

The Status of Wisdom in Firdausi's *Shahnameh*

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to discuss the status of wisdom in Firdausi's *Shahnameh*. In general, *Shahnameh*, Firdausi's book relating to Iranian epic, has been discussed by researchers and teachers not only in Iran but also all over the world. When the epic is discussed, Firdausi's great name touches Iranian people's minds and souls. The epic, patriotism and national pride were created as the three sides of the charter which Firdausi made, based on the wisdom, knowledge and faith. *Shahnameh* is the greatest epic book admired for wisdom and is considered the base of life. According to Firdausi's point of view, a wise man is a person who has a regular program for his life. He always tries to reach the perfection stages of humanity dynamically. Thus, Firdausi also offered some solutions in this regard. He admired wisdom and described some characteristics for the past and present man. Firdausi considered wisdom as the base of a successful personal and social life. Therefore, he introduced religious wisdom and he believed that wisdom is the most important of every good deed. In addition, he believed in wisdom as the basis of perfection.

Key words: Firdausi's *Shahnameh*, wisdom, wise, man.

Introduction -

The Status of Wisdom in Firdausi's *Shahnameh*

Before inquiring directly the status of wisdom in Firdausi's *Shahnameh*, let us investigate briefly the history of Persian language. Persian is as one of the most important of languages of the world. Khansir and Mazafari (2014) indicated that in human history, Persian language is recognized as one of the oldest languages. This language is directly related to Indo-European languages family and is recognized as a branch of Indo-European languages. Aryan group is an old group of this family which arrived in Persia area from western Asia. Firdausi's *Shahnameh* is the largest Persian poems book which admired wisdom. In this book, wisdom is considered as the basis of doing every affair and as one of the most important features of human beings.

Focus on Wisdom

Wisdom is a specific topic and different languages have discussed it through various meanings and vocabularies. Throughout human history and in all cultures, people have paid much attention to it. The English word "wisdom" has been derived from the Indo-European word "ueid" (see and find out). It is also close to the Greek word "idein" and later "Idea" and Latin word "videre" (look at something). In German language, this concept and its diversity are still used. The German word "Weisheit" means "reason", the word "wissen" means "wisdom" and "wissenschaft" means "knowledge". The Arabic and Syriac word "hok hmah" means "skill and ability". The Arabic word "hekmat" originated from the same root. The term "Sophia" in Greek means "intelligence or skill" (Mohajerani, 1993, p.87).

Thus, all of these terms and concepts such as wisdom, ability, knowledge, reason, etc., are written in the introduction of *Shahnameh* book. Therefore, Firdausi considered wisdom as the most precious divine gift which the Lord gifted and bestowed only on human beings. *Shahnameh* mentions the words "intellect" more than 500 times, " wise " 300 times and "wisdom" 20 times.

Firdausi's Ideal Man

From what has been mentioned above it is clear that Firdausi paid more attention to wisdom. Jawanshir (2005, p. 64) mentions that "deciding the fate of mankind according to the wisdom, and depending "his both lives" on his increase and decrease of reason, is Firdausi's main linchpin". Firdausi considered "wisdom" as the highest symbol of creation (Ranjbar, 2000, p.71). Torabi (1997, p.43) also said, " Firdausi's ideal man is a human who has these features all

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together: goodness, purity, faith, determination, challenge, gentleman, wisdom. He must also be away from any perversity and shortcomings." Mokhtari (1989, p.126) indicated that : "one of Firdausi's specification is to praise the superiority of the wisdom, the functional aspect of wisdom, which tends as a balancing factor in the "spiritual purity" promptly to the sacred aspect of super humanity, the aspect which Persian literature praised uniquely and excellently."

Wisdom – Basis for Living, What Is Wisdom?

Wisdom is praised and mentioned in *Shahnameh* book more than any other Persian books. Thus, in this book, wisdom is also considered as a basis for living. A question arises, what is wisdom? It is taken from human experiences to show humans the right way from the wrong one. It is the density of thoughts and experiences which must leads to man's success. The basic life of man is that he lives worthy and suitably in order to respect the natural joy of life without getting it at any cost. In this world, man has a series of transactions of wishes. Therefore, here is the point that wisdom comes to help him make good selections. Human's wishes constantly run into each other and this is the wisdom which guides man to choose the best. Wisdom chooses the spiritual demands which are more stable, and those which do not have these characteristics are excluded (Islami Nadushen, 2002).

Salvation through Wisdom

"Intellect" and "wisdom" are human's guidance in his life, and man can reach salvation through them. "Progress and retrogression, sorrow and joy, comfort or discomforts of life, achievement of spiritual and material ambition, status, or loss. ... depend on wisdom ... As a wise man's life is very regular, he is always evolving and gradually reaching the pinnacle of humanity which is the ultimate goal" (Ranjbar, 2000, p.72). About the concept of wisdom, Islami Nadushen (2002, p. 13) states that: "In *Shahnameh*, wisdom is a fundamental base for every activity. It has many excessive concepts and it is the abstract of the doctrine of all human's right knowledge and experiences. Human's right knowledge and experiences will gather in him and form his wisdom. These collections shape the society's wisdom totally. It means that the approach that should be adopted for the continuation of a society is the practical experiences (wisdom) compacted and formed in the shape of instructions".

Lord of Life and Wisdom

Firdausi began his great epic with the name of the Lord of life and wisdom. This is a point that Firdausi invited the readers to think about carefully. In this book, human being has been trying hard to reach to a suitable degree of wisdom, while remembering Lord in this way is a kind of literary art. "Life" itself is the most important thing that man has to work hard to get it in this world; for "Life" will not be limited to the area of animal life or brutality, nothing will be more useful than wisdom to guide man in this world. If life is not under the control of reason and wisdom, it will be an animal life. Therefore his life activities will create neither epic nor history (Zarrinkoob, 1997).

Age of Firdausi

Firdausi lived in an age during which various kinds of wisdom and reasoning were propounded such as Iranian reasoning, Greek reasoning, Mu'tazilites' reasoning, etc. Mohajerani (1993, p. 33) also made reference to this issue and believed that "Firdausi linked three streams of thoughts: Islamic, Greek and Persian ideas to each other in the introduction of his book. Without any doubt it is clear that the origin of his thought is Islamic one and Islamic wisdom, he paid attention to the other major contemporary currents of thought too."

Iranian history has been divided into two eras: (1) the pre-Islamic era and (2) the post-Islamic era. It is not such that Iranians had totally set aside their cultural heritages and civilization. Iranians kept and maintained their ancient national culture even after accepting Islam, so they were Iranian Muslims. It means that in the fourth and the first half of the fifth centuries, being Iranians and Muslims were features of Iranian culture. Firdausi's *Shahnameh* linked the pre-Islamic Iran to the Islamic era. If the past history of Iran was not rich, it would be impossible to influence the next era. Iran's culture found its way from the ancient time to the modern one (Falah Nezhad, 2002).

There is no doubt that Firdausi took advantage of his resources, reviews and researches of Pahlavi's literary texts and Iranian mythologies and heroes, since he was also familiar with the Iranian philosophy. In other words, Firdausi did not ignore Iranian wisdom and philosophy in the

processes of his stories which were considered as the spirit and essence of mythology (Mohajerani, 1993).

Zoroastrian Wisdom

In *Avesta* (name of Zoroastrian book), we faced two kinds of wisdom: "wisdom in the human world is divided in two forms and man has both types, but his success depends on his understanding of them:

1. Inborn wisdom (Assen wisdom), inherited in the nature of all human beings, Demon of lust (Verne) is its enemy. Ahura Mazda's wisdom, all, is inborn and heavenly wisdom.

2. Acquired wisdom (Gushan Sorude wisdom). After perceiving and understanding the human innate wisdom that has been molded in his essence, man will add his wisdom through righteousness and his experience. This is called acquired wisdom.

Thus, by the help of these two forms of wisdom man can achieve their liberation and reach to his ultimate goal "(Rezaei Rad, 2000). He also stated that "there is a difference between Holy Urmazd wisdom which related to Firdausi's creativity of words and philosophical wisdom. Wisdom as the most original questioning and trust finding drive has an important philosophical position. Through wisdom (Logos), a philosopher can draw a distinction between truth and doubt. So, there is always an image of doubt in the philosophical wisdom.

Ormazd Wisdom

In the Zoroastrian religion, philosophical wisdom does not have any relation to the Ormazd wisdom, and it could be the beginning of series of innovations and religious misunderstanding. Man should try to close his wisdom to the overall wisdom of Ormazd because movement of man is an imitation of Izad (Lord). Ormazd with his sacred wisdom knows the final outcome. He will be able to create and in general, he is wise and powerful (Rezaei Rad, 2000).

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Falah Nezhad (2002, p.25) mentioned that "wisdom in Divine wisdom and Firdausi's Shahname are both religious and they both endeavor to bring the bliss not only in this world but also in Judgment day". Kuyaji (1992) stated that "Firdausi referred to a certain anonymous author who wrote about wisdom in two cases. Therefore, Firdausi himself clearly was inspired by the anonymous author's work. He also mentioned that there were much more worthy and important subjects that he could quote from the same source:

خوردد بر او زگفتار دانا که هنر مرد خردمند آن گفتم چه

And later he added:

آفرین رازجهان داندیم چه زین دگرگنده دانا زشدیم

It can explicitly be said that the author of Pahlavi book (wise and divine wisdom), a certain example of these characters since the author was the most famous anonymous Iranian author who wrote a book about "wisdom". So it is fair enough that prior to anyone else, the author reaches to the title of "the man of wisdom" (Kuyaji, 1992). Mohajerani (1993, p.72) believed that "Firdausi's ideas originated from Islamic texts," although in the texts of Pahlavi, some notions of similarity to Firdausi's ideas can be pointed out. It is clear that the base of his thought was taken from Islamic, Holy Quran and the traditions". Firdausi lived in an era during which Greek's thought and philosophy was widespread. He even mentioned in his book, Shahnameh, about Aristotle and Plato in the story of Filghus' death, Alexander's father. Firdausi addressed Aristotle like these:

بوس چند یک بود اندرون روم به یوسف گه چند آن اندر بدمرد
 بدست را بدی دست و جست بهی بدست بر نیاخت به سه سکندر
 بوم و مرز هه آن بد شادک زو روم به گه آن بد نامداری یکی
 نامک گس ترده و بیدار و خردمند نام ار سطلایس بد که حکیمی
 جای بد گرفت و گویاک رد زب ان رای پاک آن شد سکندر پیش به

Greek Philosophy in Iran

Thus it can be said that Firdausi was quite familiar with the ideas of the Greek philosophers, but he did not call himself a philosopher and he would like to call himself a wise man. He did not like philosophers (Firdausi, 2003):

مپوی گوی که راهی به به پویم گوی بد سیار دان فله ای سا

گوی و گفـت این هـرگـز بـن بـه نـیـا د گ و سـخـتـه سـخـن شـوای سـخـتـه گـر تـ و

Falah Nezhad (2002) believed that Iran was the first Asian country which fought against Greece. Iranians knew about the ideas of great Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle many years even before accepting Islam. Later through translation, Greeks' ideas entered into Islam's world. However, it is not clear that whether Greeks' thinking was accepted or not. What is certain is that Greek's rational thinking did not have a serious influence among Iranians. Iran and Greece had two different ways of thoughts. If Iranians accepted Greek's rational thinking, it was not clear what would happen to the religion which was the origin and base of policy and government. The Greeks did not insist on teaching their own thinking to the other nations. Perhaps, they exclusively considered rational thoughts just for their own dignity. Iranians neither wanted nor could abandon their own principles of thinking and instead embrace another philosophy.

"Firdausi not only derived the benefits' of Greeks' thought and wisdom, but also he got the advantages of Iranians' thought and thinking currents too. He formed and integrated different thinking currents of thought in the context of monotheistic wisdom "(Mohajerani, 1993, p.47).

Firdausi (2003) considered wisdom as the cornerstone of creation:

پاس سه آن و است جان ز گجه بان
شـد نـاس ر ا ر د خ آ ف ر ی ن ش ن خ س ت
گـمـان بـی بـد و ن یـک بـود سـه کـز یـن ز بـان و گـوش و سـت ا چ شـم ت و پـاس سـه

However for establishing an ideal individual and social life, Firdausi considered "wisdom" as the firm cornerstone which would be a secure foundation of life. So, in 'the Holy Quran' and 'Islamic Hadith', the discussion about wisdom has been the most important anthropological issue. Late Kolehini in his book, *Osule Kafi*, which is one of the four main Shia's books, discussed about wisdom as the first valid argument. It showed the importance of this issue in Islamic Studies (Choobineh, 1998).

In the *Dictionary of Philosophy*, this is the definition of the word "wisdom": "the word *wisdom* lexically means to forbid and prohibit, because it looks like a camel's reins, since wisdom forbids his owner from being far from the right way." Firdausi paid more attention to the practical reasoning issues than theoretical ones. From Firdausi's point of view, Obligations include wisdom, righteousness and goodness, knowledge, patience, and giving ... and what should not to be done include being far from jealousy, greed, doubt, stupidity, envy and so on. According to the mentioned issues, what can be seen in Firdausi's ideas are more related to the Islamic teachings and the wisdom which he talked about is a religious wisdom.

Firdausi (2003) talked about wisdom as the first valid discussion which shows its importance. He also considered wisdom as the top of all goodness and everyone who is trying to reach the perfection, must be rational:

جهان اندر ن یست خرد از ف زون مہمان و کہ تران ف — روزندہ
خرد از شد شاد او کہ کہ س آن ہر نہ سد پردہ بد کہ ردار بہ را جهان

Important Features of Wisdom in *Shahnameh*

The most important features of wisdom in *Shahnameh*

1- Wisdom is God's gift (Firdausi, 2003):

داد راہ از بہ را خرد سد تاپش بہ عداد اپ زد چہ ہ از بہ تر خرد
سرای دو ہ بہ گ یرد دست خرد دل گشای خرد و رہنمای خرد

2- Wisdom is liberating and Savior (Firdausi, 2003):

م بہ تلاب — لادرک سی م بادا بہ ل از ار مرد خرد رھلند

3- Wisdom guides man (Firdausi, 2003):

سرای دو ہ بہ گ یرد دست خرد دل گشای خرد و راہنمای خرد

4- Wisdom decorates our body and soul (Firdausi, 2003):

م گردی پ یش شاھن آیہ بین از مرد خردمند بہ اجزای مزین

5- Wisdom protects man (Firdausi, 2003):

سید پناه اب رزگ دارد بر سرش نیکخواه و باشد پاسبان خرد

6- Wisdom is the best knowledge (Firdausi, 2003):

راه نماند ندهد نیکویها سوی شاه که دامست ده زین گفتم بدو
بگذرد گمان بی دانشی هوز برده راه که پاسبان داد چنین

7- Wisdom brings happiness (Firdausi, 2003):

نسد پرد بدک ردار به را جهان خرد از شد شاد او که که س آن هو

8- Wisdom is man's armor (Firdausi, 2003):

است روشن زو دهادن جان و دل جوشد دست خرد دیوان شمشیر ز

9- Wisdom is the Tree of loyalty (Firdausi, 2003):

پادشاست دل جسد تن بهار زو و وفاست درخت چون جهان در خرد

10- Wisdom keeps people away from being greedy (Firdausi, 2003):

بسد تردد دلت از تاج آزمگر خرد دارو و پندست تو پز شک

Features of a Wise Person

1-A wise person does not set his heart on instabilities and temporary world (Firdausi, 2003):

رای پاک مردم یاف ته خرد سرای سدنچی اندر دل نبدند

2- A wise person is patient (Firdausi, 2003):

خوار جهاندار چشم به نه باشد بر دبار کند دل کو خردمند

3- A wise person is humble and modest (Firdausi, 2003):

پرورد خرد در هی سد پهرش خرد دارد که هوبود فرتور

4- A wise person does not worry about past events (Firdausi, 2003):

نزد بگ که زو آن غم ندارد خرد دارد که که س هو آنک نخست

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5- A wise person is a clever counsellor (Firdausi, 2003):

مگر د پ یشی شاهن آیدین از مرد خردمند با جز رای مزن

A wise man's words are valuable. He is always hopeful and happy. He is not following any senses of desire or whimsy.

Firdausi believed that "What is based on wisdom is divine and what is out of reason belongs to devil and madness. Boundaries of being right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable is wisdom. The rational systems and behaviors will be accepted; while, the irrational systems and behaviors won't be accepted. All of the time, Firdausi considered wisdom as the best criterion for judging especially about kings and their governments. He supported governments which obeying reason and wisdom and criticized and rebelled irrational ones. The best attribute of kings and heroes are wisdom and justice and their worst traits are madness and wickedness (Jawanshir, 2005).

Firdausi emphasized and praised wisdom in the fifth century (A.H.), in the period in which nobody either dared enough or had the necessary knowledge to talk about reason. The value and validity of Firdausi's judgment about the conditions of his era would be far more eloquent than words suggested by historians and biographers. He analyzed the spirit of his time in which wise people lived in darkness Social knowledge was not so common that wise people could talk about and, also for the sake of their lives, people did not even listen to the words of the wise. (Mohajerani, 1993).

Firdausi not only took the man of his time to the pinnacle, but also invited today's man to get wisdom. He was invited to the wisdom that originated from the teachings of the Islamic religion. Firdausi's ideal man is a person who is adorned with the ornament of wisdom and knowledge and understands his own personal status (Firdausi, 2003):

اند ب پرورده میاند جی چندین به اند آورده برگ یتی دوازت را
مدار بازی به را خوی شد تن تویدی شمار پ س دین فطرت نخست تین

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Conclusion

In the history of Iranian literature, some great poets have been grown up such as Firdausi, Hafez Shiraz, etc. are identified. Mozafari, et al (2015) mentioned that *Shahnameh Firdausi* is known as part of the history of Persian literature and it is one the most important epic books considered by literary experts not only in Iran but also all over the world. Firdausi is a poet who admired wisdom and knowledge. He considered some features and attributes for the past and present man. He emphasizes that in making a strong personal and social life, wisdom and knowledge are the first fundamental cornerstones. His expression of wisdom is a religious one. He believed that wisdom is the summit of all kindness. He overemphasized that in the way of human's evolutionary development, man must be rational.

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