

Recreating Myths in Contemporary Iranian Literature: Case Study of Mehdi Akhavan Sales Works

Pooran Poodat* and Maryam Bahmanichahestani

Farhangiyan University, Bandar Abbas, Iran

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the myths recreating in contemporary literature with an emphasis on Mehdi Akhavan Sales (M- Omid) works. Myths are among valuable heritages of every community and people that come from the humankind latent and in other words, represent an ethnic group dream. Myths recreation in poetry and literary works is the most artfully use of myth making. Poets integrate and combine different mythic elements with the aim of acquiring new mythic elements and with the help of myth making, make the myths close to their contemporary time. The results of these literary works have been followed by political and social developments in contemporary times. Mehdi Achaean Sales is one of the poets who are strongly interested in their own land myths. Opposing to the political and social conditions of his time, he tried to recreate the ancient myths of Iran land, and he managed to make conditions politically and socially desirable. Recreating myths, the poet has been able to leave some works that are unique in their kind.

KEYWORDS: Recreation, Myth, Literature, Mehdi Akhavan Sales

1. INTRODUCTION

"The world of myth is a supernatural and surreal world that is grounded in reality and derived from the objective world, although outside of reality, it has allegorical and symbolic motif in order to represent the truth. The symbolic form of reality is those that can be seen in the holy books. Books of the Old Testament and the New Testament (the Torah and the Gospel) and even the Qur'an are in allegorical and symbolic language in which the historical facts have mythological and occult dimension, and are changed to eternal – immortal truths [1].

Mythic events are thought of as the real stories, because the essential foundation of myths is real phenomena [2]. Despite the myth is considered as narrative of historical events, the basis for valuation of myth is not its historical accuracy [3]. But what makes the myth worthwhile is sanctimonism endoplasm, supernatural making and content creating beyond the truth that is synthesized with the human ideology about himself, about the surrounding world and his Creator [1].

The attention to the link between myth and literature, especially poetry among new critics and theorists is seen more or less. So that Northrop Frye knew myth the same as literature and believed that the myth is one of the structure and organizer principals of literary form and an allegoric form is a basic element of a person's literary experience.

One of the finest and most artistic applications of myth in poetry is recreating myths. In recreating myths, the mythic world is the myth processor poet and writer's arena of imagination and creation [1]. In such a recreation the purpose is linking the past to the present and providing context in the field of mythic insight. Thus, the poet links the past to the present and through this link he offers social and political implications and comprehensions to his reader.

Mehdi Akhavan Sales (M- Omid) is a famous Iranian poet who has lived in the contemporary era (1928-1990). Akhavan Sales believed that the Iranian culture and civilization include the today's needs of Iranian society and non-Iranian myths and allusions have no place. His poetry has an Iranian color and having tendency for myths expresses Persian Life features. That is why the love of Iran and Iranian myths is obvious in his poetry [1]. Therefore, this article explores the myths recreation in Akhavan Sales poetry.

A) AKHAVAN POETIC MYTHS

The Lost Paradise

Nostalgia or feeling homesick is a natural sense in all human beings. When a man is faced with problems in the real world, to escape from the problems he turns to the glorious past world where he has its dream in his mind. Nostalgia is a subconscious behavior among poets that in this state, the poet having a flashback to a particular past time or land is involved in a sense of sadness and grief associated with joy to cite previous days.

Nostalgia can be seen in the school of Romanticism. Romanticist in his dream trip wish to find an elegant and luxurious environment, and finally the desired aesthetic that the romantic artist wishes to achieve it. This nostalgia for the lost paradise is often associated with the search of what is missed and has gone [4]. Akhavan had

a keen interest in ancient era and illustrious heroes. Turning back to Iran's past time, he tries to somehow give relief to the pain of his and his society failure. But besides recalling the return myths, and eternal heroes, some places like a garden in his imagination is the reminiscent of a holy and heaven like place that he always in his thought desires to return to it. Garden for many ethnic groups, especially Iranian ethnic groups is a symbol of a worldly paradise or the lost paradise where the human is always looking for it. That is why Persian gardens were built much like heaven and Iranian poets in their descriptions have talked about a paradise like garden. In some Akhavan's poems the concern to reach a clean and eternal paradise or garden is clearly seen [5]. Garden in his poetry is not always typical garden but sometimes it appears with its mythic performance. Akhavan sometimes at his life sad moments by drinking wine separates from his own self and enters cleaner and truly world that makes the desire to live more in him. It is clear that this pure world is the Lost Paradise that he has always aspired to achieve it [6].

Fairy We face mythical female creatures like fairy in Akhavan's poetry that have similar characteristics. Fairy in the Zoroastrian religion is an evil and infernal creature that has the ability to change into any shape, deceives heroes and hurts them. The only way to get rid of the fairies is to praise the gods and heroes and Persians essence. In Greek myths we also encounter sea fairies called Siren. Sirens were beautiful and witch women in the shape of birds that sat on the beach and drew the sailors into themselves with beautiful melodies. The sailors were so mesmerized of the beautiful Sirens' songs that until the last moment of their death they stayed on the island and listened to their songs.

In Akhavan poems fairy has a beautiful and alluring figure and there are no downsides in her. Akhavan in most of his poetry has created similes with the aid of fairy. For example: Akhavan in the poem of "Links and Garden" speaks with regret of the neighboring garden and sits behind the garden's bars watching its greenness. He likens rotating his eyes in the neighboring garden to the rotation of fairy in the legendary garden [7]. In the "Sunrise" poem he likens the beautiful fly of pigeons to fairy magic [6]. In another poem, Akhavan has likened dormant trees into beautiful and drunkenness fairies who have slept deeply, as if nature sleep is the same as fairies sleep that rise from sleep with little voice or touch.

Look at the dormant trees that are like slept drunk fairies
 Their sleeping spell is exploded hardly even by the butterflies sigh
 See, touch the purple silk hair
 But softly and calmly
 That the beautiful fairy jumps from sleep fearfully [8].

Akhavan in the poem of "At the end of Shahnameh" when he is the narrator of the glory of ancient Iran, dreams the royal court of Mehr, Zoroaster and fairies that are circulating in the light of the moon [6].

God who becomes martyr

Belief in a god who dies each year and revives again is associated with the mourning ceremonies on the death of plant god and the celebration for the resurrection of this god and reviving the nature. Existence giving power of God to the plant nature is not limited, but the concept of dying god and reviving god can be seen in the characters such as Sohrab, Siavash, Irej and Christ. They are the people who in addition to having God attributes, have removed the decay and destruction of the living among lives by sacrificing their lives and their death and have given new strength to the world. In Akhavan poetry the allusion of the mythological god who becomes martyr or savior is observed clearly. He used this myth in the form of symbolic expression to discuss the social and political ideas. Akhavan in the poem of "Eighth Khan and manikin" cites Sohrab and Siavash and places them next to a modern hero, Takhti, to express the powers struggle in his country and the heroes that are victim of this condition. Sohrab, Siavash or Takhties who die because of others' sin and by their death cause people's thinking resurrection [8].

In Akhavan poetry the Christ character is mentioned lightly when in the biting cold of his dominant society oppression he is looking for a savior to cure him by liberating him from affliction of this condition. Christ is the symbol of a new life that is the heating breath of the poet in the pack ice of the society:

O, my generous Christ! O, dirty old shirt Christian
 It is so unfairly cold, O,
 Your breath be warm and your head be good
 Answer my greeting, open the door [5].

Resurrection

Social and political crisis dominant in the Akhavan's society was one of the factors that directed the myth-making mind of the poet to the myths of redemption and resurrection. Being aware of internal chaos and concerning about his society future the poet looked for those myths that in their promising shadow, oppressive conditions of grief-stricken durability are forgotten and somehow they promise to get rid of the society dominant state.

In addition to the fact that rain element is one of the resurrection and new life factors in Akhavan poems, mythical characters also serve this function. The resurrection idea of Akhavan's society is based on the beliefs of Zoroastrian religion. He offers an image of the resurrection of the end of world that is taken place by the Iranian

mythological figures (Bahram Varjavand, Tus, Giv, Kei Kosro, Pashutan, Garshasb). These immortal heroes associated with Zoroastrian saviors destroy all the forces of evil and devil and then Iran experiences a golden age [7].

Mythological evil characters

One of the mythological evil characters in Akhavan's poem is demon who can be placed against another evil character in Siab's poem called Cerberus. In Akhavan's poem, demon is the symbol of all ugliness, wickedness, and evil deeds that is replaced with all goodness due to departure of the age from its orbit. The only way to get rid of this turbulent century is breaking his life glass [6].

Sometimes demon in Akhavan's poem is likened to be in people service. Akhavan in the poem of "Eighth Khan and manikin" talks about Rostam, demon killer, who has become helpless and incapable in front of sadness black demon and cannot deal with it [8]. Elsewhere in the description of the greatness of a rock placed on the beach, he likens the rock to the great body of the demon [6]. Also in another poem Akhavan likens thirst and hunger to a demon:

We all know, Haider Salar's child
Is innocent, he wanted that
The kick he throws with all anger and closed eyes
Relentless demon of thirst or hunger or both together (Life says: But it should be lived: 161).

Or he likens despicable and ignoble people that there is no mercy in them, to a demon:
Our sea became dried and Lut Desert
Today is bad and the worse is our tomorrow
Because of this ignorant demon like Mr. Shamar
Our world became like Yazid hereafter (From the Avesta: 9).

Another evil character that is seen in Akhavan's poem is Satan. Although Akhavan pays little attention to Arabic and Semitic myths, Satan can be seen in his poetry with the same guile and charm adjectives that are its most striking features. In his poem, Satan with his charm has evacuated the current century from goodness, and people are feeless stones that have lost their power to revolt against the world:

He cried like a valorous prince to the city:
"My courageous men, O Lions
Women! Men! Youth! Children! Oldsters"
And spoke most courageously, but he heard no answer.
If destiny cursed or Satan did magic, either hand or hands,
There was no sound from any head, because all people suddenly became stone and cold (From the Avesta: 20).

The devil is so ingrained in human heart that with all the good virtues and softness that exist in his soul sometimes he becomes a serpent and in a moment becomes a heavy composed mass:

Then apart from him
I wanted to ask
Satan? Or God?
That year, the year of the lion who tore the chains;
Which old magician,
Made up of rabid wolves Tallow Tar cloud?
Then by magic
Showered on the Amir Khan's bloody pears [8].

Another bad feature of Satan that is likened by Akhavan is his haste in doing things. Akhavan likens the hastening of day for passing to Satan haste:

Night like the piety of Sheikh is caught by temptation
Day, hasten from the fate essence like Satan
Like the smile of a chaste girl
Corrupt the piety foundation and virtue house (Winter: 21).

Akhavan in his poems pointed to Ahriman which is the function of Satan. He describes night in one of his poems as Ahriman's creature that is the enemy of daylight or as an Ahriman that has been dominant in the world. So, everything has dark colors (Inferno but cold: 296). In Akhavan's poem, Ahriman is the symbol of oppression and corruption that dominates the poet's society. Though he sometimes hopes deliverance and destroying Ahriman, he then cries of despair that no savior will rise and Ahriman is still dominant on the world (From the Avesta: 24).

National heroes

In Akhavan's poem two national heroes are mentioned, Rostam, the great Iranian hero and Hercules, one of well-known heroes in Greek mythology. What we read about Hercules in Greek myths shows that in some respects he has similarities with the Iranian hero. Hercules is one of semi-god heroes in Greek myths that being

thought by experienced teachers in the early childhood; he was master in all fields. Like any great champion, he chose the most difficult way of life for himself. Thus, he faced a lot of problems in life, but he always came out victorious and proud. One of his most famous heroic deeds is saving the Prometheus. Hercules was appointed by Zeus to terminate Prometheus torment by shooting the Eagle. Hercules was annihilated by his wife in his last victorious trip. But as he was semi-god, he entered the heaven in his youth face, and had a good and eternal end.

Rostam is Iran's complete hero who lived and died in strange patterns. He is known similar to Indo-Iranian god "Indra" because of some characteristics. Rostam tries all his life to triumph goodness over evil and ugliness and retain the name of Iran. His wins in all battlefields and he is always Iran force and the country variants' hope. He is Iranian's symbol and desire. One of the most beautiful and the most amazing adventures of Rostam's life is his "The Seven Adventures" that is not unlike the victorious and dangerous trips of Hercules. When Rostam goes to Mazandaran to release Kaykavous two ways are placed before him, and, like Hercules, Rostam chooses the most difficult and risky one. Although Rostam is a full hero and has had many successes in life, like any other man his life has been associated with frustration and bitterness. He finally is killed by scheming and intrigue of his half-brother, but his death also is unique. To express the oppressive conditions in the country, Akhavan makes Rostam the symbol of the modern hero who is involved in the betrayal and Rostam's half-brother in this poem symbolizes betrayers, dastards and those inferior people who do not want the championship to be emerged and if a hero like Rostam emerges, they immediately destroy him with guile and deception [8].

Then Akhavan shows well that speaking about Rostam has no attraction for society. In these tricky circumstances today's society does not accept Rostams and today Rostam is a manikin that is displayed through the demagogical medium [8].

Sometimes Akhavan becomes distressed and while he is disturbed he thinks about his last days and what happened. Desperation and despair that he has penetrated in Akhavan, puts him in doubt whether there is a hero like Rostam to rescue people and is going to come or not, he is just an imaginary role to release the sorrow:

How was that really?
 Last night or yesterday, last year or the year before,
 What a night, a day, a year it was?
 Was Rustam Real
 Or he was the shadow of Duk Zali? [6].

B) MYTHICAL FOUNDATIONS IN AKHAVAN'S POEM

The end of Shahnameh

As can be deduced from its title, the poem refers ironically to the passage of an epic. This poem recalling past glory and beauty of ancient Iran and the chastity that has been already downtrodden, reminds the reader the myth of the eternal Heaven or Lost Paradise and expresses Akhavan's nostalgia and mentions happy lost days that he wished to reach them again. Akhavan sees himself in dream of Iran's glorious past and here he is the narrator of the glory, honor and chastity story of Iran [6].

In continuation of the poem, the poet talks about the world that is suffocative and corrupted. A century that, despite of scientific progress, is devoid of spirituality and threaten has involved all aspects of people's life, and here Akhavan is the narrator of forgotten stories:

Ah, where is it?
 The capital city of this Fort-law tumultuous century
 The century of face figures
 Passing the orbit of the moon,
 But very far from the place of sun
 Century of vampire,
 The more terrible century of message,
 Where with mythical Durpardaz bird droppings
 At a time four pillars of God seven regions are intrigued [6].

Recalling the grandeur of his country and perceiving humiliation and destruction of its beautiful appearance, Akhavan cries and revolts against this century to fell the spell of demons and break it to conquer this crazy century:

We come to the capital of the century to conquer
 To open the wide nine passages nowhere of this carefree dusty
 With awful clank of our swords, sharp
 Thundering from Haman's timpani, the share
 Jumping of Haman's arrow thorn, fast;
 Very well [6].

But when he sees the conditions of his society and intellectual impasse where his society heroes have fallen into the conspirators' trap and there is no hope to be saved, also nothing can be done by refuge from the past glory, he disgraced and desperately blames his harp for ranting [6].

Chavoshi

"Chavoshi" is another poem of Akhavan that has a mythic structure. This poem is created based on trip myth. Poet is like myths traveler who goes on a journey to achieve knowledge. The dusty air dominated on the route recalls the gloomy atmosphere of the myths. As any trip in the myth is associated with an unsolved riddle, in this journey, there are also some mysterious ways that traveler must select one of them.

Three ways are apparent

Written over each of them on the stone,

Narration that is not written on the other

First: Enjoy, comfort and happiness way.

Smearred with shame, but looks on the town and village and gardens

Second: the half shame, the half fame,

If rise up, tumult and if remain silent, quiet

Third: no way back, no appeal [5].

But Akhavan selects the third choice that is the way to dream land and thus begins his journey to gain experience and knowledge. The land is nowhere except this world and its known things [5].

In fact, when Akhavan observes the discrepancy between him and ruling values of his society, like the mythological heroes, moves away from the society and starts searching a world beyond this world to find what he had missed in the previous world and reaches comfort. This no-return path is the way of eternal heaven or lost paradise that Akhavan prefers it to painful and fearful life in the world [5].

Kaveh or Alexander

Kaveh is the name of a craftsman in Shahnameh that revolts against the oppression of Zakhak. His name is not mentioned in the Avesta and Pahlavi texts, but given the evidence, his personality is close to the mythical character called Garshasp, the Iranian mythical hero. In Iranian mythology, Garshasp is a brave hero that destroys Zakhak forever in Doomsday. Kaveh's tale is written in more mythological parts of Shahnameh and he is one of the popular saviors who revolts publicly against the Zakhak. Garshasp is the heroes' ancestor and Kaveh also starts to be hero from Shahnameh.

Akhavan has composed the poem of "Kaveh or Alexander" a few years after the coup of 19 August 1953 and being influenced by that atmosphere. The poem atmosphere shows the repressive prevailing in the country, resulted from the repression of the oppositions and sending them into prison after uprising of 1953 [9]. Akhavan shows the stepping face of all painful and angry anti-government people very well. As if the city is a destroyed city and suffocation is so that no person dares to whine. Akhavan in this despair context that all the friends and colleagues have become exposed and have a seal on the lips of silence, reaches the conclusion that the hope for victory was vain and there is no day behind the Hill [6].

Akhavan is angry about leaders and politicians who introduced himself the saviors of the nation and gave the spirit of hope to people by false and deceptive words. But when they achieved what they wanted and sacrificed people for their demands, they left the scene. Now, they shrug their shoulders indifferently and they shirk responsibility. Now the people must pay back and stay with "storm and surge":

The one who had gold and honor in his blood

Shrugged shoulder and drunk the wine glass

Having an invisible steel umbrella at the hand

Trod the other beaches

Wondered of the no rider mist

Angry, we have remained dishonorable

Waters have fallen of the mill; But

We have remained with storm and surges again [6].

The myth that exists in this poem is savior and hero myth. In this poem, as the poet's soul is tired of the lies of the so-called saviors of the nation, he transforms the savior myth and gives it different functions. Savior in this poem is not the one who is expected, the one who emerges and saves people [9]. The saviors in this poem are in fact that the cheaters and liars of policy that made water muddy, and when they caught their prey, they packed off and left the political scene and left people alone.

Akhavan, who is representative of the intelligentsia, disgust that tomorrow another savior emerges under the pretext of helping people. Kaveh that was from people and rose up among people, all of his concerns was people's liberation. Now he would not come and the resurrection does not occur ever. Omid in this desperate situation wishes that now that the savior is not found to save people from evil tyrant rulers at least Alexander attacks maybe he perishes the lineage of the tyrants. Akhavan prefers the presence a foreigner to the cruelty of them. At least their oppression is ended by this attack:

Again they say: another tomorrow

Wait until the other one is found.

No Kaveh will be found, Omid!

I wish an Alexander be found [6].

Man and Palfrey

Poetry of "Man and Palfrey" is the narration in which Akhavan has benefited from the hero or savior myth. In this poem, because of the Akhavan's disappointed spirit, the function of hero and savior is changed. Akhavan by changing the hero myth and placing it as a symbol of his society heroes expresses his society horrific atmosphere and function of heroes. Akhavan who is the narrator of this epic story, speaks about the sinking of the hero in the epical past and deployment, combat, probing, and finally his ending, by a satiric language:

Field of holes brought forward its funny torn leathern bag.

The torn leathern bag that you consider

Whatever had existed in it has fell and will fall again.

Fakh and Fukh and Tagh and Tugh.

Another man said, "in his thought" that he is sank head to foot in the iron and steel

.....

Pieces of waxy flats joined together.

Another man said, "in his thought" that his invincible face sits up and went to field of Navard

The narrator said: To the laugh-place [7].

The riding man sometimes is called the savior of a legendary, where the poor tired people are waiting for the rise of day light and emergence of Savior to bring an optimal day:

Oh, look ... Look now ... the risen dust and what a dust.

It seems as if a harbinger arrives now, with a message.

It may be that dust that has a man and a palfrey,

The forgiver glorious welfare-giver [7].

But the man and palfrey is not the society hero and does not meet the people's hope for salvation. He overruns to an unknown field of battle, towards the nowhere:

The way deserted, the plain quiet and night as if

Losing its color.

Men of man men but still on his tame palfrey,

Warmly overruns towards nowhere [7].

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