

## The study of mythical semiotics of matriarchy in Shahnameh

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**Abstract-***Ferdosi's Shahnameh* is the history of Iranian people fiction .What we read from *Shahnameh* is undoubtedly a subtle hint of a secret, mystery, sign and allusion. Accordingly, one of the most important issues in this venerable work is signs that represent evolution of social institutions. Therefore, the history of changes in matriarchy, forming a family and some points about the prominent role of women in society can be deduced from its stories. In this study the authors have considered Barthe, Culler and Ekou's theories to analyze the signs like females' authority, their right of ownership, their position and their characters.

**Key words:** *Ferdosi's Shahnameh*, signs, myth, matriarchy, position, ownership.

### I. Introduction

Language is a system of signs and is formed from the combination of a cause (outlook) and an effect (mind and meaning).The connection between them is made through a contraction, a rule or an agreement that are accepted in the society. The form of language is considered very important since it can lead us to understand its infinite hidden meanings. The constituents of the language along with their signs should be studied to grasp the meanings. According to Roland Barth's opinion a sign is anything that can be meaningfully replaced by the other thing.(Lebib:1999,p.21)Therefore, he has boarded the area of sign farther than language and has generalized it to other systems. There are many systems of signs in the world, such as literature that due to its implicit implications it needs semiotic description and examination. Each of literary elements can express different meanings. According to Jonathon Cullar " semiotics in literature is to discover the agreements on generating meanings ". (Cullar: 2009, p: 85).Although semiotics has a linguistic aspect in literature, it should not be limited to this aspect, because from Amber Taco's point of view "expressions can be used normally to refer to things or states. But in the first place they refer to cultural units, that is, they refer to content of those elements that have been made by a certain culture"(Echo: 2008, p: 20-21).So, we need to know the signs and the myths better .The signs that even in the case of a specific system like literature are able to represent non-literary aspects and in this discussion they are able to be connected to sociology and psychology discourses. Generally in the world of stories especially in lyrical-epic stories various occurrences

can be seen. Occurrences that make sequel to define things in wider dimensions than their true instances in the real world. Realization and perception of the world of social and cultural developments depends on "recognition of symbolical structures and independent objects and the systems of relationships that have given meanings to objects and actions and have formed the human world". (Culler: 2009, p.66)

## II. The Study of the matriarchy semiotics

*Shahnameh* has codes and signs especially in its mythical sections. A careful study can lead us to the key of secrets, and this way the enjoyable root of concept can be found from the hidden layer of sequences of the stories and tales. In this paper the authors strive to elicit the social institutions changes in women's role in the society in the *Shahnameh* stories.

### 1. Marriage

Three important principles that have prevailed in different ages cannot be seen in mate selection and marriage in tales and epic stories of *Shahnameh*. The three principles are; a) preference to men rather than women that is a necessary factor for patriarchy, b) giving inheritance to other children by the oldest child, and c) reproachable emancipated sexual relationship and also women modesty. Therefore, the signs are unknown for the ancient society of Iran, and their origin should be found in culture and civilization of people who have matriarchy and female-domination system in their society.

In these stories getting married to a woman is different from what Iranian traditional families do. One of the specific features of these stories is a love invitation of men by women to marry. The general plan of this request can be stated this way: An Iranian man travels somewhere that ends in a foreign country or the border of a country. The purpose of his travel sometimes is hunting, making war, invitation, or conspiracy. The man faces a high-ranking woman. Sometimes the man faces a woman in a party. The woman's love invitation of the man is a common feature of the story. One or some mediators, leaders and sometimes a message from God interfere to create a relation between man and woman. An event also can happen in the story that sometimes ends happily and other times end by killing the Iranian man who is the fruit of this marriage. In the end, there is a discussion on this issue that the groom comes back whether alone or with his wife together. The children who were born and are the result of this kind of marriage, sometimes come to Iran or stay with their maternal clan. If they come to Iran, they never forget their kinship with their mothers and their maternal clan. Some of the signs are worth considering the next part.

#### 1-1 Marriage of Fereydoun's sons with the Yemen king's three daughters

Considering the matriarchy system and love invitation of man by woman, we can point to the first marriage in Pishdadian age that is the indication of women high position in the society. Iraj, Selm and Tur married the Yemen king's daughters: Arezou, Muah and Sauhi. In this story Ferdowsi attributes the distinction between the boys to their mothers. This difference shows matriarchy and high respect for women clearly. The boys are known by their mothers. Selm and Tur are from Shahrenaz and Iraj is from Arnavaz.

*Among these three boys, two are from Shahrenaz and the youngest is a handsome boy from Arnavaz.* (Ferdowsi, 1995, vol.I, p.82,c.52)

Here Fereydoun's sons meritorious evaluation by the king of Yemen is considered. He tells Fereydoun "I will evaluate your sons base on my daughters' merit". It not only shows high respect for women but reveals matriarchy system of the society.

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Numbers after the year indicate the volume of Shahnameh. Numbers on the left and right sides indicate the page and couplet respectively. This is on the basis of Moscow printing.

*I accept what you say, and I will evaluate them regarding my daughters.* (1995, 1, 86, 123)

There is also a sign in the part below:

*I should see your three brilliant high-position princes* (1995, vol.I, p.87, c.128)

Also there are signs that indicate various testing and evaluations of the king of Yemen for accepting Fereydoun's son .it shows how valuable his daughters are for their father.

He had three daughters like three precious gems, but he had no son. His daughters were his officers.

If a messenger shows herself like a bride, she should kiss them because she is in lowly position to them.

I requested your father for accepting my sons just for you, and I talked beautifully to him

*Be always clever, quick and listen to him* (1995, vol.I, p.87, c.140-144)

In the end, when they marry Fereydoun's sons, the king of Yemen talks about his daughters' superiority to fereydoun's sons and says:

*In front of all priests cedar said the king was as beautiful as the moon (it indicates his daughters' superiority to Fereydoun's sons).* (1995, vol.I, p.89, c.171)

In this story the daughters' dowries are considered as a factor that shows high respect for them and also equality between girls and boys.

Yemen was settled in a good situation just due to the daughters and their dowries.

When a child has religion and parentage, both are dear whether boy or girl. (1995, vol.I, p.90, c.175-176)

The signs of matriarchy can be found in Zal and Roudabeh's marriage(vol.I,p.155-246), Kavoos and Soudabeh marriage(vol.II,p:131-137),Rostam and Tahmineh marriage(vol.II,p:170-179),Siavash and Jarrيره marriage(vol.III,p:92-94), Bijan and Manijeh lovemaking(v:5,p:9-85)Gashtasb and Katayoun marriage(c.6,p.10-64)etc.

## 2. Brides

In *Shahnameh* one of the signs which is the subject of lyrical stories is the marriages that represent matriarchy in *Shahnameh* stories. Paying a careful attention to the stories indicates that the marriages are held in the border of the country and near the brides' country or in brides' land. Some examples of this kind show the wedding parties take place in hunting-ground or ceremony-ground.

*The priest said that Rostam got up in the early morning for hunting*

*And went towards the border of Touran, like a brave hunter* (1995, vol.II, p.16, 18, c.170-171)

*That night like other nights also passed* (1995, p.174, c.62)

*A very beautiful woman like the sunshine, concealed herself there*

*She had two arched eyebrows and long hair like a lasso, she was as tall as cypress*

(1995, vol.II, p: 65-66, c.174)

*He asked her "what is your name?" "What are you doing in the dark?"*

*She said, "This is Tahmineh, I am so upset"(because of her true, deep love)  
I am the only daughter of the king of Semengan, I am descendant of heroes (1995, 2, p: 175, c: 69-71)*

There is another sign in the Siavash story and the heroes that kidnap his mother:

*One came from far distances near the border of horse riders of Tour (1995, vol.III, p.7, c.25)*

*Both were riding to the wood and rotated around the meadow*

*They found a beautiful woman there, and both became happy (1995, vol.III, p.727, c: 28)*

Also there is a sign in the story of Bijan. (vol.V, pp:10&12, 16-18)

Many wedding parties are celebrated in brides' land. Its signs can be pointed in the story of Zal, Kavous, Soudabe and the story of Siavash. Therefore, hunting-ground or celebrating-ground are always in the border of Touran and the story events happen there. In many cases women have important roles in them. The weddings are held exactly in the brides' land .there are some examples of this kind:

### **2-1 Zal's story:**

*It was Farvardin and the beginning of the year, the Zal's army was at the edge of the river*

*They picked up flowers from the edge of the river, their faces were like flowers (1995/164, 420-421)*

### **2-2 Kavous in the story of Soudabeh:**

*The king Hamavaran was told that the king Kavous came up with his troop via the China Sea (1995 vol.II, p.130, c:63)*

*Then kavous was told he had a daughter*

*She was more beautiful than cypress and had glossy long hair (1995, vol.I, p, 131, c: 72-73)*

### **2-3 Kavous in his bride's land (Soudabeh's land):**

*Kavous became inspired and encouraged and said;"I am in love with her"*

*"No one else except a king like me can be with her, a king can just stay with the moon"*

(1995 vol. II, p: 131, c: 76-77)

The Same sing can be seen in the story of Siavash (c.3, p: 78), and Gashtasb (vol.VI, p.16-17)

## **3. Woman courtship expression**

One of the visible signs of lyrical stories in *Shahnameh* is the matter of love on behalf of women and its acceptance by men. Generally, men are beloved and women express their love to their chosen men. Being responsive towards their lovers (women) shows women's right to choose their mates and their social superiority to men. In addition to arousing love, some are involved in materializing the lover and beloved relationship and they are in relation with the bride's family in different ways .These signs can be understood in some examples. Whenever love is the priority and the story begins with love. One of the women's relatives is engaged in creating the bond of matrimony between them.

### **A) Nanny and bondwoman in the story of Zal and Roudabeh**

*Roudabeh possessed five Turkish obedient and affectionate bondwomen (1995, vol.I, p.166, c.376)*

*One of the bondwomen said:" O' hero, tell us sweet talks"*

*Bondwomen started describing and acclaiming the beautiful visage of the hero (1995/1, p: 165/c. 446)*

*One of the bondwomen said to her a charming mistress "now it is your turn to find a solution" ("and attract Zal to yourself") (1995, vol.I, p.170, c.527)*

The Bijan and Manijeh story is also one of this type.

### **B) Girl's father**

In *Shahnameh* in two stories girls' fathers are involved in creating the bond of matrimony between lover and beloved. The stories are: "Rostam and Tahmineh" and "siavash and Jarireh". The story "Rostam and Tahmineh" has signs that show her father likes her to marry Rostam and the one who causes them to marry is her father. Matriarchy is obvious in the story. Ferdosi says:

*Cops commander (the king of Semengan) gave him a suitable place in the palace and always respected him*

*He invited elders from the army to celebrate a party for Rostam (1995, p: 56-57, c.173)*

*They drank wine and pretty dancers danced for them*

*They did not want Rostam to be upset, so they had him sit next to musicians and dancers*

*Tahmineh's father gave him an appropriate place to sleep and and fragranced his room (1985, vol.II, p.58-59, c.174)*

In Siavash and Jarireh story like Rostam and Tahmineh, Jarireh's father likes them to get married. Siavash was told "there are several girls here around you that one of them has the merit of being the queen of the palace".

*"The best and the most beautiful girl among them is Jarireh"*

*"She is as beautiful as the moon and she has a high position" (1985, vol.III, p.92, c.1423-25)*

Sometimes the signs of love and sympathy are quite natural and simple. These signs can be seen in the story of Zal and Roudabeh that Sindokht plays a great role in their marriage.

When Sindokht found he was in love with Roudabeh, she gave a solution:

*She said, "hero do something instead of thinking and imagining"*

*He accepted and they both became happy*

The most prominent sign is that women try to seduce men and attract their attention.

We can easily guess that in the original form of the story Tahmineh herself steals Rakhsh. She uses this trick to make the hero love her and she wants him to have lovemaking with her to give the horse back. It is the most important right for expressing their love to choose their spouse. This means that women have more right to choose their husband than men.

*I respect your horse and I give you the authority of ruling over Semengan*

In the story of Manijeh and Bijan cheating the fairy is because Gorgin Milad tricks Bijan and takes him to Manijeh's celebrating-ground. Something that can be seen obviously in *Shahnameh* is that Manijeh anesthetized Bijan and then took him to her palace.

*She ordered her servant to mix the anesthetic drug with his syrup (1985, vol.V, p: 70, c.22)*

*When he woke up he suddenly found that he hugged her (1985, vol.V, p: 22, c.78)*

### **4. The men's bond to their beloved's land**

The other important subject that its signs are visible in lyric stories of *Shahnameh* is the men's habitation in their birds' land after marriage. Its different aspects can be reflected precisely. Brides get married to the men who pass borders to live in their wives mainland. It seems they adhered to something to reside there. When they intend to go back home they face severe disagreement of the brides' tribes. In lyric stories of *Shahnameh* some grooms are invited to stay permanently in their brides' land. Sometimes marriage proposal is along this invitation and it

indicates matriarchy. The brides who travel to Iran finally escape or by force stay there by force. For instance Katayoun could not go to Iran with her husband.

*Make arrangement to cross your land and go to Iran where brave hearts live*

*Katayoun said "nonsense, do not look for a way to go from here"(1985, vol. VII, p.34)*

In Siavash story, jarireh lives far from siavash. Tahmineh stays with her father and being separated from Sohrab .in soudabeh and in manijeh stories the men are imprisoned in woman's land and they are released by **saviours** .Diversity of men in the land of their brides is **abserved** in Shahnameh lyrical stories .some of the examples are as follow:

**A)** Dependence to the bride's land may be due to dowry, treasury and desires that are contributed to groom by his father-in-law. Like the dowries of the king of Yemen's three daughters. (1995, 1, 89-90) katayoun (1945, 6, 62-63)

**B)** The interest of groom in residing in the land of bride could be due to the land .it can be seen in about Faranguis's dowry, that is about 600 km away from Touran and is given to her husband.

*All citizens talked about it from this boundary to the sea of China.*

*The length of the land was over 600 km, but the width was impossible to be measured.*

*The statements were written on silk for the king as a tradition by Kian dynasty*

(1995/3.p:101/c:1549-51)

**C)** Sometimes the sign of this dependence is due to receiving crown by groom's father-in-law. The tradition of the groom's crown on Zal's head (Rostam's father) by his father-in-law is another example of this kind.

*A crown with a jewel was put on Zal's head*

*They arrived in Kabol happily and talked about their past*

**D)** Vow and marriage stipulation: in lyrical stories of *Shahnameh* groom should do something or solve a problem. Doing these things are necessary for marriage. It is considered an athletic act. An example can be seen in Gheysar's daughters' marriage. He accepts the suitors of her daughters on the condition that they dosomethingimportant; *who he wants to be my son-in-law* and becomes proud of himself

*He should do something significant and of great import (1985, 6, 26)*

And also:

*One of them became Gheysar's son-in-low and loved him from his heart*

*The two others could not do what he wanted*

*He killed them, because he had no fear to kill heroes (1995, vol.VI, p.27)*

Grooms can also make a commitment to do something for their wives' families that should be done continuously after the marriage. It can be seen in Tezhav and Siavash story, Tezhav was his father-in-law's border guard and animal keeper.

*Tzhav was as brave as a lion*

*He was so strong that he could move the mountains (1995, vol.VI, c.1031-32)*

After Siavash gets married to Farangis, he becomes responsible to develop touran.it is a part of Farangis's dowry. He builds a palace for his wife.it is a sign of female- domination.

*I will build palaces in this land (1995/3:104, 1593)*

*I will develop the land a way that all become surprised (1995, vol.III, p.104, c.1596)*

*He built large palaces for Farangis and gave her a high position (1995, vol.III, p.117, c.1795)*

## 5. Birth

Giving a baby is far from his father's family, but mother's family informs them. The news of the birth of Rostam is given to Sam, his father's family, and the birth of Foroud is given to Siavash, his father's family. Their fathers lived far from their wives. Rostam's silk bed is sent to his father and the saffron copy of Foroud's hand shape is sent to Siavash.

*They sent the silk bed of Rostam to Sam*

*The powerful Sam, this hero, stood up and confirmed he was his son* (1995, p: 240/1530-31)

Siavash:

*Someone came to Siavash and told him good news*

*Your wife gave a baby that is like you* (1995, III, p.118, c.1813-14)

In spite of the fact that in *Shahnameh* and also in Iranian tradition all boys are attributed to their fathers, there can be some reasons that show their mothers' families had more value than their fathers, or at least the relation between mother and her child is unforgettable.

## Conclusion

The mythical semiotics of matriarchy in *Shahnameh* as a social institution has an important role in forming Iranian families. In this paper the signs of female-domination with the subjects like gaining possession, method of living, marriage, ceremonies, friendship, commitment and condition and birth have been revealed equally. According to *Shahnameh* women have important roles in all levels and their positions are higher than men in some duties. The reason is the development of ancient and original culture of historical stories and history of *Shahnameh*. In fact in the world of *Shahnameh* there are a lot of debates and analysis and semiotics about women that can help us to have a better perception of our society and our culture. Definitely *Shahnameh* is the best resource to show female-domination, their value and their position. The stories are visible in the language and new social concepts in our culture reveal *shahnameh* messages in words and meanings.

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