Folk beliefs in the poetry of Saeb Tabrizi

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Abstract

One of the characteristics of Saeb poetry is being holistic. His divan includes poems in various subjects. Beliefs and customs constitute the cultural infrastructure of nations; therefore, survey on the beliefs seems essential in research on the folk literature.

Saeb lived in period that the people were accompanied by poets and they addressed the common people and folk beliefs in their poems. His poems are influenced by folk beliefs and even superstitions. Although, he was faithful and adhered to Quran and religious values, folk beliefs and superstitions are seen in his poems which can be referenced by anthropology researchers depicting his awareness on social conditions of his time. In his poems, the folk beliefs on evil eye, luckiness or unluckiness of eye twitching, inauspiciousness of owl, and putting horseshoes in the fire, belief in demons and fairies, etc have been represented.

Keywords: Saeb Tabrizi, folk beliefs, culture, reflection, society.
Introduction

The folk culture can be considered involving beliefs, proverbs, rituals, traditions, legends and myths transferred from one generation to next generation since old times and these beliefs are common in all over of the country and used in the daily speeches. These beliefs entered in the poetry and literature gradually and represented in various forms. Saeb Tabrizi was not optional in this regard, he has referred to the folk culture, folk beliefs; superstitions, divination and talisman. As one of the great poets of Safavid period, he has played a major role in reflection of the social conditions and dominated folk culture in his period and the main reason for his success in poetry was using folk culture. He has mentioned folk beliefs which mostly are superstitions. Some of these folk beliefs and superstitions are addressed in the following:

Auspiciousness and inauspiciousness of the eye twitching

The common people believe that eye twitching can be good omen or bad omen for Saeb and it is believed that placing straw prevents the eye twitching.

The evidence of remedy of eye twitching with placing straw on the eye can be found in his poems:

A noble man cannot tolerate the beneficence of the curmudgeon

Do not place straw on eye when it is twitching

The noble man needs curmudgeon

That straw is remedy of twitching eye (Saeb divan, 1988: 575)

Belief in demon and fairies

In the folk tales, the demons are big, fearful, grayish and fraudulent creatures with horns enjoying eating the human meat. They are strong and do witchcrafts and seen in various forms and cause to disaster. Although they have been imagined black and gray, the famous demon visualized in the Firdausi’s Shahnameh, the head of the Mazandaran demons, is white. The demons and fairies have been addressed less in Persian literature except in Shahnameh and what has been represented is mostly symbolic. The term of demon that is called divah in Avesta, and diva in ancient India was meant god and this term was referred to a group of Aryan gods. After advent of Zoroaster and introducing Ahouramazda, the ancient gods (demons) were called misleading and evil; fairies are superior to demons and they are white and beautiful and in the Persian tales “The daughter of the fairies’ king” is so beautiful that every man wishes to get married her and the stories of the love and marriage of the heroes with fairies particularly the daughter of the fairies’ king have been narrated in the folk tales. In some ancient stories, the fairies fall in love with the heroes and if they do not accept them, they hurt and enchant them. In the Persian tales, the fairies are sometimes friend with demons and aid them and sometimes they are their enemies. In most stories, a demon falls in love with a fairy and traps her but she avoids him.
“Islam is a realistic religion and it means obedience depicting this fact that the first condition for being Muslim is belief in facts and realities” (Motahari, 1994:74).

A demon cannot be trapped in an enclosure

No heart becomes rest in the green dome (Saeb divan, 1989: 2205)

My liberal and calm people are free from demon

There is no trace of fairies in my imagery (ibid, 1991:3470)

**Belief in inauspiciousness of owl**

“Owl has short neck and its ears covered by deformed feathers and its ears are biggest among other birds. Owl hunts at night. Iranians have negative attitude towards owl mixed with superstitions, so they believe in its inauspiciousness. The sound of owl brings bad news and if an owl cries it is pleasing; otherwise, it is bad omen. This belief is rooted in living in ruined places. In the ancient texts, owl has been introduced the wise bird and in the story books, it appears with glasses that advices others animals. Inauspiciousness of owl in Iranian beliefs dates back to attack of Arabs to Iran; since it eats lizards and rats. It has a specific place in the cultures and it has been introduced as bad omen bird that sounds badly. It is called the night bird in Persian literature.

**Owl in the world people beliefs**

Britannica Encyclopedia writes that owl is symbol of mystery that belongs to other world because of awaking at night and sounding bad. Owl’s soundless fly symbolizes soul that has led to being the target of superstitions in most parts of the world. On the other hand, belonging to other world has empowered this belief that it can tell fortunes, in other words, due to belonging to eternal world, observing an owl can be good omen or bad omen. Thus, owl is symbol of silent intelligence, destructive knowledge or vice versa, it is symbol of auspiciousness. Owl represents night, moon and even woman since it is mysterious. Most people believe in its remedial power of the substance prepared from its body, particularly its eyes.

The ancient Greeks believed that there was a small owl in Athena image. She was the goddess of civilization, wisdom, power, technique, skill and just which has caused to converting owl to the symbol of wisdom in the ancient Greece. Owl and Athena were accompanied each other. According to this belief, owl is seen in the logs of most of the world libraries and universities.

In the ancient Rome, Minerva was other form of the Athena that had her duties. She was guardian of the Athens and they constructed Pantheon Acropolis for her sake; therefore, Greek beliefs in owl are rooted in Athena that was accepted in Rome. On the other hand, the Romans knew it the bird related to funerals and observing an owl was bad omen for them. In book twelfth of the Virgil Aeneid before last fighting of Terence, an owl appears that represents the death of the hero.
According to Islamic encyclopedia, there were specific myths and superstitions related to owl among pre-Islam Arabs and they knew it the bird of death. They believed that when a person dies his soul cries on his tomb as an owl (referring to its mourning sound). Post-Islam Arabs believed in inauspiciousness of owl, raven and crow although the holy prophet had warned about superstitions.

In India myths, the god of wealth is represented os an owl, hence it can be said that owl was good omen for Indians and if it nested near a house it was sign of prosperity, according to Islamic Encyclopedia, in Indian- Iranian myths, owl is representative of Jam in the ancient Iran and it was the god of death for Indians. There is a story on the owl and crow in the Kalila and Demna translated from Indian Pnchatntra.

In the ancient Egypt, owl guided the dead souls to the living world and the Egyptians showed owl with broken leg to prevent returning the bird of death to the world. In the Egyptian hieroglyph the broken owl symbolizes the letter “M” and in Kenya the people believed that owl is sign of death and if a person saw an owl or heard its sound, it was sign of death. In America continent, owl was symbol of death and in the tribes of Aztec, the god of death was shown in the shape of an owl. The ancient Peruvians adorned owl and drew its images. In France, the owl with ear was symbol of wisdom and the owl without ear was bad omen. The Welsh in modern Britannia have a myth on owl that owl was a tyrant woman who was converted into an owl and she hated by other birds. In Finland Scandinavia, owl was symbol of wisdom and stupidity and in Japan owl had positive and negative aspects (Soltani, 2010: 373).

In the realm that the bearded vulture is a pet bird

It was not happened the shadow of an owl seen in our roof (Saeb divan, 1988:1771)

The pain does not let me to be rest in the body

The owl does not nest here because of fear (ibid, 1991: 3522)

**Talisman**

It is a kind of hallucination in human that the false is seen as real and it causes to deceiving of man and if it is not prevented, the man is destructed and he should trust only on God since everything is managed by will of God.

The dead who did not break the talisman of existence

What is their profit since they joined the sea as the foam (ibid, 1988:1881)

Why your opponents are more than ants?

Have you trapped them in the sugar by talisman? (ibid, 1991:3313)

It was believed that any treasure has a talisman, for instance there is a dragon that protects it.
They are as dragons in the corner of the treasury

For half profit they fight with beggars (ibid, 1988: 2030)

Break the talisman of your existence that other than this

Nobody saw a mask on that beloved (ibid, 1989: 2344)

**Placing a horseshoe in the fire**

“The primitives had to identify the manifestations of existence and explain the events. Therefore, they made efforts to identify the world, but they had no enough experiences and could not recognize most of objects and events with observation and experimentation so for finding solutions, they took refuge to imagination and explained the existence with their primitive imagery and found responses for some of his endless problems and for dominating on the events they had plans and activities. These activities which were rooted in their imaginations were called witchcraft aligned with positive effects” (Adopted from Aryanpour, 1973: 425).

Placing a horseshoe in the entrance is sign of being anxious and restlessness since if a person wants to make a person eager for him, write his or her name on the horseshoe and puts it in the fire and read a enchant and make the beloved restless and he or she becomes obedient.

“The horseshoe is an iron piece that placed on the feet of horses or other cattle and placing a horseshoe in the fire is meant being anxious and restless that the witches put a horseshoe in the fire for fascinating of the lover”(Dehkhoda, 1982:1817)

To being close to home caused to put horseshoe in the fire

I was calm whenever I was far from home (ibid: 2143)

The beneficent cannot be rest

His horseshoe in the fire is as rainy cloud

Once again I put a horseshoe in the fire from other arrow

That drags the heart other arrow (ibid: 3523)

Majnun placed the Layla’s horseshoe in the fire of fright

My way is closer than way of the king to his beloved (ibid: 2228)

**Auspiciousness of bearded vulture (Homa)**

In Persian literature, the owl is symbol of bad omen and destruction, the bearded vulture is symbol of happiness and prosperity. “Bearded vulture appears in myths as auspicious as simourgh. The ancient believed that it is a bird that eats bone and does not attack on any
creatures and if it sits on the head of a person, he will be become king” (Pournamadariyan, 1996: 451).

Today I lost my consciousness

How well if they find the shadow of homa on my head (ibid, 1998: 1574)

The happy man is content to a loaf of bread

Homa becomes bone because of consolation (ibid: 1776)

Belief in divination

Superstitious beliefs, witchcrafts, divination and fortunetelling and reliance on sorcery in daily life were common in Safavid period. Usually, superstitions are common in an unsecured society. “One of the superstitions causing to problem in modern society is encountering with individuals who are famous for being bad omen and they also think negatively and the people avoid them and connecting one event to others influences life and what is expected is happened. Thinking about bad luck is influential than thinking about good luck. For instance, the sounds of crow and owl have no good or bad effect and only the augur thinking affects the affairs. Islam prohibits the Muslims from divination and jinx. These affairs have historical roots and Quran refers to the negative perceptions about some holy prophets” (Tafsir-e-nemuneh, 1995: 431)

When you opened eye to this world, close it rapidly

This is not that divination which cannot do it (Saeb divan, 1991: 3399)

When a heart is profited from the lord of promise

Makes divination from the divan of modesty (ibid: 1635)

Divination

Saeb refers to good and bad divinations. Divinations have negative and positive denotations in divan of Saeb:

Divination by comb:

One day we will meet her

We have seen this omen from the comb of the box-tree (Golchin Maani, 1994: 179-180)

Folklore

“The society systematizes human organizations through social, cultural heritages and personal culture and defines codes and norms and establishes culture among generations and preserves its survival. Culture has a broad scope and it is essence of social life and reflected in thoughts,
words and activities. Human being needs social compatibility to live easily that there were these conditions in the Saeb period” (Adopted from Aryanpour, 1973, 120-123).

Saeb refers to examples of public culture in his divan:

**Breeding pets and birds**

Saeb points to training parrots in that period in his divan:

It was simple-heartedness to look in the mirror with hundreds tricks

A parrot knows the language of mirror (Saeb divan, 1998: 1581)

Saeb wondered from observing that garment

The parrot knows several languages from a mirror (ibid: 1582)

**Using letter carrier pigeons**

The exact history of using breeding pigeons and using them at the period of peace and war is unknown, but what is obvious is that pigeons lived in Egypt three thousand years before Christ and the Pharoses used them as carriers and they were holy creatures. The Greeks used pigeons as messengers thousands years before Christ and they tied the letter including the names of the Olympic champions on their legs and sent them their hometowns. Egypt, Iran, China, Greece and Rome were the oldest centers for breeding pigeons in the past. Evidences show that Cyrus the Great sent pigeons to different parts of country carrying secret letters and Julius Cesar, the Roman Emperor was the first person who used pigeons to conquer France. This old tradition has been manifested in the poems of Saeb:

The speech of the restless heart has feather

The letter of delight does not need the pigeon (ibid: 1599)

**Coloring hair with henna**

Saeb refers to coloring hair with henna several times. It is specified that it was common in his period:

Be patient when your foot got stuck in the mud, it is henna

Tie it on the feet at night and remove it in the morning (ibid: 1715)

**Protecting against evil eyes with burning wild rue**

Rue is a plant that grows in the desert area. It is herbal plant and used in medicine since old times in most parts of the world. Wild rue is burnt for protecting against evil eye and incidents and it has a specific place in Iranian culture. Burning wild rue is one of misbelieves manifested in the poems of Saeb:
Protect your pleasing solitude against evil eye

When the wild rue passing the fire delightfully (ibid: 1880)

**The children running on canebrake**

Saeb refers to children running on the canebrake as one of the entertainments of that period:

The field that passes the wind and thunderstorm

It is the field for children to run on the canebrake

The bridges leading to my love and scandal

Seem to me a canebrake as Mansur (ibid: 2195)

**Conclusion**

Literature inherits culture and civilization that reflects customs, rituals and beliefs. The Iranian culture and civilization have been represented in the Persian poems and this manifestation is one of the literary prospects. Saeb lived in period that the people were accompanied by poets and they wrote their poems for people. Folk beliefs and even superstitions have influenced his poetry. One of characteristics of Saeb poems is being holistic and he has written poems in various subjects. From the perspective of sociology in Safavid period, his divan is a thesaurus that includes subjects on culture, civilization and belief. In this article, the folk beliefs mentioned in divan of Saeb have been investigated. He has referred to auspiciousness and inauspiciousness of twilling of eye and showed that in his period a straw was placed on the eyelid to prevent eye twilling. Saeb points to believe in demon and fairies, inauspiciousness of owl and auspiciousness of homa and also talisman and divination etc. He also refers to placing horseshoe in the fire. If a person wanted to attract the attention of a person he or she wrote his or her name on a horseshoe and placed it in the fire and read some wizardry words. Saeb has mentioned the customs of rituals of his time including using pigeons as messengers, burning wild rue for protecting against evil eye, children running on the canebrake, coloring hair with henna and etc.
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