Studying writing style of correspondences and letter writing in Persian literature

Zahra Iranmanesh, PhD
Persian literature and language, Farhangian University, Kerman, Iran

Abstract

The present research is aimed to study writing style of correspondences and letter writing in Persian literature and also to study writing style of correspondences, types of correspondences in Persian prose, features of Persian correspondences. The method is a library based one. Results show that generally writing style of correspondences in fifth century has been in form of prolixity, expansion, and emphasis on meanings and concepts and in some cases it accompanied with literal array.

Features of Persian correspondences: using epithets, prayers, saying the name or nickname of writer and addressee Literal features and imagery: prolixity is the lower degree of correspondences regarding literal figures of speech compared to other types of prose especially stories and ranks, applying rhyming prose, borrowing from Hadith and verses, including poems and examples. In fifth century, the beginning and end of correspondences were written in Arabic form. In Soltaniat (Shah Correspondences) the writing was started by prayer of consignee and accompanied with short epithets such as the life of the lord, the benefactor will be long. There were different components in correspondences but these correspondences were not completely separated. The epithets were short and only one single word was sufficed. Literal and imagery forms were not common in this period and rhyming prose and other figures of speech were not seen in prose of correspondences but method of prolixity was considered in a balanced form.

Keywords: writing style, letters, correspondences, Persian literature.
Introduction

Correspondences are a type of prose works that rarely are translated from language to another due to lack of reasonable meaning in order to change them into another language in one hand and on the other hand, the beauty of styles is more or less paid attention in this technique. Each language depends on special literal and non-literal forms. Therefore, they cannot be maintained in the same form while translating them into another language. However, the popularity and technical aspects of Persian correspondences in Pahlavi and Sasanian empires were such that in early Islamic centuries, most of their parts in scientific, religious, and historical works were translated into Arabic. In addition to different types of correspondences in Iranian culture, gradually the technique and approach of each of them, their tradition, education, and also quality of their compilation were based on certain methods. Books such as Dastor Alkatib Fi Taein Almarati b, Adab Alkatib, Otbah Alkotobah and others show obviously that the most important type of writing in centuries 4 to 9 is correspondence and letter writing because firstly most of book writers were court secretaries, and secondly the most important letters (court and official letters) should be written carefully by considering all aspects of the subject due to socio-political considerations. Therefore it is seen that the oldest writing books are those that show instructions for letter writers not merely composition and writing that include all types of writing. This is exactly in contrast with writing books in our age. Concerning importance of writing style of correspondences in Persian language and literature and its history in ancient Iran, the present research is aimed to answer following questions in order to reach the general goal of effect of correspondences on Persian literature.

1- What was the writing style of correspondences? 2- What was the style of correspondences and their types in Persian prose? 3- What are features of Persian correspondences?

Findings

Question 1: What was the writing style of correspondences?

Generally, writing style of correspondences in fifth century was in form of prolixity, expansion, and emphasis on meanings and concepts and in some cases it accompanied with literal array although in some cases, briefness of imitation from Arabic correspondences of first century had been applied and this method continued in specific cases even in sixth century. Abusaeid Abolkheir’s correspondences are one of those letters in which such briefness has been used. The beginning and the end of correspondences were written in Arabic form in this period but it was not a figure of speech. Epithets were brief and led to one or two single epithets and composite epithets were not used as applied in next period. Imageries are not common in this period as they were current in sixth century in an exaggerative form in prose of correspondences and no sign of rhyming prose, balance, symmetrization, and other figures of speech were seen in this period and literal arrays were used in a balanced form. Prolixity is considered to some extent in correspondences of fifth century and sequence of concepts is not separated from each other. In short, most of Persian correspondences of fifth century written by Bounasr Meshkan, Abolfazl Beihaghi, Abusaeid Abolkheir and others can be referred to in order to speak about types of correspondences and their different literal and historical features but by studying works of Arab historians and Iranian writers and scientists in early Islamic centuries, it can be found that among different types of prose, correspondence was prevalent in that age with its certain technical conditions.
and it had a special place among types of prose such that old and new researchers and historians decide to enter its rules into caliphs court by translation of Pahlavi texts and they had considerable effect on development and advancement of technique of correspondence in Arabic language. Some of works before Islam have been cited and adopted in Arabic historical and literal books by writers and historians. Following books can be referred to:

The book “Altaj” (which was translated by Ibn-Moghafah from Pahlavi to Arabic and some writers asserted that most of narratives about correspondences in Pahlavi language have been taken from this book and one of its chapters is about correspondences of Pahlavi language and rules of writing art in that period), the response of Bozorgmehr to Anushiruwan, part of Shapur I letter to one of his agents, part of announcement of the victory of Bahram Gor after defeating Khaghan, part of letter of Anushiruwan to Fazusban in Azerbaijan, promise of Kavad to Khosrow Anushiruwan, advice letter of Parviz to Shereoe and his response, part of letter of Jamasp to Goshtasb in order to prevent him from accepting Zoroastrian religion, letter of Shapur to Qeysar of Rome, letter of Shapur to King of Armenia and Armenian borders, letter of Ardashir to king of Armenia, letter of Mehrnersi to residents of Armenia, letters and announcement of the victory which were adopted by Ferdousi in Shahnameh from Pahlavi texts, letter of Ardashir Babakan to Shah Gohnasb and prince Padishkhwargar and also letters of correspondences of ancient Iran that were stated in works of Islamic historians and researchers such as Tabari, Ibn-Ghotaybah, Masoudi and others but they are not available. In Seljukian period, correspondences had been written in Persian or Arabic but in age of Kharazmshahian, letters had more appropriate status and they were frequently Persian. In next periods until contemporary age, the official language of courts was Persian. The oldest examples of Persian correspondences available from Islamic age belong to first half of the fifth century and kingdom of Sultan Mas’ud of Ghazni. Some letters have been remained that were written by Abunasr Moshkan, the writer of “messages of Mahmoud and Mas’ud of Ghazni” (died in 430 Hegira) in Tarikh-e Beyhaghi. This book has all features of prose of correspondence and some of them are of the best examples of Persian writing language and letter writing and show perfection of Persian prose. Of writings of late fifth century and early sixth century are epistolary writings of Sanai Ghaznavi including seven letters that were written to his followers, ministers, governors, and issuance of Gaznein and Shah Bahram Ghaznavi. Writings of Khaghani, famous poet of sixth century include some letters that were written to his relatives, Emirs, and princes of his age. Such letters have complex and synonymous sentences in Arabic. Khaghani used some of his poems and Hadiths in the letters. The language of Khaghani in his letters is as complex as his poems. The speech of Sa’ad Aldin Varavini in the introduction of “Marzban Nameh” shows the truth of this claim and in those days, the approach of Khaghani was not in accordance with traditions of secretaries. In Seljukian and Kharazmshahian ages, most of court correspondences were in Persian language and Arabic letters were written in addition to Persian ones especially letters that were sent from Seljukian and Kharazmshahian lands to court of Abbasid caliphs and sometimes among Persian court correspondences, commands for appointing judges and other court authorities were issued from Kharazmshahian court and they were written in Arabic language such as those written by Rashid and Tovat in Arabic language and even some of his Ekhvani (friendly letters) writings are in Arabic language. Dr. Safa wrote about the prevalence of Persian language and writing of court correspondences in Seljukian age: formation of the Seljukian government that its secretaries and governors were from Khorasan and Iraq was an instrument for prevalence of Persian writings such that there were few letters and commands
in Arabic language. In previous periods, famous secretaries and ministers such as Ibn-amid, ministers and owners of Samanian age wrote their letters in Arabic language but in this period, they wrote their works in Persian language. In late sixth and seventh centuries, secretaries such as Jorfaidgeshani, Sultan Toqrol and author of “Yamini history” and Mohammad Nasavi, the writer of Sultan Jalal Din Kharazmshah and others, wrote their writings that were full of figures of speech (Nasr Masno’) and they were common in sixth century. Among very important letters of the seventh century, there are letters of Jalal Alding Mohammad Balkhi, known as Rumi who is a famous poet and Sufi and they were letters written to authorities in favor of his followers and apprentices and approximately the sign of knowledge and mysticism is seen in all letters. Except in some sufic letters, there are many technical prose in rest of letters and many innovative epithets have been used such that recognition of the name of addressee is difficult without high accuracy. Persian and Arabic poetries, verses, and Hadiths have been included proportional to the material and added the beauty of the speech and even in some cases; a metrical prose has increased beauty of phrases. What is remained from writings of Molana includes 144 letters and this work was firstly released by Freidoun Nafezbak in Istanbul.

Question 2: What was the style of correspondences and their types in Persian prose?

Generally, two correspondences were considered in Persian prose of Islamic period that were written for different purposes in various methods.

A. official and formal correspondences as follows:
1- Sultaniat
2- Charters and commands
3- Fathnameh & Shekastnameh (Announcement of the victory and defeats)
4- Moshafehe Name (Letters of face to face conversation)
5- Sogandnameh (Oath letters)
6- Goshadnameh (Open commands)
7- Movaze’eh Nameh (Legation)
8- Safe conduct
9- Story

B: personal and private correspondences or Ekhvaniat (friendly letters) as follows:
1- Mofavezeh Nameh (Equality)
2- Service
3- Congratulation letter
4- Taziat Nameh (condolence letters)
5- Power of attorney
6- Bay Sahrt Nameh (buying products with condition of cancelling the contract)
7- Writing title deed
8- Esteta (asking religious questions from religious authorities)
9- Will
10- Letter of endowment
11- Letter of partnership
12- Didactic writings

What was the style of the correspondences?
Professor Khatibi defines the style of correspondences until fifth century as follows
1- Writing style of correspondences in fifth century was based on prolixity with expansion and emphasis on concepts in a balanced form and it was accompanied with literal array.

2- In this period, the beginning and end of correspondences were in form of Arabic correspondence. In Sultaniat, the writing was started by prayer of the writer and it was accompanied with brief and short epithets such as “life of the lord, the benefactor, will be long.

3- There were different components in correspondences but these correspondences were not completely separated.

4- The epithets were short and only one single word was sufficed. There were certain condition in Sultaniat and Manashir in order to maintain the place and rank of each person.

5- Literal techniques and imagery were not common in this period and rhyming prose and other figures of speech were not seen in prose of correspondences but method of prolixity was considered in a balanced form.

In addition to abovementioned, other specific interpretation and literal techniques have been considered in prose of correspondences in this period and they were the most technical types of the prose. Official documents and court writings were written by Sanai style that had special rules and condition and included sayings of governors, advices of great people, poems, innuendos, metaphors and examples and sometimes they became beautiful and perfect pieces of poems. This style was used in Sultaniat and letters that were exchanged between Sasani kings and surrounding governors and government’s agents and literal and literary techniques were considered in these letters more than others.

Question 3- What are features of Persian correspondences?

A: application of epithets: it is a basic component in writings of this period and it was used in an exaggerative form before the main title for respecting the addressee of the letter. These epithets were being used from fifth century and were increased in correspondences of sixth and seventh centuries such that these epithets were in long combinations and certain epithets were used for each of court appointments and works and the higher the discrimination between appointment of the writer and the addressee, more epithets were applied.

C: prayers:  they were in Arabic language and sometimes in Persian followed by certain epithets and they were used as same as epithets.

D: the name or nickname of the writer and the addressee: they were different based on the place, appointment, and occupation of people and they depend on condition and regulations. Writing the name of the writer in the letter shows the great place of the addressee and the name and nickname of the addressee was written when the letter was from the king, ministers, and emirs to their agents.

Literal features and imagery

- Prolixity: among different types of prose, the highest degree of prolixity belongs to the correspondences especially those in this period. Application of prolixity in each of
correspondences has certain condition and ranges and it can be said that the method of Arabic correspondences is followed.

- Regarding literal techniques and figures, correspondences have lower degree than other types of prose especially stories and ranks because the author requires to consider certain limits between the writer and the addressee. Repetition of uniform and obvious interpretations and combinations will reduce the diversity of the writing and literal techniques and figures are less dealt with.

- There is rhyming prose in correspondences of this period like other types of prose and even it is more exaggerative

- adopting verses and Hadiths and including poems and examples: in court and formal correspondences, a certain number of verses and Hadiths in form of quotation are used without any variations in appearance of the speech and poems and examples are very rare. In Sultaniat, verses and Hadiths are not inferred and inclusion of poems and examples is not common except in limited cases. In Ekhvaniat, verses and Hadiths are used rarely but assurance of Persian and Arabic poems and examples is the main pillar in speech beauty. Regarding non-literal features, prose of Ekhvani writings in this period is considered as the best examples of prose especially description of enthusiasm in Ekhvaniat that have poetry concept. Persian prose has lost its credit regarding thought and language. There are authors who have maintained the old method and liked complex writings but others paid attention to simple prose and historical texts were written by court secretaries such as Zafarnamah book of Sharif Aldin Yazdi. Even in this period, a remarkable prose was also written by Sufis. Writing letter to friends and apprentices was common between Sufis and scholars as a means of instruction. Of letters attributed to Sufism is Ghazali correspondence. Although in some cases there are only some meanings or summarization of some sayings in his other works there is no doubt in accuracy of its attribution. Simple statement of the author with kindness and knowledge gives them an extraordinary attraction and some of his speeches remember us Kimiyaye Sa’adat. Correspondence of Ein Alghozat Hamadani is like these works and and some of them are like independent orders. Some people, who were addressees of these writing in time of judge, thought that they are Sufi lyricism with a prose full of bright pictures. Correspondence of Abdollah Ghotb includes precise interpretations that make the prose imaginary like the verse. Regarding composition, according to Ghazvini, Ghotb correspondence is very easy and fluent without prolixity, technique, and figures. These letters are apparently friendly and relate to his intimate followers.

**Conclusion**

Generally writing style of correspondences in fifth century has been in form of prolixity, expansion, and emphasis on meanings and concepts and in some cases it accompanied with literal array although in some cases, briefness of imitation from Arabic correspondences of first century had been applied and this method continued in specific cases even in sixth century.

Features of Persian correspondences: using epithets, prayer, saying the name or nickname of writer and addressee

Literal features and imagery: prolixity is the lower degree of correspondences regarding literal figures of speech compared to other types of prose especially stories and
places, applying rhyming prose, borrowing from Hadith and verses, including poems and examples. Writing style of correspondences in fifth century has been in form of prolixity, expansion, and emphasis on meanings and concepts and in some cases it accompanied with literal array. In fifth century, the beginning and end of correspondences were written in Arabic form. In Soltaniat (Shah Correspondences) the writing was started by prayer of sender and accompanied with short epithets such as the life of the lord, the benefactor will be long. There were different components in correspondences but these correspondences were not completely separated. The epithets were short and only one single word was sufficed. Literal and imagery forms were not common in this period and rhyming prose and other figures of speech were not seen in prose of correspondences but method of prolixity was considered in a balanced form. Things mentioned briefly in this paper were not the same in all types of correspondences rather the approach mentioned in Arabic and Persian correspondences after Islam paid attention to the proportionality of speech and the place in all cases. Concerning the order and command given by Parviz to his writers and Ibn Ghatifeh quoted from the book Altaj, it is clear that writing style of correspondences in Iran before Islam has been different relative to different writer and addressee. In commands issued from governors to the public like announcement of the victory or other court orders, prolixity was used and on contrary if the letter was from inferior people to superior ones, it should be written simply without any additional words. In summary, in each case, the writer had to write the letter based on the place and rank of the addressee and he did not have to write inferior words for great people and superior words for inferior people and he wrote to enemies of the king either in peaceful words or in threatening words in short form.
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