Synopsis of thesis: The Great War between Keykhosrow and Afrasiab

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Shāhnāme has been analyzed from different perspectives. Although researchers have analyzed different stories and characters of this epic poem from different perspectives, yet there are few studies on Shāhnāme with an interdisciplinary approach which uses two different yet interconnected fields of anthropology and mythology. Through this research, we have tried to create an interdisciplinary approach with the use of some influential anthropologists’ theories.

In this research with qualitative approach, interpretive method, the use of desk study and the use of Lévy-Bruhl’s theory of primitive mentality, Morgan’s analysis on ancient society and Mauss’ General Theory of Magic we have analyzed the story of the Great War between Keykhosrow and Afrāsiāb.

One of the basic assumptions of this research is that the creators of the stories of Shāhnāme lived in an era when the primitive mentality was dominant or at least while creating stories, they paid less attention to logical thinking. Primitive thinking as Lévy-Bruhl shows can be seen at work in stories and legends of primitive people. The primitive way of looking at events and things causes some distortion in representing them. In the stories where primitive mentality is at work, time and space seems strange and cannot be understood in a logical way. Furthermore, Primitive mentality neglects causality and accepts magic and supposes its effectiveness.

By having Morgan’s theory about ancient society and its structure we have shown that Irān and Turān are two clans of a tribe. Each of these clans are made of different families. Shāh of Irān, as the person who is responsible for uniting families of Iran, is empowered by the approval of the heads of the families who are rulers in their own territories. Heads of families approve the Shāh’s rule directly by their words and indirectly by their actions. Therefore, Shāh of Irān is obliged to protect this group of people while protecting the whole territory in which Iranians live. Murder of one of the members of the group means that the whole group is injured. Consequently, the Shāh is obliged to take revenge and restore peace. Revenge plays an important role in the society and cannot be neglected because it seems by taking revenge the society heals itself.

Due to the prolonged hatred between Irān and Turān which was caused by the murder of Iraj in the first place and continued to the time of Keykhosrow, the Shāh of Irān who has both physical and mythic powers, is obliged to overthrow the representative of Ahriman on earth. As Afrasiab is not a common man and fights in favor of Ahriman, the war between Irān and Turān is the epic reconstruction of the finite war between Ahurāmazdā and Ahriman.

Iranians like Rostam fight with Afriasiab and his troops throughout the Pahlavāni part of Shāhnāme and win wars but do not have the mystical powers to overthrow the kingdom of Turān. With Mauss’ theory in mind, we have analyzed keykhosrow’s character. He has characteristics of a witch-doctor: is born with a distinctive mark; can defeat the witches who live in Bahman’s castle by writing some words on a piece of paper and putting it on a spear and leaning the spear against the castle’s wall; has a globe which shows everything in the world during the month of Farvardin; can cure wounds with magical stones; and defeats Afrasiab who is a dark witch himself.

Keykhosrow in opposition to Afrasiab who uses black magic too destruct everything that is good and murder people who are in Ahurāmazdā side, by using white magic and seeking help from Hom, who is a mystic being living in the mountains and praying all the time, finds missing Afrāsiāb and kills him by his sword and word; puts an end to the prolonged revenge-seeking; protects the world from Afrāsiāb’s destruction and causes prosperity and makes Frashkard happen.

Iranians epic narrates the cosmic battle between Ahurāyi Iranians and Ahrimani Anirānis like a divine history. This literary piece has had an impact on collective representations of Iranians and the battle of two forces has been an archetype and been influential to this day and has had impact on history and historiography.

The findings of this research show that with an interdisciplinary approach stories and characters of Shāhnāme can be analyzed more properly and the underlying societal characteristics of the stories which belong to ancient times can be inspected by studying literature.