Manifestation of “Ayari“ in Iranian Culture

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Abstract

“Ayars“ and their ritual, from ages before the advent of Islam up to the contemporary era, have been pervasively present in the community, written and verbal literature, arts, rituals, Zourkhanei sports and folk beliefs in Iran. There are numerous instances of this multi-figure hero in other cultures: from Japanese samurai to Robin Hood and to King Arthur’s the knights of the Round Table in England, from Arabian Saalik to the French knights, from the Kakehs of Afganistan and Alfetes of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to Ahdaths of Syria. Apart from supposing either social or religious roots for it, the following features are nearly common in all of the figures: courage and celerity, honesty, benevolence, generosity, hospitality, and so on. This research, with a descriptive-analytic approach, is in search of the causes of comprehensive presence of “ayar“ and “ayari“ in various cultures, especially in different cultural as well as social skeletons of Iran. In this regard, it is researching into different embodiments of the intangible cultural heritage, concentrating on literature in Iran, and subsequently proposes three possibilities to explain similarities and to find out the causes of this repeated pattern and all of the three possibilities, it is believed that the same origin for the issue does exist.

Keywords: ayari, Iran, culture, literature, archetype.
Introduction

Ayari has an old history in Iran. It is as old as the mythical age. In addition to references to it in the pre-Islamic epoch, “undoubtedly, in historical books, even in old Arabic and Persian references similar to the History of Al-Tabari, the History of Masoudi, the History of kamel Ibn Athir, the History of Sistan and Mojmal Al-tavarihkh and Alghesas, and so forth, one encounters numerous occurrences and acts done by Ayars (Mahjoub,2008: 970).

Ayars, in some regions and over some periods in history, had methodical and organized groups and caused profound social changes. They, at times, acted in little groups or individually. In some periods, they adopted transgressive stand concerning the status quo and brought the guilty to justice arbitrarily which turned them into an antisocial group.

The prevalence and influence of Ayari has been observable in different aspects of the culture of Iran to extent that Najm-Al-Din Zarkoub in his Fotovvat-nameh says: “Ayari is immanent within all objects.” Direct and indirect manifestations of Ayari is clear in some social behaviours of people, literature, sports, Sufism, arts, and all the other manifestations of human thought. This pervasiveness necessitates new researches in this area.

This essay illustrates intangible traces of this cultural heritage—especially in literature—and studies the reasons why such a pervasiveness in different regions and eras, and among different nations and cultures, did exist.
Methodology

This descriptive-analytic research is based on library method which consists of two parts. In the first part, after explaining the conception of Ayari terms, the history of the subject is discussed. Afterward, the manifestation of Ayari in Fotovvat-namehs and pahlevani and zoorkhaneh rituals is explicated. The first part ends with an overview of the theme of Ayari in Persian Films. The second part is devoted to the figure of Ayars in some works of Persian literature. In this part, non-narrative and then narrative texts are studied and finally, in the conclusion of the essay the findings of the study are analyzed and the cause of similarities are explained.

History of Ayari

There is strong evidence to support the point that Ayari dates back to ancient Iran (Bahar,1996:73) / (Pour Shariati, 2014: 84-103) / Shadorvan, 2000: 31)

Ayari is closer to Mithraism than other religions of ancient Iran. Some features of it, resembling Ayari, are as follows:

1- First and foremost, Mitra was the god of vow and loyalty.

2- Mitra was the eternal protective of the oppressed.

3- Mitra was a warrior god. “Mitra in Mehr Yasht is a combative hero who defeats devils and vow-breakers and does a great kindness to the oppressed, the miserable, and the belittled”. (Pour Shariati, 2014: 88)

4- Mitra was the eternal enemy of lie.

5- Mitra was powerful and nimble.

6- Mithraists were obliged to be committed to an ascetic morality.

Accordingly, it appears logical to suppose that Ayari had a mythological background.
The Portrayal of “Ayars” in Persian Literature

Ayari literature, composed in verse or prose, including oral and written literature, is the subdivision of didactic literature. (Jafarpour & Alavi Moghadam, 2013: 18). As a matter of fact, a great deal of Persian literature is pregnant with Ayari doctrine in one way or another no matter that being Ayari is specified. Here some instances are mentioned:

Classical Literature

1- **Ghabousnameh**: it was written by Onsorolmaali Keikavoos-ebn-e Eskandar Iben-e Ghaboos in the 5th century AH. One of the 44 chapters of the book entitled “Ayari Occupation” is devoted to Ayari and its principles. Onsorolmaali says: “Ayari comprises three parts: doing whatever you say, not telling untruth, and being patient because every Ayari-related trait consists of three parts (Keikavoos-ebn-e Eskandar, 1985: 246).

2- **Saadi and Ayari**: "Mohammad-Reza Shafiei Kadkani in the essay “Saadi in the Chain of Ayars” tries to use prose and verse instances in the body of Saadi’s work, in addition to other clues, in order to categorise him as one of those Ayars, albeit from a spiritual and Sufistic perspective, who were members of the Saghayans cult of it.” (Jafarpour & Alavi Moghadam, 2013: 14). Saadi says:

If you be Ayar, the two worlds are yours

The two worlds are great for Ayar

True Ayar is Ali in truth

The greatest of benevolent men is Ali

**Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh**: All over Shahnameh the major characters represent Ayari characteristics. Every major character has some of those traits. Some of these traits are continence, faithfulness, truthfulness, rationality, oppression fighting, reputability, self-esteem, consideration for the indigent, justice-seeking,
valour, prowess in wars, diligence, enmity toward enemy, expedient, and most important of all justice, which includes the aforementioned characteristics. Ferdowsi underscores seeking justice to the extent that thinks of it as the cause of equilibrium in nature. During the kingdom of Kay Khosrow his justice results in:

Vernal cloud was raining mist

Sadness took off the sad on Earth

The world pregnant with greenery and fast-flowing rivers

Sadness vanished

The Earth became a heaven adorned

Immersed in justice and fairness

The world full of goodness and security

Devoid of any evil hand

Ferdowsi points out, somewhere else, the repercussions of cruelty and oppression on the cosmos:

Oppressions of the king of the world

Removes the whole goodness

“Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh is probably the oldest Persian text in which, without mentioning Ayar and Ayari, Ayari scenes and events undoubtedly similar to Ayars’ acts are described and explained (Mahjoub, 2008: 959) Mahjoub, for example, alludes to some parts of Bijan and Manijeh, especially Rostam’s help to liberate heroes. Esfandiyār’s passing the Seven Labours to liberate his sisters from the Castle of Ruyin, The story of
Kerm-e Haftvad, Goshtasb’s tour de force in his expedition to Rome and the adventures of Shapour-e Zolataf are of instances which are greatly similar to Ayari stories. (ibid 959-964)

The following lines which are related to the historical parts of Shahnameh and the kingdom of Ardashir-e Babakan is indicative of king’s decree regarding the public education of chivalric techniques for boys. This education, like chivalry, strengthens both boys’ bodies and their psyches:

In some lines of Shahnameh this kind of advocacy is more obvious, like these lines:

Be loyal to Ayari and truthfulness

Make your thought totally benevolent

Ayari in Popular literature

Samak-e Ayar: This “which dates back to Ashkanian epoch”, (Pour Shariati, 2014: 97) is a long folktale compiled by Faramarz-Ibn-Abdellah-e Kateb-e Arrajani in the 13th century. It is the oldest Ayari book in Persian. The oral narrator of this book was Sadagh-Ibn-e Abolghasem. A considerable proportion of the tale is devoted to narrating Prince “Khorshid Shah”’s search for Mah-Pari, the daughter of the king of
China, whom he dreamt. Khorshid Shah travels in order to find his beloved and in his travel he asks Ayars help. One of the Ayars is called Samak who is the leader of one of the Ayari groups and the hero of the tale. The tale, in fact, revolves around his Ayari acts. Although Samak is not physically different than ordinary people, with respect to his expedient and moral, he far betters. Therefore, he can be considered as possessed of all characteristics of Ayars. He, whose fame is widespread, introduces himself as such: “I am a penniless and Ayar man. If I find some bread, I eat, otherwise wander and minister to Ayars and if I do anything that is merely for reputability not for bread.”

Moral principles of Ayari concerning Samak-e Ayar are trustworthiness, truthfulness, helping the wretched, continence, devotion, comradeship with comrade and enmity to enemy (Natel Khanlari, 1985: 71-76).

Drabnameh: It is a folktale on the vicissitudes of the vicissitudinous life of Darab, king of Iran, and King Firooz, his son, and a knight called Farrokhzad. In this tale, Ayars play a pivotal role. Darabnameh, similar to Kelileh Va Demneh and other instances, has a story in the story. Ergo, at the heart of the main story there are various minor tales.

Some of the characteristics of Ayars included in Darabnameh are Valour, truthfulness, keeping promise, religiosity, avoidance of weakness, wretchedness, and arrogance, benevolence, trustworthiness, continence, generosity, hospitality, helping the poor, and expedient.

- Abou-Moslemnameh: it is an epic on the life of Abou-Moslem-e Khorasani and his chivalrousness. His battle with the last Umayyad caliph, Marvan, which ends with Abou-Moslem’s victory and end of Umayyad. Abou-Moslemnameh is a story with Ayari roots and Shia’s appearance. Therefore, afore-mentioned Ayari attributes are spoken of in this book too.

- The Thousand and One Nights: It is rooted in “Hezar Afsan” and some Indian tales and got some Islamo-Arabic elements as well over the time.
The traces of Ayari is frequently detectable in this book, for example, in the stories of “King Omar-e Noman and his sons” and “Ajib and his Brother Gharib”.

**Other Folktales:** Studying folktales reveals that in many of them, with no mention of Ayari and chivalrousness, the hero is possessed of Ayari. Here some instances are mentioned:

The Legend of Khodadad: In this story the similarities of the hero with “Ayar” are as follows: Khodadad is helpful and trustworthy to people; he is a warrior; he fights against the dragon and liberates the girl. He battles chivalrously and thinks of attacking the dragon while sleeping as opposed to Ayari principles. He is, moreover, humble. (Mihan Doust,2002:31-45)

The Legend of the Devil of Bad Hend: The prince is a warrior and in three battles defeats White Devil, Black Devil, and Red Devil and liberated the princesses. (ibid 84-92)

The Legend of Divzad Knight: A dragon which devours horses and virgins was killed by the hero (ibid 93-102)

The Legend of Khorshid Afarin: It revolves around the hero’s wrestling (ibid 103-110)

The Legend of Shoushtari Ayar: It has not been published anywhere.

In general, in Ayari legends, like many other folktales, elements of Iranian archaic thought of the battle between the good and the evil do exist.

**Manifestation of Ayari in Modern Storytelling:**

Sadegh Hedayat in his short story “Dash Akol” masterfully exposes Ayari mores.
Dash Akol is a famous heroic outlaw whose chivalrousness made him respectable to people. Kaka Rostam, in contrast, is a tough and miscreant whom has recurrently been faced by the power of Dash Akol. In this story the conflict between chivalrousness and shabbiness, incarnated by the two characters, is quite obvious.

In some stories, at times, with no mention of Ayari and chivalrousness, the hero is possessed of Ayari, like Yousef the protagonist of Simin Daneshvar’s Savushun (Daneshvar, 1983)

Analysis of findings and conclusion:

In this essay, Ayari and its different appearances and manifestations was studied and revealed that there are some general traits somewhat common in all cases, namely valour and nimbleness, continence, truthfulness, trustworthiness, keeping promise, benevolence, generosity and hospitality, poverty and indifference to gain of wealth, patience in the face of difficulties, sophistication in martial arts, thieving at night and donating to the poor, in other words not succumbing to the states quo and attempting to found a new order.

The obvious presence of Ayars and their values and rites over the thousands of years embodied in different kinds of works, rites, artworks, and so forth, is indicative of the universality of Ayari thought each time manifesting itself in one way or another. For example, in Iran, manifestation of the kernel of Ayari in sports caused the birth of pahlevani and zoorkhaneh rituals and in the form of social institution founded Ayari communities; the synthesis of it with Sufism is manifested in “Fotovvat creed” and is illustrated in literature, cinema and other fields. In each of these cases the characteristics of Ayars are those of the ideal man and thus “Ayar” could be called the ideal man of Iranians or even that of humankind.

There could be two different probable reasons at work for the presence of different manifestations of “Ayar” in different periods and areas:

First, it has its origins in Mithraism and this thought is an essential part of Iranian thought.
Second, perhaps numerous archaic Persian words which are linked to chivalry in some way that all praises chivalry in one way or another, could be considered as the residue of the adoration of chivalry. In this view, in other words, the status of knights, to Iranians, who consider the same status for Ayars too, conveys the prevalence of the adoration of chivalry in ancient times. Furthermore, “some believe that the adoration of chivalry is rooted in the worship of ancestry.” (Sattari, 2013:187) Therefore, “Ayari” is a changed form of the worship of ancestry.
References


