

Nature as the Source of Wisdom in Sepehri and Wordsworth's Poetry

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Abstract: Sohrab Sepehri is one the great contemporary Persian poets who shares the same taste of composing poetry with that of European ones especially William Wordsworth. They both admire nature and believe it to be the only true friend and inspiration for attaining wisdom or understanding the world we live in. To them nature is a book open to human being and this book is expiration date free. It is always there for the seeker of truth and is trustworthy. According to them the rustic man that is true to nature and understand it, is superior to modern man in the civilized city. The present study traces some few shared ideas and poems containing the same message of accepting the nature as the true teacher and source of wisdom to man, though the shared concerns are much greater. Thus the study takes *Riddle Bird*, *The Water's Footfall* and *Moving On* by Sepehri and *To the Cuckoo*, *A Poet's Epitaph* and *The Female Vagrant* by Wordsworth for a concise comparison and analysis.

Keywords: Bird, Land, Modernity, Nature, Rustic, Sepehri, Wisdom, Wordsworth.

INTRODUCTION

Sohrab Sepehri, one the great poets of New Poetry in Iran unlike his contemporaries is not really known for the non- Persian speaking readers. Though lots of surveys and studies took the responsibility to compare Sepehri with American, Swedish, German and French thinkers or poets, most of the aforementioned works are written in Persian such as works of Dr. Bahram Meghdadi which compares Sepehri with Donne, Coleridge, Whitman, Emily Dickenson, Joseph Conrad, Eliot, Kafka, Frost, Sartre, Camus, Farrokhzad, Khayyam, Hafez, Mowlana, Nima, Bible, and mysticism. Dr. Meghdadi in *Sepehri and Kafka* compares these two and asserts that though Sepehri like Sadeqh Hedayat tried to understand the mysticism of Hinduism, like Hedayat did not reach the truth [1]. Or Ali Khazaiifar in *Sohrab Sepehri and William Wordsworth* traces the description of a travel from nature and a return to it, explores their experience of being far away from nature, thus compares *Tintern Abbey* and *The Water's Footfall* through their metrical pattern, structure, the story behind composing them and the context of both [2].

Furthermore just two articles, one by Ali Khazaiifar and the other by Ramin and Bakhtiyari (*Comparative Analysis of Romantic Concepts in Sepehri's Hasht Ketab and Selected Works of William Wordsworth*) [3] tried to compare the poetry of Sohrab

Sepehri and William Wordsworth, but to great disappointment both are in Persian language only. Therefore the need was felt to devote a study to the literary figure of modern literature of Persia and the figure of English literature that holds the flag of romanticism.

DISCUSSION

In Sepehri's point of view a poet should heartily accept the nature and every creature which lives in it should listens to the songs of birds, the birds that are aware of the "secrets" and their song gives more awareness than the established knowledge. His only concern is the pain of separation from the original and primitive land. In human's short life there should be no limitation and people should communicate. In his *The Wall*, Sepehri almost like Robert Frost's *Mending Wall*, complains about the wall that people build around themselves to escape exposure and commitment. Both Wordsworth and Sepehri have devoted a poem or so to birds. Sepehri describes his *Riddle Bird* as having the awareness within itself but because of being a bird nobody except the poet can understand:

It has been a while, on this willow's branch
A bird has dwelt, its color, that of riddle
No voice, no color matches it
Like me it is lonely in this land
Though full of passion within

It is silent on the surface
Once if breaks this meaningful silence
It will captive all
Though this is a compulsory silence
Its silent frame speaks a thousand words
... The riddle bird is but a stranger here, [4].

Wordsworth, nature's high-priest or devotee also wrote *O Nightingale! thou surely art, To a Sky-Lark, the Sparrow's Nest and To the Cuckoo*. In the last one the poet insists that there is this tie between man and nature that could not be separated. People get aged and they change, but the only thing that remains the same is nature, in which in it a cuckoo bird reminds him of his school days when he was only a child, pure, intimate and close to the origin of nature and the world:

Thou tallest, Cuckoo! In the vale
Of visionary hours.
Thrice welcome, Darling of the Spring!
Even yet thou art to me
No Bird; but an invisible Thing,
A voice, a mystery.
... O blessed Bird! The earth we pace
Again appears to be
An unsubstantial, faery place;
That is fit home for Thee, [5].

The bird's twitter is somewhat of a mystic quality to both. Sepehri believes that the bird knows the mystery of the life and if it could speak its words, everyone would lose their consciousness because of the quality of the message. Wordsworth too knows the mysticism of the bird and appreciates it in a nostalgic way. The bird reminds him of some "invisible thing" of "some mystery". Both of the poets believe that the land is now something "unsubstantial" or a place where the bird or basically the nature is not appreciated any more. Wordsworth believes his mind to be the creator and receiver. He always describes himself as the one who absorbs the external sensation and creates something beautiful out of it. In a similar idea Sepehri also believes himself to be the one who understands outdoor nature and claims it to be "the interpreter of sparrows in the valley of ambiguity" [4].

In his poem *The Other Reign*, Sepehri joins the "eternity of flowers" and sinks in the songs of birds or in another word he connects himself directly to nature. Thus everything in the world whether be it a flower or bird is another manifestation of the "secrets". In the opposition of knowledge and wisdom he believes that knowledge is inferior to wisdom and it is just a tool in obtaining wisdom. This poem sets a way for his future poems where he speaks of closing the books and learning from nature.

In Wordsworth and Sepehri's worldview the poet is united with the whole universe. So this attitude

liberates the poet from solitude and lets him to feel brotherhood with all the creatures, therefore even being alone does not mean being lonely. Thus the poet never is afraid of death because he was born in nature and life is just a transitional phase in which death reconnects him to the depth of nature. God also is never very far off, but according to Sepehri in his *The Water's Footfall*, He" lives nearby/ amidst these gillyflowers, near that tall pine tree/ over water's cognition, over the ontogeny of plant". The poet is so absorbed and united with the nature that can "listen to the music of growth" like a vase. Repeatedly he states this union: "wherever I am, let me be/ the heaven is mine./ window, mind, air, love and earth are mine" [6]. Therefore there is no ugly or bad thing in the world. Everything by nature is good and it bothers the poet when the people cannot see the world differently and wants people to lose their habit in seeing old things like their ancestors:

I wonder
Why a horse is a noble animal and a dove is lovely
And why no one pets a vulture.
I wonder why a clover is inferior to a red tulip.
We need to rinse our eyes, and view things differently, [6].

Meghdadi claims that like the American nature poet Walt Whitman, Sepehri believes nature to be way better an artist than what he is. For example they think that a wave of sea is much more beautiful than any poem with the best rhyme scheme or harmony and they are not able to compete such a beauty, [7]. Thus as Wordsworth puts it, the best poetry should be the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" Sepehri too says that the words must be as natural as the nature "the word should be the wind itself, the rain itself". We should accept the life as it is and people are not allowed to interfere with the rules of nature "let's not tread on the Law of Grass" and they should accept everything in nature to be good and beneficial let it be the night, dark or death:

Let's not wish the fly scared off the
Fingerprint of Nature.
Let's not wish the panther wiped away from
creation.
Life would lack something with no worms.
The laws of tree would suffer without
caterpillars.
Our hand would seek something if there was
no death, [6].

Or in his *Moving On* he directly states that when someone is in love, he should forget about books because books lead people toward intellection that is inferior to wisdom which Sepehri believes in:

He [the lover] and the seconds, the best book
of the world
Would give to the water
And they pretty well know
No fish ever
Untied thousand knots of the river, [4].

He also suffers when he sees that the neighbor's girl in one of the most beautiful nights is studying theology, rules and regulations instead of thinking or studying about love:

I feel somber as a piece of cloud
When I see Huri
--the next-door mature lass
Studying theology
Beneath a rare elm tree, [6].

In *A Poet's Epitaph* Wordsworth again recreates the picture. Wordsworth reminds one that the only true appreciator of nature and truth would be a rustic man, because he believes scientific knowledge not appropriate for understanding and appreciating the majesty of God and nature:

But who is He, with modest looks,
And clad in homely russet brown?
He murmurs near the running brooks
A music sweeter than their own.

He is retired as noontide dew,
Or fountain in a noon-day grove;
And you must love him, ere to you
He will seem worthy of your love.

The outward shows of sky and earth,
Of hill and valley, he has viewed;
And impulses of deeper birth
Have come to him in solitude, [5].

Here Wordsworth even mocks the man of science by suggesting that he is too absorbed to the logical facts that makes him unable to see the beauties of nature when he tells the man of science "Physician art thou? one, all eyes/ Philosopher! a fingering slave/ One that would peep and botanise/ Upon his mother's grave?".

Sepehri believes modernity and industrialization to be barrier toward human's spiritual development and in his poem *Moving On* refers to Eliot's *Wasteland* and like Eliot mourns for the ruined world: "because of the waves of industry all the surface of travel was gloomy and dark/ and smelled like oil" this brief sentence has lot to tell, the surface of travel means the surface of the earth which due to industrialization has become gloomy. The dark and the smell of the oil in the circumstance also refer to asphalt. Therefore the poet makes a simile between

industrialization and a sea that has passed through its borders. Later on the poet makes a simile between man and tree who has not yet receives the "secrets". Thus man resembles nature, something that we come across in the world literature as the unconscious which is dark and unknown and human cannot understands its secrets.

In *The Pulse of Friend's Shadow* he almost paints a picture of rural areas in Iran, noticeably native rural Kashan. In *The Blue Room* also he tells us that even the shoe is a barrier for connection with nature, when he barefoot feels the treasure of thatch. He thinks that shoe is the emblem of the nostalgia of being separated from the heavens. *The Pulse of Friend's Shadow* tells us about the way he took in life and the way he prefers to see a country road: "we are a company of lovers and our way/ meets the villages familiar with poverty/ and extends toward unlimited joy", [7]. He believes that habituation is an enemy to inward light and in the past era when the man was not so engaged with the modern life and technology, he had the chance to get inward light. But when the modern life style substitutes the primitive, many poets whether in Iran or European countries mourned about what has gone.

Sepehri feels a kind of nostalgia toward the ruined nature and thinks the industrialization is invading the beauty of nature: "the growing geometry of cement, iron and stone/ the pigeon-free rooftops of hundreds of buses" and in *The Water's Footfall* continues to express that the city is no longer the same, and everything has changed and he is no longer able to recognize his hometown due to the changes that industrialization brought with itself and the poet with much effort is able to build a fantasy town for himself at the other end of the darkness of this present town:

I'm a native of Kashan, but
My hometown is not Kashan.
My hometown is lost.
With endurance and stamina
I have built a house on the other side of the
night, [6].

Likewise Wordsworth in *The Female Vagrant* describes the predicaments of a female vagrant who grew up in country side and is forced to leave her native land because the British state was under urbanization. She describes her time being in the countryside as the most freshening of all time:

One field, a flock, and what the neighbouring
flood
Supplied, to him were more than mines of
gold.
Light was my sleep; my days in transport
roll'd:
With thoughtless joy I stretch'd along the shore
My father's nets, or watched, when from the
fold

High o'er the cliffs I led my fleecy store,
A dizzy depth below! his boat and twinkling
oar, [5].

Then by intrusion of capitalists, the nature and country life style should have changed and the cottagers were forced to leave their home land. All the natural beauties and cottages were replaced with tall mansions and cruel buildings: "Then rose a mansion proud our woods among/And cottage after cottage owned its sway". The female vagrant now is made to leave her land because of some unfortunate circumstances and she even starts to cry while telling us her story when she feels no friendship, support or generosity: "All, all was seized, and weeping, side by side/We sought a home where we uninjured might abide" she endures through the loss of her home land, through poverty and bitterness but there is no consolation of any kind offered to her:

Three years a wanderer, often have I view'd,
In tears, the sun towards that country tend
Where my poor heart lost all its fortitude:
And now across this moor my steps I bend—
Oh! tell me whither — for no earthly friend
Have I. — She ceased, and weeping turned
away,
As if because her tale was at an end
She wept; — because she had no more to say
Of that perpetual weight which on her spirit
lay, [5].

And clearly in a same path, Sepehri believes that nothing in nature is hostile to another thing almost unlike human beings who fight and dispossess people from what they have: "never have I seen two poplar trees at war/ never have I seen a willow selling its shade to the ground/ the elm tree offers its branches to the crows gratis" and proceeds to remind us that life in general should be something good: "life is a pleasant custom". Therefore we should make it as simple and pleasing as we can and should enjoy every little simple pleasure in life: "life is washing a plate/ life is finding a ten-shahi coin in the street gutter", [6].

CONCLUSION

It is now clear enough that Sepehri, Wordsworth and romantic poets like them are all advocates of human rights against the established rules, religion, contracts and whatsoever distances human with their origins. They all challenge the accepted ways of treating phenomena which has its roots in nature. The nature that is the only source for inspiration and wisdom that without it human's life would lack something precious and great.

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