
A Study of the Story of Bijan and Manijeh in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* (The Epic of Kings)

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ABSTRACT

Bijan and Manijeh is an independent, love story in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. The present paper aims at investigating this story, which is regarded as a love story through which Ferdowsi had initiated his epic, in terms of lingual, literary, intellectual, and psychological aspects. For this purpose, then, this paper elaborates on the lyric and epic poetry, their primacy-recency relationship, and introduces the main characters of the story. In the section on interpreting the story, the introduction (in terms of its prominent features) and the main text, in terms of the above-said aspects, will be discussed, and in the characterization section, the focus will be on the character of Bijan and the dominant guile in the beginning and the end of the story on the one hand, and the character of Manijeh and consequently the type of outlook Ferdowsi had taken and that of the traditional culture to the personality of women on the other hand.

Keywords: Ferdowsi, Epic, Love, Bijan, Manijeh, Iran, Turan, Woman.

Introduction

It goes without saying that Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* has proven itself as one of the most precious and pleasing works of human culture in cherishing justice, wisdom, humanism, and truth. Ferdowsi is not merely a poet, rather a talented psychologist, a meticulous sociologist, an intellectual philosopher, and a liberal sage whose fame and name will never be eroded by the passage of time. His *Shahnameh*, too, is not just an epic poetry that narrates the story of kings and heroes, rather it stands as a mysterious world laden with secrets and myth, and its creator is a talented psychologist well aware of the mental miseries and

obsessions, and due to this knowledge, he applies narration and allegory to describe them, and consequently creates the stories of the wars fought between two poles of Iran and Turan. He depicts Iran as the symbol of brightness and beneficence and Turan, however, as the symbol of darkness and malice. It is worth to say about the family of Tur, whose member, Manijeh, daughter of Afrasiab, is discussed partly here, that while it is the opposite side of the family of Iraj (the Iranians), but this is not to say that they belong to another race than Iranians, but both of them are the offspring of Fereydon and the third sibling was Salm and all three were Iranian and

Areaian. However, Ferdowsi does not hold the Turanian in his bad book, and believes that greed is the source of all the malicious deeds stemming from either Iranians or Turanians. He wishes to rear real, wise human being who forms a wise and real society as a whole. It is why after centuries, his ideas and values are both appreciated at home and abroad by all those who seek the path to truth and perfection. Before going through the analysis of the story of Bijan and Manijeh, which is a love story in *Shahnameh*, it should be noted that some researchers believe that epic poetry was developed after the lyric poetry, and is regarded a consequence of it, as it is understood from the evidence that man before describing the social and external events, was entertaining himself with religious, ritual, and love poetry which had a lyrical aspect embedded in them, and from the other hand, any given epic poetry, no matter how completed technically it might be, cannot be void of lyric ideas, and one may find obvious signs of lyrical ideas in every epic poetry of the world, including the *Shahnameh*, the love makings of Zal and Rudabeh, Tahmineh and Rostam, Sudabeh and Syawash, Bijan and Manijeh, and etc., and the descriptions of the beautiful ladies and beloveds are among the most pleasing Persian lyric and epic poems (Epic writing in Iran, pp. 34-35).

That said, the *Shahnameh* is a panorama illustrated with all types of literary genres in terms of perspective and theme. In doing so, some lyric, mystical, love, didactic, and descriptive sections are contributing to fulfill this end, which are narrating the traditional stories of the nation, and in fact, they help Ferdowsi to decorate the national epics of Iran (from the color of flower to the misery of the thorn, pp. 42-43).

The stories of the *Shahnameh* are also categorized in terms of plot and content into: epic, love, mystical, poetic, political, social, didactic, philosophical, and religious stories. The story of Bijan and Manijeh is among the independent, love stories of the *Shahnameh*, which claims for some 1312 verses in the *Shahnameh* of Moscow Press. Some scholars believe that Ferdowsi had written it while a young man, and its account does not date back to “the *Shahnameh* Abu-Mansouri” and “*Khodaynameh*”, and it seems to have a certain source. In sum, this story is about the prevalence of love over ethnic conflicts in which two lover find their golden days after tolerating a tough time.

Characters

Manijeh is the daughter of Afrasyab, the King of Turkan. The enmity between the Turanians and Iranians is a dominant theme in the *Shahnameh*. In the beginning of this story, the latest malicious deed done by the Turkan people, before the story of Bijan and Manijeh, was the murder of Syawash, which led to a horrible war.

Bijan is a hero from the dynasty of Godarzian whose pedigree is from the tribal kings of Ashkanian. His father, Giv, is the most famous hero after Rostam, and his mother was Bano Gashb, the daughter of Rostam, that was a matter of rivalry among the heroes of her time to be taken as their spouse. Godarzian were of much importance before Kai-khosrau, and when he was but a teenager and his father was killed, and he was sought after, Giv took him from the Turan land and accomplished his dangerous mission. As such, Kai-khosrau appreciates their stature, and once he commissioned Rostam with rescuing Bijan from the well of Afrasyab, he told him:

(Symbol and symbolism in the story of

Bijan and Manijeh, the Cultural Keyhan, Akram Joodi Nea'mati, No. 105, pp. 23-25).

Results and discussion

Synopsis

Ferdowsi at first describes the night, which is bera'at-e estehlal, on the story and its narration which will follow the discussion. He says: "when Kai-khosrau was elected the King, and emptied Iran from the presence of the enemies, and provided his people with security and relief, one day he received a group of people seeking his justice on a certain matter. They complained that countless pigs had made their appearance across Armenia, damaged their crops, and they sought a solution from the King. Khosrau asked the present heroes that who was ready to deal with the pigs to release that people from their damage. He ordered to prepare countless gold coins and jewelry to be dedicated to the volunteer. But there was no volunteer than Bijan. Having no other child than Bijan, Give tried to change him mind, as he was too young then, but Bijan was determined. Due to the youth and lack of experience, Kai-khosrau asked Girgin, son of Milad the general, to accompany him.

Bijan asks Girgin to help him in hunting the pigs, but Girgin responds that: "The King gave you gold coins and jewelry, then you asks me to take the risk?" Then Bijan goes for the mission single-handedly. He kills all of the pigs, and shows their teeth to Girgin, and claims that he would bring them for Kai-khosrau. Irritated by the fire of jealousy from that wonderful bravery, Girgin plans to ascribe the grand work to him, and return by himself to Iran. It is why he tells the following to Bijan:

That simple mention of girls and describing them before Bijan was enough to mislead his heart. But Girgin did not

confine to that malice, and sought for his last trick out of his deep temptation:

Till he succeeds to take Bijan to the near of that festival. On that day, Manijeh was among the worshipers out of the palace to do their rituals. Bijan was watching over her secretly close to her tent, and finally fell in love with her. Once Manijeh observed him from her tent, astonished at his stature and fitness, she felt a simmering love for him, and sent her nurse to tell him:

When the worshipers took the welcoming message of Bijan back to her and described his appearance, Manijeh asked the worshipers if they could take him secretly to the tent. Bijan arrived in the tent on his foot.

Afterwards, the beautiful girls prepared a ceremony for the honor of Bijan, and both of them were enjoying their time.

Thoroughly overwhelmed by her keen love for Bijan, Manijeh blended some anesthesia to the wine cup of Bijan not to be able to return to Iran. This accident marks the first usage of anesthesia in Persian literature.

After that occasion, applying this medicine became an important element in Persian narratives, and there are a few narratives in which the heroes do not take advantage of this medicine to fulfill their missions and capture the mighty enemies. After a while, Bijan became conscious to find himself in the palace of Manijeh. Though too frightened, he could not challenge the sweetheart.

Manijeh soothes him very cold-bloodedly and arrange a ceremony with the presence of the worshipers and musicians, but before long, the palace's door-keeper informed Afrasyab of what was going on. Afrasyab bursts into tears upon hearing the news, and declares: "Be him a King of throne or otherwise, the one who holds a girl behind the veil is ill-starred." He

orders his brother, Girsuz, to reach himself to the palace with his horsemen to seize the entrances of the palace and capture anyone found there.

Girsuz broke into the palace's doors to find it laden with music and Bijan with a cup of wine in his hand. He aggressively calls him, and Bijan who had no horse or weapon, so he took his dagger from the side of his shoes, and said:

Girsuz attested a lot and took the dagger from Bijan with his decisive tongue, captured him, and took him back to Afrasyab. In order to save the life of Manijeh, Bijan narrated the below simple story out of his mind:

But these childish lies did not work in Afrasyab, and before long, Afrasyab got angry with him, and ordered for his execution before the palace, let it be a good lesson to all Iranians. The scaffold got ready after a while. In the meantime, the old sages and ministers of Afrasyab showed up to refrain the headsmen from their mission, and tried to give a pardon for Bijan from him:

Afrasyab replied that if they did not know about the ill deeds of Bijan to his family, and that he had defamed his girl in the whole nation.

The sages confirmed him, but to them, killing Bijan was not a good choice. They believed that:

Accordingly, Afrasyab pardoned Bijan after hearing the sages' statements, and instead, ordered to detain Bijan in a well, and let Manijeh be out of her wealth on the opening of the well take care of Bijan. As such, Manijeh was on the well from early in the morning, and did her best to prepare a meager meal for him, to give it to her dear detained at night, and then mourn over their misfortunes.

Girgin who had understood from the evidence that Bijan would die soon in Turan, came back to Iran and faked some

stories for Kai-khosrau, but Kai-khosrau decided from his stress and pale face that he was telling a lie, so he ordered to imprison him.

Kai-khosrau wrote a letter to Rostam and asked him to rescue Bijan from Turan. However, beforehand, Kai-khosrau had seen in the Nabidi Mirror, which reflected the secrets of the world, that how Bijan would be rescued. He had told Rostam about that fact. Before departing to Turan, Rostam told him:

Clothed with the garments of traders and equipped with many jewelries, Rostam left to Turan, and obtained the permission of the authority to reside there and do his trade job.

Finally, Manijeh who did not know Rostam, went to her and asked him, as an Iranian trader, to get back to Iran and inform Kai-khosrau and other Iranians of the story of Bijan imprisoned in that well. Rostam, without revealing his real identity, gave her a roasted chicken in which his ring was embedded to be taken to Bijan. Bijan finds the ring in his food, and upon observing the name of Rostam engraved on it, he bursts into songs and happiness. He smiles surprisingly which makes Manijeh to wonder about its reason. After Manijeh had lost all her possessions and wealth and put her life at risk for her lover, Bijan asks her to promise not to reveal his secret. This makes up the most saddening part of the story. It shows that Manijeh is portraying the sacrificing role of a woman through dedicating all her wealth for the sake of Bijan. She receives in return all types of insults to herself as a princess. After observing the true pleas of Manijeh, he changes his position and asks for her pardon. Funny enough, he thinks that anti-heroic act was the result of his long stays in the deep, dark well not anything else. Rostam ordered Manijeh to make a big fire on the well at night to usher the army to

arrive there. She did so, and Rostam and his army appeared on the well.

An important point rises here. It indicates of the chivalry of Rostam and humanism of Ferdowsi that while Bijan was still in the well, Rostam asked him to promise to forgive Girgin, otherwise he would remain in the well. Bijan who had no other choice, accepted and Rostam, in turn, took his grandchild out of the well (*The Shahnameh of Ferdowsi*, Saeed Hamidian and Afaryn Ferdowsi, pp. 177-193, and the story of Bijan and Manijeh, pp. 30-45).

From this point on, Rostam takes his heroic garments on, and goes to fight with the Turanians and kills a large group of them, and comes back victoriously with Bijan and Manijeh to Iran. In the meanwhile, the mutual love between Bijan and Manijeh fulfills and all the advices of the King are summed up in cherishing the wonderful loyalty and the unlimited dedications of the brave girl of Turan's King.

A lingual and literary analysis of the story

The language of Ferdowsi, with regard to the dominant style of his time which was Khorasani, in expressing different ideas is simple and eloquent, and at the same time at utmost degree of consistency and serenity. And the expression of Shahnameh tends to be simple and with no attention to imagery, as the literary perfection and fineness is to an extent that artifice is overwhelmed by simplicity and consistency, and if he occasionally focuses on imagery and literary techniques, the eloquence and articulation of the language does not let the reader observe them. It should be noted that while paying much attention to the rule of simplicity and eloquence of his poetry, is much interested in selecting beautiful and persuasive terms, so his speech is both simple and

selective, both eloquent and tender, and this type of speech is called "easy and recusant". It is why Nezami Arooz, who was a great scholar, says about the work of Ferdowsi: "Honestly he has fulfilled his job, and ascended the speech to the highest possible degree in grandeur."

The introduction of the story of Bijan and Manijeh is one of the masterpieces of Ferdowsi. Especially if we consider it a separate story which is in line with the whole book, this introduction can be regarded a product of the poet's imagination and a parallel to the text of the story of Bijan and Manijeh and its synopsis. We believe that an imaginative poet like Manouchehri Damghani, says that:

It shows that he has considered the story of Bijan and Manijeh and thanks to his talented taste, he has masterfully paralleled the description of the night in the introduction of this story with the events taking place in its context. When we consider the introduction of Bijan and Manijeh carefully, then, we see that Ferdowsi is inspired by an understanding of a similarity between his night-like life and this part of this ancient story.

He feels some obvious consistencies between his dark life and the residency of Bijan in that well and his own wife's kindness and loyalty and the empathy of Manijeh, and in order to express this consistency, he re-narrates the story of Bijan and Manijeh.

This introduction is an independent narrative in which, the story is narrated from the first point of view, and like the main story, and it holds a drama quality composed of a sad and happy section. The first section describes a long night likened to the devil and a black snake in which, the poet feels anguished, and the second part is about the happiness and enjoyment of the poet of his loyal beloved. As the plot of

the story of Bijan and Manijeh begins from the bottom of a well and ascends to the height of the moon. In terms of beauty, this 37-verse poem is one of the longest poems of the *Shahnameh*. As if nowhere else Ferdowsi writes his poetry so faithfully and with a keen love.

The verses Ferdowsi writes on describing the night are expressing other themes symbolically: 1. the description of the night's darkness, the darkness of man's fate, the darkness of the social and political situation of that period, and the darkness of his own life all illustrate the dark well of Bijan. 2. Bringing a candle by the beloved and wife of Ferdowsi both shows the poet's reluctance with the darkness of the night and reminds us of the fire making of Manijeh over the opening of the well. 3. The narration of his wine drinking with his wife indicates of his honesty and sincerity with the reader and assign of the secret wine drinking of Bijan and Manijeh in the palace of Afrasyab. 4. His kind wife invites him to enjoy himself and remove his inner sadness, and this well fits with the words of Manijeh while inviting Bijan upon getting conscious and finding himself disarmed, naked and lonely in the palace of Afrasyab.

Generally, in this introduction, Ferdowsi reveals what is on the road, and lets the readers know that this story is a mixture of solution, cheating, kindness and war and the embodied ideas within which apply to men of might and intellects. He indicates that a hand, which is far more above all other hands, is in the work of fastening and unleashing knots from every affair. He finally reminds us that sadness and happiness and misery and treasure are blended together.

Mojtaba Minovi argues that the story of Bijan and Manijeh is a separate one, and that Ferdowsi had composed it before the

rest of his book. He mentions three reasons to support his claim:

The trend of the war between Iran and Turan is as such that while taking the revenge of Afrasyab is not still settled, the story of Bijan and Manijeh begins. What happens has no relation to the past for the future events. True that there are five or six indications of the Syawoshian revenge, and that if Afrasyab did not kill Bijan and just detained him in that well, it was why the sages advised him that he killed Syawosh and received all those miseries, let alone killing Bijan. It is while there is no mention of the story of love affairs between Bijan and Manijeh and his predicaments.

At the first sight, Ferdowsi describes his own situation that it was a dark night, and sat in a garden, anguished and with no tendency to get to sleep. That he asked his kind idol to bring a candle or light and make a feast for him. They did so, and once entertained, his wife asked if he wished to hear a story from the book and etc.

Through composing that story, Ferdowsi tried to test his poetic gifts and see if he was able to accomplish it or not. As he was a beginner in writing poetry, and had no independence in his poetic diction, so he imitated the former poets. Later on, when he composed the rest of his book, he then included such separate stories in it and made them a whole book of poetry (Ferdowsi and his poetry, pp. 59-61).

Other technical points

In terms of the technical points of the story, one may well refer to the love conversations between Bijan and Manijeh. Though the story has love content, the love conversations between the characters are scarce and there is no single direct conversation between the lover and his beloved. Just once Bijan becomes conscious in the palace of Afrasyab and is

frightened at his ominous fate, and prays, then Manijeh tells him that: "Be not sad. Men are characterized with numerous good and bad events in their life. Never feel regret for a nonsense (From the color of flower to the misery of the thorn, p. 323).

Another important point is their conversation with the wind. When Bijan is detained in the palace of Afrasyab and the King of Turan orders to execute him, he talks to the wind and commissions it with bearing his sad news to Iran:

There is such a long pedigree in the Iranian literary tradition regarding talking to the wind, as a medium between friends, that one may call it a poetic tradition.

Another technique commonly adopted by Ferdowsi in his narratives is metamorphosis of the identity of the story. That is, there are some stories that begin with a lyric nature and end in epic or mystical drama. As such, the story of Bijan and Manijeh has got a happy beginning and end and a saddening middle.

There are a few elements common between this story and other love stories of Iran: 1. the presence of some nurses or worshipers who secretly connect the lover to his beloved. 2. A prey in search of which the hero reaches the palace or location of his beloved. In this story, the pig is the element that guides the lover. 3. The lover observes a scene of girls celebrating in a garden or on the plains.

What follows is a short list of the literary techniques the poet has used in his poetry: Alliteration: the repetition of the letter "sh" in the first and 20th verse of the introduction;

Personalization of the natural elements;

Using emotional similes;

Using all types of pun;

Using words like: horror, loose, dark, the night, and etc. that are indicative of the

mysterious, Gothic atmosphere of the poet's and story's context.

Using paradox; and,

Using imagery in narrating the stories. It is well-known that Ferdowsi is not a poet who just speaks, rather embodies his words in the mind of his reader through imagination, as such, the reader can imagine the pictures in his mind. In this introduction, Ferdowsi describes a night that is both the identity of his story, and different in nature with other nights depicted in his book. The elements of his pictures are palpable, but this is not meant that spiritual, emotional, and intellectual affairs are not mentioned in the realm of epics. Rather, the spiritual stuff is a picture of the material ones, and Ferdowsi's gift is in drawing the abstract and spiritual things to the realm of the palpable affairs.

In his *Shahnameh*, Ferdowsi illustrates women in different shapes, and in this story, he considers Manijeh a symbol of affection and loyalty, and generally regards women as pious and sacrificing.

He is often found likening women in beauty to stars, the moon, the sun and etc. and this remains the richest source of Ferdowsi in imagining women.

The features of the story's characters

In this narrative of Ferdowsi, the pivotal character around whom the other characters' acts and speeches revolve is Manijeh.

In this story, Manijeh is a brave, determined, proud, and loyal girl. These features are also common among other female characters of the book, including: Faranak, Sindokht, Tahmineh, Gordafarid, and etc.

Similar to Tahmineh and Sudabeh, Manijeh is that brave and at the same time self-conscious that outruns her lover in expressing her love for him. Like that occasion when Tahmineh went to the tent of Rostam to express her love to that

unknown man, or Sudabeh who reached the dorm of Syawosh to show her love for him, Manijeh, too, sends her nurse upon seeing Bijan to invite him to Manijeh, and upon his arrival in the tent, she welcomes him warmly. Fearful that he might reject her love while still conscious, she orders to pour some poison in his cup, and then transform his unconscious body to the palace. That same hero who had no fear of fighting with Human, now was trembling with fear in the laps of his daughter. But Manijeh tries to sooth him.

However, if that bravery of Manijeh was but a mere whim, she could forget about him after imprisonment, but as her bravery comes from her self-consciousness, when Bijan is captured in that well, the initial whim turns into a stable affection and loyalty. It continues till that wealthy princess tries so hard and even begs to find a meager food for Bijan.

While she is self-conscious and determined, Manijeh is sacrificing, emotional and sensitive. It is why a mere nag from the side of Bijan hurts her. Anyhow, what remains at last is the sacredness of a permanent love begun with a worldly whim, which at last leads to a true love, unconditioned loyalty to the partner of her life.

Bijan's characteristics

Apart from a brave, lion-hearted man, Bijan is introduced as a gallant man in the *Shahnameh*. In the love stories of this book, Bijan remains the only hero who is driven by women than love or lovesickness. When Kai-khosrau took the throne and offered a prize to a volunteer who could get the captured Spnoy, the daughter of Afrasyab, the only one who raised his hand was Bijan. He is the only hero of the book who copulates with a woman before passing the religious tenants. From the earlier days of entering

the book till his death in the snow (at the end of the Great War), Bijan is a character whose nature is interwoven with innate temerity and valor. In each phase of his life, he is an image of a permanent raw, youth. It is while he encounters his life' events with his simple logic and bravery. He is deceived three times by the cheats of others throughout the story. First, Girgin deceived him by initiating him into Manijeh which led to his detainment in the land of Turan. Second, Manijeh deceived him by giving him anesthetic and capturing him in her palace. Third, Girsuiz disarmed him by flattering. This should be noted here that the story begins with cheating, continues with cheating and ends with cheating.

The initial cheating (that of Girgin), the middle one (the cheating of Manijeh and Gersuiz), which paved the ways for his predicaments and other sad occasions of the story, and the last cheating (that of Rostam) that rescued Bijan and ended the story.

Another prominent of Bijan is his obvious insults to Manijeh and ignoring her many sacrifices to him, which could hurt that beloved.

Conclusion

One may conclude from reading this story that in the *Shahnameh*, women like Manijeh, Shirin, and Farangis are among the pious, kind, and praiseworthy women, but in general, women's stature does not equal that of men in this book, and are frequently reproached by other men, like that scene where Manijeh was reproached by Afrasyab, and Bijan expressed his doubts in her. It might be concluded that women are underestimated in the realm of epics, and not only the Iranians, but also the Turanians and Romans were unhappy with their girls.

In the *Shahnameh*, then, women are depicted at the service of their whim that often prefer worldly pleasures over their name and honor. They are said to be cheater and capricious. However, this outlook is neither that of the epic nor that of Ferdowsi, rather it was the dominant perspective of that period. The image Ferdowsi illustrates of his wife in the introduction of this story indicates of the high stature of women in his view, as he describes her as kind, the kind idol, kind beloved, the sun-faced moon, and etc. and all these show that this poet consider beauty and kindness as the main treasure of women. To him, the desired woman is a mix of beauty and kindness. It is the beautiful appearance and innate kindness of a woman that causes a man to fall in love with her.

Another conclusion one might draw from the design of this story is that due to the fact that Bijan and Manijeh is an epic-lyric story, unlike other lyric stories like Khosru and Shirin, its design is at the service of connecting it to the narration of epic which is the ultimate aim of Ferdowsi. Thus, the main characters of Khosru and Shirin are based on these two, and their words and deeds comprise the whole story. But in Bijan and Manijeh, the love between these two happens to be an introduction to reviving the wars between Iran and Turan, than celebrating and love-making. So, the love conversations accompanied by demur and demand, which is the most important image of such love conversations, is so negligible in this story that one can ignore

it. But compared with the design of Khosru and Shirin, the story of Bijan and Manijeh has got a more consistent design thanks to the cause and effect and reasonable arguments that support the deeds and events of the story.

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