



Investigating the elements of play in text of Ghanbar's Elegy: The Mullah Mohammad Ismail Matbuei's Version

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Abstract

The ritual ceremony of Ghanbar's Elegy has been held in Fasa city for about one century. Mulla Mohammad Ismail Matbuei, who was one of the tragedians in Ta'zieh, eulogists, and Ta'zieh director, has written the poems of this version of the Ta'zieh in more than a hundred years ago, roughly between 1289 and 1299 Hijri. In this research paper, we first try to introduce Mulla Mohammad Ismail Matbuei and then investigate the elements of play in the Ghanbar's Elegy Ta'zieh. Moreover, a cross-sectional approach is taken – along with concepts like personality type, depth of thought, story map, character, time and place, conditions, and dialogues – to fully recognize the elements of theater in Ghanbar's Elegy with philosophical-ideological, sociological, and artistic functions.

Keywords:: elements of theater, Ghanbar's Elegy, Mulla Mohammad Ismail Matbuei, Fasa city.

Introduction

Different types of Ta'zieh form part of the ancient Iranian culture and literature through the history. These poems, in addition to literary richness, sophistication of expression, interesting stories and themes, which are fruits of a faithful and believing man's hard work, have become popular among people due to their link to life, beliefs, rituals and traditions of people, and a reflection of Iranian national attitudes and opinions. The purpose of this paper is to introduce elements of play in Qanbar's Elegy written by Mullah Mohammad Ismail Matbuei. Meanwhile, in order to introduce Qanbar's Elegy and understand its elements of play, recognizing dramatic literature, dramatic elements, and Qanbar's Elegy Ta'zieh written by Mullah Mohammad Ismail Matbuei in a descriptive analytic way seems necessary.

Dramatic Literature

Includes texts having dramatic situations such as dialogues, closet drama, and also works which can be played on a stage. It should be noted that dramatic poetry:

1. is written to be heard not read.

2. has visual scene reflections, i.e. behaviors are understood from it.

3. has music; as of the similarities between sounds, a unity is formed among words and then in sentences, where in addition to the understood concept, the sentences are heard as a piece of music, too (Nader Najaf Abadi, 1377: 11).

By this definition, the poems composed for Ta'zieh are included in dramatic literature and can be also studied from the perspective of elements of play, since they have similarities with play i.e. they both represent the behavior of the characters and events of their lives and have elements such as plot, atmosphere, setting, contact, conflict and many other elements and commonalities.

Qanbar's Elegy

Qanbar's Elegy is a version of a Ta'zieh in memory of the martyrdom of Amir al-Mu'minin (Commander of the Faithful) Imam Ali (PBUH) by Mullah Mohammad Ismail Matbuei written nearly a century ago. The story of this Ta'zieh is as follows. Before Imam Ali (PBUH) is wounded by the accursed Ibn Moljam Moradi, Qanbar leaves the city to visit his relatives with the permission of Imam Ali (PBUH). But it does not take a long time that he becomes impatient and worried because of being far from his master, so he immediately returns to

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the city of Kufa which coincides with the time that Imam Ali (PBUH) is wounded.

Upon entering the city of Kufa and going to the house of Imam Ali (PBUH) Qanbar notices that the people in all parts of the city have gathered together and shed tears of sorrow. He asks for the reason of their grief. They tell him “Where were you Qanbar? Did you know that our Lord and Master Imam Ali (PBUH) was wounded in the head by IbnMoljamMoradi and now is in bed and doctors have been unable to treat him!?”

Hearing this bad heart-rending news, mourning Qanbar moves toward the house of Imam Ali (PBUH) with a plaintive and tearful face. He reaches there while he is full of grief. Actually, “Qanbar’s Elegy” starts from this point and it is worth mentioning that, this Ta’zieh was first performed by Mullah Mohammad Ismail Matbuei and after that, which is nearly a century, other artists of Fasa have reestablished it and it is still performed.

Elements of play

“Like other arts, drama has its own language. It is composed of various elements that have been combined in various ways, in accordance with special rules, to induce a dramatic message” (Holton, 1387: 27). Aristotle is the first person who analyzed play with a systematic approach and enumerated some elements for it. According to Aristotle, tragedy has six main elements: “plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle (scenic effect), and song (music), of which the first two are primary.” According to Aristotle the plot is the most important element of tragedy. This categorization of elements of play have developed over time and some other elements have been included in it, too. But the most important ones which we will discuss through analyzing elements of Qanbar’s Elegy are as follows.

Theme

Theme – which Aristotle calls *thought* – has the fourth place in the Aristotle divisions, but it should be noted that this is one of the requirements of any play, i.e. each play faces some thought from which the play arises. Generally, theme has three different meanings:

1. Basic source (content) that is the main subject of the play.

2. Pure source (subject) that summarize the plot in a few sentences without citing the script or author’s style.

3. Base of thought (motif), which states the mentality and message of play in one or two sentences.

Martyrdom and innocence of the first Shia Imam, Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (PBUH), is the main theme (motif) of Qanbar’s Elegy Ta’zieh. The catharsis and purification of the innocence of Imam Ali (PBUH), takes place in a hamartia that Qanbar character has in his dialogue with Imam during the reading or performance of this Ta’zieh by the audience.

Plot

Aristotle ranked plot first in terms of importance. It includes the “the arrangement of events” (Holton, 1387: 88).

The plot is based on the story source and differs with it in the way of selection and arrangement of events and incidents. Plot shows the steps, events and actions that the challenging character undergoes to achieve its own objectives. Plot is descriptive in non-performing contexts and active in performing contexts.

Qanbar’s Elegy Ta’zieh written by Mullah Mohammad Ismail Matbuei is a tragedy in memory of the martyrdom of Amir al-Mu'minin Imam Ali (PBUH). All parts of a play including Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, and Catastrophe are clearly visible in this play. The Exposition talks about the sublime character of Amir al-Mu'minin Imam Ali (PBUH). By observing mourning people who have gathered in different parts of the city of Kufa and shed tears of sorrow the Rising Action starts. The Climax reveals as the story continues and Qanbar arrives at the house of Imam Ali (PBUH). He gets in and a set of questions and answers are exchanged between them. At the end with the martyrdom of Amir al-Mu'minin Imam Ali (PBUH), the dramatic climax of the Ta’zieh takes place.

Character

Aristotle defines tragedy as an imitation of human actions and defines story as an issue to introduce a play’s characters. This means that story is a field where the characters can emerge. “By creating a character in dramatic literature, the author is trying to image human nature with all its complexity and



diversity. Addressing this important issue, he designs the dramatic action sometimes with an emphasis on actions of the character, and sometimes with an emphasis on dialogue, and sometimes with putting character in a specific situations and developing it. But no matter in what way the dramatic movement takes place, the character should have acceptable human characteristics, and have a reasonable and justifiable motivation in behavior or change of behavior” (Zahedi, 1376: 46-45). By this definition, the characterization of each character in plays is largely dependent on their interaction in the situation they are in. In western drama, characters are mostly based on four dimensions: Physical, Psychological, Social and Ideological. In terms of Physical dimension, characteristics such as gender, age, height, weight, ugliness, prettiness, physical defects, etc. are considered. The Psychological dimension includes traits and characteristics, moods, mental health or illness, instincts and so on. In the Social dimension issues like class, occupation, education, family relations, social status, nationality, etc. arise. And finally the characters in Ideological dimension are processed in terms of thinking, ideology, religion, etc. However, in Iranian plays these dimensions are summarized in form and meaning.

Imam Ali (PBUH)

According to historians, Imam Ali (PBUH) was born on Friday, 13th of Rajab, 30th Am-ol-Fil year in The Kaaba. His father was Abdul MuttalibibnHashimibnAbdManaf (the uncle of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)), and his mother was Fatima daughter of AsadibnHashim. Therefore Imam Ali (PBUH) is of the Hashemite lineage from both parents. Imam Ali’s childhood until the age of ten (first revelation of The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)) was passed under the shelter and protection of The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This elementary educations led to Ali (PBUH) being the first person to accept the invitation of The Prophet (PBUH) to Islam and made him ready to sacrifice for the sake of truth for the rest of his life. In the year 10 HA that coincided with the last year of Prophet’s life, while returning from Hajj from Mecca to Medina, on the 18th of Dhu al-Hijjah, The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stopped in a place called The Pond of Khumm, because an important

issue was revealed to him from Allah that had to be communicated to the public, and that was the Caliphate of Ali (PBUH). The Prophet Muhammad told the Muslims that “Of whomsoever I had been Master (Mawla), Ali here is to be his Master”, so be true companions and friends to him. Then he prayed that “O Allah, be a supporter of whoever supports him (Ali) and an enemy of whoever opposes him and divert the Truth to Ali”. After the death of the Prophet (PBUH), Imam Ali (PBUH) was kept away from his inalienable right to rule for several years. He eventually came to power after the death of the third caliph of Muslims. Eventually, his rightful governance and restoring traditions and commandments of Quran, made opponents and enemies of the Imam to injure him in the head on the morning of the 19th of Ramadan 40 AH in Kufa mosque during prostration with the poisonous sword of Abdul RahmanIbnMuljam. He was martyred on the 21st of Ramadan. Imam Ali (PBUH) was 63 years old when martyred; his Imamate was thirty years; and his caliphate was about five years.

Qanbar

Qanbar, whose real name is likely Abdolfattah or Abolsha’sa’, passed part of his life in company of Amir al-Mu’minin Imam Ali (PBUH) and was one of his dignified companions who martyred after Imam Ali (PBUH). The definitive information obtained about Qanbar from historical traditions is that he was the servant of Imam Ali (PBUH) and accompanied him in judgment and governance situations. He was proud to be continuously in service of his master and assisted him as a devoted soldier in Safin, Jamal and the Khawarij of Nahrawan wars.

Dialogue

Dialogue or conversation has the third place in the Aristotelian divisions. That is, Aristotle believes that in drama, dialogue is the most important feature of this art after plot and character. In fact, “due to some limitations that the drama faces, dialogue is the key driving factor of events and their qualitative and quantitative explanation and justification. The playwright mostly addresses the nature of their characters through dialogue. In fact, dialogues are the most fundamental means to development events, demonstrate characters



moods, and create a proper atmosphere to induce the author's ideas" (Mackie, 1366: 25-26).

Dialogue has multiple functions in plays:

1. Drives the story;
2. Reveals the identity of the characters;
3. Shows individuals moods and feelings;
4. Creates atmosphere and mood;
5. And in some cases is used to express the scene, time and place.

Using dialogues instead of telling the story have made the language of Mullah Mohammad Ismail Matbuei, the poet of Qanbar's Elegy, more dramatic. So that the dialogues of this narrative, play an important role in advancing the dramatic events of the story and introducing the characters of Qanbar's Elegy Ta'zieh.

Dramatic dialogues visible in this Ta'zieh include:

- Using *dialogues* in interactions that arises between the main characters of Qanbar's Elegy Ta'zieh, i.e Amir al-Mu'minin Imam Ali (PBUH) and Qanbar.

It should be noted there are some dialogues between Amir al-Mu'minin Imam Ali (PBUH) and his daughter Hazrat Zeinab (PBUH), too.

- *Monologues*, "appears in a play when an actor – a character – recounts his long lines to other actors – other characters. The rest of the characters are motionless and remain silent so that he express his mind and adventures. However, he doesn't forget that the actors are other characters in the scene and they are his audience" (Nazerzadeh, 1369: 108). The two main characters of this Ta'zieh – Amir al-Mu'minin Imam Ali (PBUH) and Qanbar – use monologue to restate their thoughts and emotions.
- *Soliloquy* "occurs when the actor – character – expresses many lines alone and for himself, and in fact for the audience, and informs the audience of his inner thoughts and feelings. The soliloquy actor or character, seems to be talking to his shadow or himself and recounting his thoughts aloud" (Nazerzadeh, 1373: 108). In this Ta'zieh, Amir al-Mu'minin Imam Ali (PBUH) and Qanbar use soliloquy to talk to themselves and through that inform the participants in the ritual of Qanbar's Elegy

Ta'zieh of the events and their inner feelings and thoughts.

- *Side talk* "is a parenthetical sentence that comes to the mind of an actor – character – and he says it to the side of the stage addressing the audience. Although his voice is heard, but he and other actors – characters – pretend that they didn't hear it" (Nazerzadeh, 1369: 109-108). Side talk is used by the characters in this Ta'zieh addressing the audience in order to inform them of what is going on at the moment.

Imam Ali (PBUH) says:

Oh, that was the moaning of Qanbar

that was the servant of the Lord Ghazanfar

He was a loyal servant to the Prophet's son in law

Call Ali, Call Ali, Oh Ali

- Using a *confidant* emerges among the characters of this Tazieh when Imam Ali (PBUH) in his final words addresses Qanbar and says:

Tell my lovers, special or general

My coming to the mosque have come to an end

Remember me every day and night

Call Ali, Call Ali, Oh Ali

It should be noted that the dialogues of characters in this Ta'zieh are in accordance to their mood and situation. It expresses the situation and social status of the characters as well as a great tragedy and sorrow, a tragedy that is as immense as the martyrdom of the first Imam of the age Amir al-Mu'minin Imam Ali (PBUH).

Setting

Drama is one of the arts limited to time and place (setting), i.e. it should be watched in a given place and time, and the drama itself runs in every moment. Each play has a major time (history) and a minor time (night, day, etc.). Also each play has a major geographic place, and a minor one (desert, town, etc.). Setting is very important in creating the atmosphere of the play, costume design, and so on. In most cases it has special functions in advancing the events. In a play setting is mostly introduced to the audience with the design or among the dialogues. The main or major time of Ta'zieh of "Qanbar's Elegy" is the year of 40 AH and its minor time is the time of martyrdom of Amir al-Mu'minin Imam Ali (PBUH), especially 19th-23rd of Ramadan. The major place of this narrative is



city of Kufa and its minor place is the streets of Kufa and the house of Imam Ali (PBUH).

Mood and Atmosphere

Every play has its own special atmosphere that comes from other parts of the work, in this work the separation, deep sorrow, painful and tragic death of the protagonist of the "Qanbar's Elegy" Ta'zieh that gives a sad and sorrowful atmosphere to it is in fact the feelings of the audience in facing with visual and audio elements. Mood and atmosphere are the inner feelings of characters. They change constantly during the show. Mullah Mohammad Ismail Matbuei have tried to create the atmosphere in this story using detailed explanation of the scenes, events, actions and reactions of the characters, in which he has been largely successful. The atmosphere of the story is nostalgic, dramatic, and tragic. It has been successful in conveying the sense of sorrow and regret to the audience.

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Conclusions

According to what we have presented in this research paper, different versions of Ta'zieh that were written by the lovers of Prophet's family in memory of the martyrdom of great Imams with a language full of love, emotion and feeling are not only a treasure of culture and literature of talented Iranians, they can also be studied from technical and dramatic points of view. As we see in the history of Iran, these poems were performed by heads of Ta'ziehs who also were sometimes the poets of these sorrowful themes. With regard to this principle, the structure of these poem have had elements of play, too. The same principle was the motivation to study the Mullah Mohammad Ismail Matbuei's version of Qanbar's Elegy Ta'zieh which was first performed by himself and then other founder of this Ta'zieh through the past century in Fasa. And also to introduce elements of play in this work and reach to this important point that in addition to being a national treasure, this work can be studied in dramatic literature, too.

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