale and love.

This discussion in Persian literature requires a comprehensive study. In addition to Assyrian Tree (mentioned above) it can be also found other examples. In the Persian poetry, Abu Nasr Ali bin Ahmad Asadi Tusi, the composer of *Garshasnameh* employed debate. Arab and Foreigner, Heaven and Earth, Spear and Bow, Night and Day, Magi and Muslim are five debates were written by Asadi. In each of the five debates, the poet has referred to the dialogue between two parties and their reasoning and ultimately persuaded them.

So the first debates in Persian poetry were in the ballad and lyricism forms. Apart Since fifth century the poets and writers wrote debates in *masnavi* and *gobbet*. The Iraqi poets that followed the style of Hindi poets also paid special attention to this kind of oratory. Debate has a special place in works of Nizami Ganjavi after Asadi Tusi. He has employed debate in his "*Makhzanolasrar*" as debates of the nightingale and falcon, fox and dog and two owls. But in *Khosrow and Shirin*, the form is somewhat different from current debates in Persian literature. In "*Makhzanolasrar*" and common literary debates the dialogues are fictional and designed to educate the reader and philosophical and ethical conclusions are drawn from the issues. In "*Eskandarnameh*" the debate between the Chinese and Roman painters are philosophical and allegoric. In *Khosrow and Shirin*, the debates do not offer such conclusions but they are techniques included in the story. The writer uses this technique to demonstration and fully engagement of the audience with the story and creates a dialogue between the characters and eliminates the weakness of characters" (Noroozi, 2009:161).

Different types of debate can be found in the Persian poetry in different styles. It can be pointed to the debates between felt and mat, razor and pen, sun and cloud by Khajavi Kermani and the debates between bow and arrow in the verse of Beggar and King by Helali Joghataii, independent verses such as a ball and bat by Talibe Jajarm, moon and sun by Khwaja Masoud Qummi, old and young by Mirza Muhammad Naseer Isfahani. In the contemporary period, Bahar and Parvin Etesami debates are famous. The debates of spring and stone, bamboo and oak, and female duck and male duck, pin and shirt, pot and frying pan, ant and snake, hunter and bird, cloud and rain, burlap and diamond, mountain and straw, eye and eyelash, livestock and seed, mirror and comb, garlic and onions, lentils and bean. In Parvin Etesami *divan* we can find over sixty types of debates from bird's tongue and abstract concepts and natural elements. As a result, it can be said that the debate in Persian poetry has begun by ode and manifested in sonnet, fragment, quatrain, couplet and most of the literary forms.

Debate in Persian prose

Although debate is common in poetry, many debates can also be found in Persian prose. These debates were written as rhyming prose especially in the second half of sixth century. In books of "*Bhralfavayed*" and "*Hamidi authorities*" written the second half of this century there are several debates. In the latter one, the characters debate each other; however, they are imaginary. The first independent debate prose in this period is pamphlet by Abu Saad Termezi, where the two main characters, the flowers and wine debate with each other (Pourjavadi, 2006: 33).

There are popular debates in "*Hamidi authorities*". In seventh, eighth and ninth centuries debate became more common in prose writing (as poetry) and many books were written accordingly. Saadi debates with a claimant in *Golistan* that is a supreme example of Persian prose debate in the seventh century.

The debates of the companions of wisdom with love, delusion and

wisdom, eye and ear, lover and beloved, epic and elegy by Saieddin Tarkeh and debates of Sun and moon, razor and pen water and fire by Monir Lahori are other examples that manuscripts and they have not yet been introduced.

Baghdad and Isfahan debate in Persian literature

The debates of various towns and cities are among beautiful and high frequency concepts in the Persian and Arabic poems. The poets and writers, together with the names of cities and countries have offered different concepts and contents in addition to the induction of different connotations to debate between the city and the country. We can find plentiful examples of this kind of literary and scientific opposition. The author could not find a debate between Baghdad and Isfahan separately. He only has found the poetic descriptions on Isfahan in debate with a group of pilgrims on the shore of Tigris in Isfahan *qasida* by Khaqani. In that debate, the pilgrims are going to have stated that the official position of Baghdad is still much higher than Isfahan. But the poet asks them about the right to arbitration. One of them says Tigris river sands are worthwhile. One of the passengers says that if there is wealth and prosperity in Isfahan it is not more than Zakat received in alley of Kharkh in Baghdad. Here the poet by explicit and unequivocal language introduces Isfahan more valuable than Bagdad and even Egypt, and he says that this alley is nothing compared to drinking fountains in Isfahan and Tigris is not as valuable as Isfahan fountains:

Some pilgrims are sitting near Tigris
They are discussing about Isfahan and Bagdad
One of them says: If you hear features of Bagdad
You will deny the glory of Isfahan
Sand of Tigris is more valuable than Isfahan
Bagdad is the city of caliph
Isfahan never reaches to Bagdad
The other says: if there is wealth in Isfahan
It is not more than offerings of Kharkh in Bagdad
There is riot and injustice in Bagdad
Isfahan is peaceful and calm
Isfahan River is more glorious than Tigris
Bagdad smells leopard musk
Isfahan smells deer musk
Isfahan is more developed than Egypt
Zenderoud is as glorious as Nile
Cairo is vanquished by Isfahan
The flowers and plants smell nice in Isfahan
I offered reasons for proving the superiority of Isfahan
I have praised Isfahan for thirty years (divan,1995).

Accordingly, apart from a few couplets written by Khaqani and poems by other poets there is no other verse on debate of these cities and the mentioned debate is the first debate in euphuism that offers the most beautiful expressions and characteristics.

Baghdad and Isfahan debate

This debate is the first debate that two cities are discussed and this work as well as other debates has written for entertainment of the king. The author is Abdul Majid bin Abi Kamal Isfahani who explicitly refers to his name. This debate was written in late seventh and early eighth century for Mobarkshah:

"One of his characteristics is that he does not waste his life and he engages in protection of the country and governmental affairs. In free time, he studies books on logic and philosophy and different

religions and scholars and sages viewpoints and discussion points to practice law”.

We could not find any information on different descriptions about Mobarakshah used by the author at the end of this work. Another unknown author named Hesam bin Muhammad Muhammad Rashid Saraf Khwarizmi has a debate, chess debate, written for Mobarakshah. Pourjavadi writes about this debate: “the debate of chess and backgammon was written by an unknown author named Hesam Muhammad Rashid Saraf Khwarizmi about the seventh or eighth century in Shushtar for Mobarakshah. Minavi has tried to find information about the author, but he has not succeeded. This pamphlet is the only work by the author (Pourjavadi, 2004:16, *ibid*, 2006: 480).

According to application of the Quran verses and Arabic couplets it can be inferred the knowledge of the author on Arabic language and literature.

Debate begins with the introduction of the author about his youth. He points to his studies and journey to different places and tolerating difficulties finally concludes that Bagdad and Isfahan are preferred over other cities. He tries to compare two cities each with unique characteristics but he could not distinguish between them. In this astonishment and confusion his friend announces him that debates have been written between these two cities. Thus he wants him to hear the debates. After this brief introduction, the author visualizes the debate stage. At first, Isfahan sends a message to Bagdad and deprives it of praising itself:

O, Bagdad unless you lost sights of Isfahan otherwise, you never showed off praised yourself. It is time to know that I have a river offers pleasure when a viewer looks at it and I have a breeze that blowing calmly. If I talk about my properties, white camphor and musk, amber and wind will be embarrassed.

Isfahan begins to describe its beauties and with arrival of the messengers to Bagdad and leaving its message, Bagdad hears its description and overwhelmingly begins to mention its beauty and traits:

O, Isfahan, you are telling a strange story and you never seem embarrassed and ashamed and never claim being meaningless. Everybody knows that my weather is pleasant and I am a famous for refreshing and pleasing air and I am admitted to be the head of the cities are in any kind and variety, I do not prefer any position of other cities in softness, strength and power of resistance.

Bagdad praises itself in few pages. Then Isfahan begins to defeat and praise itself:

There is limit in boasting what is the reason for this exaggeration leading to destruction, keep silence and never trust uproar and never give chance to madness;

Thus, it describe its characteristics and fresh and dry fruits, and grains, sand, spring, flower, orchard and garden and explores different seasons. Bagdad that is restless says:

Your speech leads you to destruction and sadness, be calm and never exaggerate; I heard your description on your river and surrounding streams and flowers and a lovely counterpoint, grass, willow and cypress and rays of its beauty, clean water and wells, ice and fruit, peaches, pears and apples and such words, I listened and now I am not concerned whether the artists will proof the nature of the property covered here and there is no need to deny other one; then it suggests that these words are false words and begins to describe its virtues and qualities and defects of opposite party:

There are abundances and variety of trades; all people live in peace and security, my river is flowing and my soil smells musk and amber, there is brotherhood, friendship and compassion in my land. My people are good natured and I see beautiful flowers in front of

the windows. Everywhere you look you can see gratitude and magnificence; the stars are shining in the sky and there is affluence in markets. Bagdad continues its description and talks about seasons, especially in spring, Tigris, streams and dates and fruit, waters, holy shrines and Arabic, the language of the Quran, resorts, artists and crafts.

After reproaching and referring to disadvantages of Isfahan by Bagdad, Isfahan tries to respond with hostile and vicious language. So it refers to the thieves and beggars of Bagdad. Then describes the features of Isfahan and this part of the argument is worth reading for having a short and expressive phrases and compounds. Isfahan has tried to use eloquent phrases and words and anecdotes to defend it. Then brief conversation between them arises and both try to convince the other party to deny other words until Isfahan demands Bagdad to open its eyes and ears and see and hear the truth:

It is certain that if I praise myself hundred years I would not refer to one hundredth of my qualities, because they cannot be expressed by speech and language, my purpose is not to deny such language in praising my qualities.

Accordingly, the author offers detailed expression of Isfahan and accounts its characteristics and thanks the creator to creation of Mobarakshah and his dignity and honor for overlooking and restoration of the government by eloquent language. By hearing description of Isfahan, Bagdad acknowledges the debate and confesses that the dispute between them has been solved. At the end, the author expresses his wish to visit Isfahan and he decides to return there and offer this work to Mobarakshah as the minister.

The first page of the Bagdad and Isfahan debate manuscript

The last page of the mentioned manuscript

Conclusion

We can conclude that:

- 1 - However, many works of Persian literature have been corrected and published in recent years, but there are poets and writers that their works are as old manuscripts and unpublished in various libraries.
- 2 - Most debates known in Persian literature are in verse and prose genre was common in Persian literature since late sixth century.
- 3 - One of the debates that have not been considered so far is Bagdad and Isfahan debate by the Abdul Salam Ben Abi Majid famous for Kamal Isfahani was written in late seventh and early eighth century as an exquisite and excellent work that is important in study of this genre. This debate is in the Book of Sufism and Persian literature by Nasrallah Poorjavadi that introduces various debates in Persian literature and there is no reference to it.
- 4 - Literary debates that have been identified until now are mainly related to late sixth century onwards, and they are valuable in study of Persian prose styles, especially euphuism.
- 5 - Although many literary debates has been corrected and published so far, there is on complete list yet. By referring to the list of manuscripts, many other examples of such works can be found that need to introduce, revise and publish.

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