

The Trace of People's Beliefs in the Animal Oriented Stories in Molavi's *Masnavi*

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ABSTRACT Culture is one of the most important issues which have occupied the minds of people in a society. People have close relationship with the beliefs of the past. This necessitates the proper analysis and psychological and social interpretation of these beliefs. Since the beginning of creation of the world, animals have played important roles in the cultures and customs of nations in different ways. They have been used, to a great extent, in prose works, poems, people's maxims and narratives in the forms of symbols, signs, metaphors and similes. These traces can be found in the works of such Persian poets like Attar, Sanai, Molavi, Saadi and Hafiz. In this article an attempt is first made to study people's culture and its background. It then focuses on people's attitudes towards some animals in one of the most outstanding Persian poems, entitled *Masnavi Molavi* aimed at a better understanding of the poem and obtaining knowledge on the background of the beliefs of the poet's contemporary people.

INTRODUCTION

The study of literature, whether epic or religious, educational or mystic, not only considered an inseparable part of ancient culture of that land, but also makes clear the ambiguities present in most of the literary works. Since the writers of these works belonged to ordinary people, and they were familiar with the social conventions, therefore they focused on the subject relevant to their own societies. From the anthropological sociological point of view, these subjects are of great importance, because the study of these cultural works which profess morality, custom, thought and the beliefs of nations is more effective and comprehensible than any history book.

Animals used in literary works can make the work more attractive and entertaining. As Singh (German poet and critic) believes fables last longer in the mind of readers because they are endowed with stronger allegorical characteristics. He believes that animals used in literature possess two outstanding characteristics: first, their characters are more stable, i.e. whenever we come across the name of an animal we are reminded of such concepts like courage, acuteness, artfulness, greed, power, and so on. They affect man's mind, because from the anthropological point of view, each animal is associated with a characteristic in people's beliefs. Second, fables would naturally have stronger emotional effect on the readers

Theoretical Framework

It was in the beginning of the 19th century when two German brothers named Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm for the first time published German tales entitled *The Legends of Children and Homely Tales*. Clouston was one of the first Orientalists who wrote Persian folktales and published a book in 1889. Jamal Khansari was the first Iranian writer who referred to people's customs in a book entitled *Aghayed-ul-Nesa*, also named *Colsum Naneh*. After Constitutionalism, Dehkhoda and Jamalzadeh were two writers who introduced common expressions used by people into prose. Ahmad Kasravi also wrote many such works. Finally it was Sadegh Hedayat who skillfully produced his major works and introduced people's culture into literature. He published *Oosaneh* in 1310 and *Neyrangestan* in 1312. (Zandi 2007: 15-19)

Since Iran has been invaded by many nations and, in turn, it has also attacked other nations, it has been exposed to many different cultures. Thus it is necessary to focus on the impact of these cultures and make an anthropological review of these works. Prose and poetry in Iran has been considered as a mirror reflecting the culture of our predecessors. By using expressions, metaphors, similes and symbols, Persian literature has reflected past and present of the people. It helps us realize the spirit of our people's past.

One of the most important aspects of the people's culture appeared in Persian literature is the attitudes and beliefs of the people in the past towards animals, which in turn has caused the emergence and creation of many images and themes.

Since the beginning of the creation of mankind, animals have played important roles in the culture and customs of people; they form a major part of human culture and custom by being depicted in the poetical works, narratives and maxims in symbolic and metaphorical forms. A great example of such depiction has occurred in Moulana Jalal-ul-din Molavi's famous collection *Masnavi*, where he has used animal. In this article an attempt is made by the author to focus on different perspectives of animals effective in the people's culture used by Molavi in order to strengthen the moral and mystic principles.

Therefore it is necessary to pay attention to three different kinds of animals: domestic, wild and imaginary animals.

METHODOLOGY

The author has used Library method using resources written by other scholars. Since the author has thought *Masnavi* at different universities, has made use of the works written by other Moulana scholars.

RESULTS

I- Domestic animals and their position in the people's beliefs as used in *Masnavi*

1- Horse

According to people's beliefs it stands for gentility, loyalty and obedience. Its presence in the house brings blessings. (Mirovich 1968, pp. 118-119) in the past, kings and lords chose the name horse for themselves. These names include Lohrasb, Goshtasb, Arjasb ... (Vashtagha 2004: 235)

Moulana has also considered horse a sacred animal. In another place, he identifies horses with men. Horses are shown as clever as men. As it has been indicated in some of ethic books, it is believed that hawk and horse are two animals that are placed on top of the peak of the animal pyramid at the beginning of human social family. (Toosi 1985: 61-62)

Again he believes horse is an animal who can easily distinguish an enemy from a friend and can feel danger. (*Masnavi* 361, line 3) Molana has made use of such names as "asb", "Fars", "Samand", "Khang", "Tazi" and "Baragh" [all standing for horse] in *Masnavi* 141 times. He has also made use of those expressions where the afor said names are used

2- Mule

It stands for stupidity; it lacks the original identity of its parents. Omar Khayam states in his *Norooz Nameh*: "Jamshid¹ made mule out of the mixture of donkey and horse" (Khayam 1959)

Molana has made use of mule in his mystic allegories in the collection of *Masnavi* as a negative symbol, especially in a story when a mule complains to a camel that it stumbles a lot but the latter does not. (3/1741) camel which stands for divinity, replies to the mule which lacks in intelligence telling it that understanding knowledge is very important, thus you (mule) lack in such divine knowledge

3- Camel

The people consider it symbol of patience, resistance and innocence. It bears hardships and it doesn't lose temper easily, but when it gets angry, it does not give up until it destroys its enemy. "camel's hatred" is a common expression used by the people indicating excessive and endless hatred. Other common expressions are like: "There is a camel lying at every one's door", and so on. (Partoee Amoli 1968: 669)

Camel, according to Molana, is considered a favorite animal among different nations. It mostly represents divinity, disillusioned lover. The only place where camel has a bad reputation is when fear is attributed to it.

4- Ass

It stands for ignorance and obedience. It is also used in common expressions like "getting drawn in mud like an ass". "Eat ass's brain" is also used for those who are ignorant. Molana states:

Mind is lost in the mud like an ass
It says of an inevitable love (1, line 115)
We ate ass's brain so that like you
Consider a fly a nightingale's equal (3, line 2735)

The word ass is also used when people quarrel. It is considered an obscene word. Molana has made use of this expression in his works in order to show ignorance:

Oh! You who lack in intellect

Are not a man but an ass (2, 1041)

People believe that ass is a domestic animal and should not be killed, but if it turns wild, it should be killed. (Shahidi, 1988, 100)

An ass should not be preferably killed

When turns wild should be killed (1, 3315)

Molana has used the name of ass in his works 306 times and he points out to the way the prophets like Jesus were accompanied by ass:

The ass accompanying Jesus was heartened
Was placed among the wise (2, 1858)

5- Cock (rooster)

Cock stands as good fortune and blessings and considered a favorite animal prophets. It is believed that the presence of cock repels evil forces from houses. (Warring 1990)

People consider it a muezzin who is not deceived by superficial morning and awakens people to worship God. But it is believed that if this animal does not sing on time, then it carries dark fortune and therefore must be killed. (Forozanfar 1968)

Oh! Untimely cock thou must be killed

As an idiot cannot be reasoned (1, line. 1159)

People also believe that there is a cock in the sky that sings early in the morning followed by the other cocks on the earth. Molana writes:

He was the sky cock who sings on time

Sing for God thou earthly cocks (1973, line 5)

6- Parrot

It stands for beauty and glory for this reason people have decided to train it.

In Masnavi, a parrot is considered a sweet talking mystic who lives in the cage of the world, and in order to gain meaning, he is ready to die. (1, 1848)

7- Peacock

It stands for beauty and glory, specially when it is a male peacock. It is believed that peacock is a heavenly bird helping evil enter heaven in the form of a snake and tempt Adam and Eve. Molana sings:

Oh! Spring to praise give thorns to flowers
Give this snake the beauty of peacock (6, 2706)

It is a favorite bird in India. It is also believed that peacock stands for pride and ambition; that is why God has given it ugly feet to make him get rid of its pride whenever it looks at its feet. People consider its feather sacred and thus keep them as blessings at their houses. (Yahaghi 1990)

II: Wild Animals in people's beliefs

1- Dragon (snake)

It is believed that if a dragon looks at a piece of emerald, it turns blind, that is why some people wear rings with emerald in order to keep this animal away. (Heravi 1992: 178) Molana also refers to this belief in Masnavi:

Dost thou know ambition as a snake

Easily die at the hand of the virtuous (1951: 5)

Snake is as dreadful as ambition and the only one who can destroy this snake is a virtuous man.

Some people believe that there is a particular bone behind snake's head, which should be taken out and exposed to air to be hardened and carried by them; it is believed that whoever carried this piece of bone with him or her, it plants love in his or her heart. It is believed that a person who has many supporters, he or she has this snake's bone. (Hedayat 1963) Molana has also used this belief in Masnavi,

Sadegh Hedayat refers to Ganj-e-Gharoon [Gharoon's treasure] which was guarded by a dragon that keeps the people away from this treasure (186).

2- Owl

It is believed that owl is an evil sign and carries dark omen. People believe that wherever an owl appears, it will bring disaster. The reason for this belief is that this bird dwells in the ruins. (Zandi 2007) Molana has also considered this bird disastrous and considers parrot its counterpart.

3- Hyena

It is known as an ugly animal. Every evil character is named after it. In Masnavi, it stands for a stupid man or woman who falls into destruction.

It is also believed that in order to hunt hyena, the hunter approaches its nest playing a musical instrument, then one would say "Hyena is at home.", the other would say "Hyena is not at home"; while hyena is unaware of what is going to become of him, its legs are tied by the hunters (Hedayat 1963).

III- Imaginary Animals

1- Al (a legendary animal belonging to Persians)

It is a harmful creature which appears in the form of a woman with thin hands and legs and a red face and a nose made of mud. It is believed to appear to pregnant women and removes her liver and keeps it in a basket. Whenever Al succeeds in crossing water, the pregnant woman would die. This creature is seldom visible.

People have devised ways to fight with this dangerous creature. These ways are: one of the ways is to keep a gun in the room of the pregnant woman, or, to draw a circle around the bed of the pregnant woman (Zandi 2007).

Moulana has referred to this creature in Masnavi. He refers to its red color believing that on the Day of Judgment, when the hands of sinners are as red as the color of Al.

2- Phoenicis

It is imagined as a huge animal living on Ghaf mountains as a bachelor. He is not married and lives lonely out of sight. It stands for divine force. Moulana in Masnavi compares phoenicis with a holy man who is invisible on earth the same as a phoenicis who is invisible on top of Ghaf Mountains (Poor Khaleghi 1968: 212).

3- Demon (giant)

This legendary animal is known in this way: he has horrible mouth and teeth, his body is covered with dark hair, and he dwells in remote and dry deserts. His hands and legs look like those of a tiger, and they are strong enough to kill men. He hunts passengers and wanderers in darkness of night and destroys them (Hedayat 1963: 175).

It is believed among people that if a man attacks a demon suddenly, piercing the former's head with a needle, this strong animal changes into an obedient slave and is ready to do anything for the man (Zandi 2007: 154).

It has also been believed that if a person is haunted he or she would be released of the demon within him by the spells uttered by magicians. (Zandi 2007: 140) Molavi also refers to this belief among people.

4- Buffalo

The Arab tribes, and a section of the people living in the Western part of Iran believe that buffalo never sleeps. Molana has manifested this belief in his poems saying that God has made him suffer so much pain to avoid sleeping like a buffalo.

DISCUSSION

Allegory is used in people's culture in order to make concept understood better. Animals play major roles in allegories. Poets and writers have made use of these allegories. Moulana Jalal-uddin Mohammad Balkhi is one of such poets. He has introduced deep mystic concepts by using allegories dealing with animals which are in turn symbols standing for certain characteristics. The readers are expected to know the beliefs behind the symbolic meanings of animals, if they intend to understand the allegories better. That is why an attempt is made in this article to emphasize the place of animals in people's cultures.

CONCLUSION

Anthromorphism has been present in literature, architecture and culture of civilized and uncivilized people over the world. Anthromorphism is a beautiful and exact metaphor used to attribute human characteristics to animals and other objects. This kind of attitude is caused by man's knowledge of animals' characteristics and his relation with animals. But it cannot be acknowledged when for the first time this method has been introduced into Persian literature. Some believe it was first introduced with the arrival of *Kelile and Demneh* from India to Iran as the first Anthromorphical story book. Moulana has made a proper use of animals in Masnavi so that he could make a better communication with his readers.

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