



An Analyze on The Assessments of Shemseddin Sami Frashëri about The Persian Poetry

Şemseddin Sami'nin Farsça Şiir Üzerine Görüşleri Hakkında Bir Değerlendirme

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Öz

Şemseddin Sami'nin birçok yazıları, eserleri ve edebi eserleri, onu Fars edebiyatının mükemmel bir ustası olduğunu ve kendi bilimsel, entelektüel ve edebi eserlerinde bu kültürü ne kadar önemsendiğini bir göstergedir. Ama, bir eleştirmen ve bir bilim adamı olarak, Sami bu şiir üzerine kendi değerlendirmelerini ve tenkitlerini de ortaya koymuştur. Sami'ye göre, Fars şiiri'nin ilk kusur - insanlara, özellikle kadınlara karşı aşk, insan ve doğa kurallarına göre ele alınmaz ve bu nedenle böyle bir aşk algılaması insan doğasına karşıdır. Böylece, bu aşk algılaması her İranlı şair'de bulunur ve herbirinin sevgilisi ötekine benzer ve aynı özelliklere sahip olur. Böyle bir yaklaşım daha sonra İranlı eleştirmenler tarafından da belirtildi. İkinci kusur, ona göre, Fars şiiri'nde aşırı ve gereksiz olan gül, bülbül, meyhane vb gibi kalıplaşmış terimler kullanılmasıdır. Bu çalışmada, Şemseddin Sami'nin, Farsça şiir üzerine görüşlerinin değerlendirip ve bu görüşler hâlihazırda ne kadar savunulduğunu analiz edilecektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Şemseddin Sami'nin (Fraşîri), Farsça şiir, edebi eleştiri.

Abstract

Many literary works and writing of Shemseddin Sami show that he was an excellent connoisseur of Persian literature and has given it a great space in his scientific and intellectual creativity. But, as a critic and a scientist, he couldn't forget also to assert his own assessments on this poetry. The first defect of this poetry according to Sami - is love, which according to human and nature rules is not addressed to women and doesn't speak about them, but is found in an unusual act. Such a defect was also found by later Iranian critics of the literature who stated that love of every Iranian poet is similar, and has the same features and characteristics. The second defect that Sami pointed out is the use of stereotypes like the rose, nightingale, vine, tavern etc, which according to him are excessive and unnecessary that influence in diminishing meaning of the poetry. In this work I will attempt to analyze these two statements of Shemseddin Sami on the Persian poetry.

Keywords: Sami Frashëri, Persian poetry, literary criticism.

Introduction

Sami Frashëri lived in a period when the Ottoman Empire had begun its disintegration, while the intellectuals and rulers of it were making all the attempts to catch the step of the modern development of that era of which they were far away, especially in the cultural-scientific level.

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Many debates on different cultural subjects were made, part of which were traditional and modern intellectuals. Actually, the polemics were between the traditional and modern or between the classical Islamic mentality and the modern western mentality. Part of these cultural polemics was also the literature or to be more exact, the poetry. Some of the intellectuals of that period¹ supported the classical – traditional poetry. They requested a poetry that keeps the rhyme and metre of the past and were against the modern poetry, which apart of the form, was more focused on its substantial message. Against this attitude on the poetry were the modernist intellectuals² who requested to abandon the classical concept relating to poetry and turning to the modern poetry. Sami Frashëri lived and worked in such an environment of polemics and as high-ranking intellectual of the Empire, he would undoubtedly be part of these intellectual debates. In some of his writings he reflected about the language and literature in general. Many of his thoughts of 120 -130 years ago about the language and literature are still relevant in actual debates relating to the language and literary critics. His attitudes on the poetry were shown most clearly in "Hafta" newspaper, even though here he represents himself only as a thinker that offers different opinions relating to the way literature should be, and not as a literary critic that deals especially with the critic on a particular genre of literature. Knowing the intellectual formation of Sami, that was as oriental as occidental, he aligned with those who were requesting modern conceptions for the poetry and this way he was against imitating the classical poets, who were more focused of the rhyme and metre than on the meaning of the poetry. "To call poetry, an adapted and rhymed word, means to lower a lot the value of poetry and poets. Many long and rhymed words are far away from achieving the epithet "poetry" and many short written words without rhyme and metre are properly, worthy to take the epithet "poetry" (§. Sami, 1289:26).

Sami Frashëri was also a critic of Turkish classical poetry, for its creators he said that they were unable to get rid from the influence of Persian poetry. He stated that because of the fact that Turkish poets were students of Iranian poets, it is normal that the defects and shortcomings of Iranian poets to be found at them. "As we have mentioned that relating to the genre of narrative and historical poetry, we cannot blame the Iranian poets, it is the same with Turkish ancient poets, and their works in these genres deserve to be valued and glorified. For this reason we can say that even though in Gazeles and Divans of Ali Shir Nevai, regardless to many traces of eloquence, even though it is normal to find weaknesses that are found at Iranian Gazels, poetic miscellany of the above mentioned poet Ferhad and Shirin and Leyla and Mexhmun are worthy to be accepted and glorified in all aspects. From that period, many writers have emerged and have left behind many valuable works in the east Turkish language. It is normal to find in their works many poems that could be distinguished" (§. Sami, 1298, no. 6:88). In many magazine articles and other writings of Shemseddin Sami we can read his reformativ statements and thoughts about the literature in general, and the poetry in particular. Apart of the critics on the classical Turkish poetry, he also targets the Arabic and Persian poetry. In this work I will attempt to analyze and critic the critics of Shemseddin Sami addressed to the classical Persian poetry.

¹ The classical poetry was supported by Eihaxh (Haxhi) Ibrahim Efendi and the artists around him like: Sheikh Vasfi Halil Edip, Faik Esad (Andelîb), Mystexhâbilizâde İsmet, Mehmet Xhelâl, Ahmet Rasim and Sâmih Rifat, who made strong critics against the modernists. Their writings were published in the newspapers and magazines like "Hazine-i Fynûn", "Resimli Gazete", "Musavver Malûmat", "Musavver Fen ve Edeb".

² The guardians of the new poetry supported their statements in Servet-i Fünûn magazine with the support of Rexhâizâde Mahmut Ekrem. The members of this school from their childhood had learned foreign western languages, especially French and were fascinated by the enjoyments and beauty of the western literature. We can mention here that even in Istanbul they placed a western way of living. While their activities and writings were realized under the surveillance of Tavfik Fikret. As a result of polemics between Rexhâizâdes and Naxhi, was born the so called The modern literature of Serveti Funin.



2. Shemseddin Sami and the Persian poetry:

In the village where Sh. Sami was born existed a well-known Tekke, in which many Albanian intellectuals were educated. The founder of this Tekke was Nesibi Baba, who came in Albania from Khorasan of Iran. (A. Rexhepi, 2015:376). This Tekke apart for praying was also used for high level education on mystical and philosophical knowledge. Considering the teachings and intellectual formation of his first period in the Tekke of Frashër in Albania, where Shemseddin Sami had learned Persian and Turkish languages and had taken the first lessons on mystical Iranian and Turkish literature, we can come to the conclusion that he was a master of Iranian language and literature. So, his attitudes and conclusions on this culture should be considered seriously.

Sami Frashëri has the opinion that Iranian literature is older than 10 - 11 centuries. Even though, according to him, Islamic religion was born at Arabs and Arabs identify themselves with Islam, Persian literature should be considered as Islamic literature. One of the main reasons about this claim is the alphabet, because Arabs even after Islam had saved their writing and this way they had also saved the pre-Islamic literature, but such a thing didn't happen with Iranians, because as soon as they accepted Islam, they abandoned their writing and accepted the Arabic Alphabet forgetting this way their ancient literature (Ş. Sami, 1298, no. 6:86). Without any doubt Sami supported these conclusions based on the results of the studies on the Persian literature that were made during his lifetime, because the later researchers of Persian literature have discovered handwritings and texts from the pre-Islamic Persian literature, and among them we can mention the mythological eposes like Mehrisht, Zamyadisht in Avesta, Ayatlar Zerinan and Karname-i Ordshir in Pehlvian language, the first part of Firdawsî's Shahnama, Gorshasbname of Esedi Tusiut and Shahname's of Mueyyed Belkhi and Ebu Mansur (A. Tamimdari, 2011:175).

As the expert of eastern and western mentalities and philosophies, Sami categorizes the Persian poetry among Indo-European poetry and makes a distinction of it from the Arabic poetry even though he was not totally free from its influence. "Iranian poets did not imitate at all Arabic poets, but they followed a special way, and it is really strange that you cannot find a single similarity between Arabic poetry and the Persian one. On one side, this confrontation and on the other side the similarity between Persian poetry with Greek and Indian one, and with the poetries of other Arian poetries, makes it possible that previous poets were subjected to the poetic works of Iran that were created before Islam. Therefore, even though today we do not have a single work left from the poetry and literature of pre-Islamic Iran, it is very possible that during the period of poets like: Daghighi and Firdewsi, existed certain memoirs of the old poems, which probably were memorized by the people. As the poets of Islamic period have inherited some of the aspects of the history of the old Iran, also some works of the poets of the period of Dara and Nevshirvan, have reached the ears of these poets as well." (Ş. Sami, 1298, no. 6:86-87)

On the preface of the book "Hurdeçin"³ in which Sami had chosen some verses of some Old Persian poets and had translated and commented their verses, he said that he doesn't feel

³ Gazmend Shpuza, in the book "The Iranian world in the works of Sami Frashëri" is wrong when he says that the book "Hurdeçin" of Sami is a translation of the book 'Hurdefurush', of the author Muallim Naci, which also (citing Sami Frashëri) wrongly presents as a Persian poet, while he was a Turkish one, a contemporary of Sami (see, p. 128). "Hurdaçin" like he says in its introduction, is a summary of some poems of Persian poets, whose poems were translated and interpreted in Turkish language. Sami doesn't mention anywhere that he has translated "Hurdefuruş" of Muallim Naci, but that he used this book as a model for his book 'Hurdeçin'. We also have to say that G. Shpuza has made another huge mistake when he translates the word 'nouresidegan' (a Persian word that means 'young' 'newborn') as a name Nusidgian, whom he represents as a Turkish poet. Sami in the introduction of 'Hurdeçin' speaks about the poetry and young Turkish poets, to whom he offers support and sometimes when he seeks about them he uses the word



any pleasure when he reads classical Turkish poetry. "The elegance and skill of Persian poets cannot be seen at classical Turkish poets, or at least it seems to me like that... This is something normal, not imposed; I just have stronger feelings with the Persian poetry. In this introduction he expresses his support for the Turkish poetry and young Turkish poets, and cites that in recent years new poets have started to emerge on the stage and they promise huge success on this direction.

It is interesting the fact that Sami Frashëri in his literary creation was influenced by Shahname of Ferdusi, a collection of which he translated into Turkish and titled 'Zubdei Shahname. In his drama Gave, he treats the story 'Kaveh Ahenger' of Ferdusi in Shahname, always according to the actuality in which he lived. Also the name of his other play 'Suhrâb or Ferzendkuş' which is still not published, make us realize that Sami was influenced by the story of Rustem and Sohrab of the Ferdusi's Shahname.

In some of Sami's works we can find a great admiration for the classical Persian poetry, especially for the Persian Epos. For him, Persian poetry was a kind of relax after the hard work. "From the past I got used that when I get tired from the obligatory works- cold and strong like iron, I seek relax and spiritual peace in the Persian poetry. Why do I like the Persian poetry? You can ask whether the softness and elegance of Persian poetry could be experienced too when you read classical Turkish poets - who have been accused for imitating Persian poets, or when you read the literary works of our new poets, who have started to write during these recent four or five years, and have even written very beautiful works? I have nothing to say about these new poets; especially I am one of the first who have supported this modern tradition of poetry, even though this poetry is still too limited. Whereas the elegance and skills of Persian poets cannot be found at the classical Turkish poets, or at least I think so... This is something normal, not imposed; it's just that I have stronger feelings for the Persian poetry" (Ş. Sami, 1885:6).

If we are allowed to adopt a saying of Napoleon Bonaparte related to the division of European languages, and if we use it for the languages of Asia, than we could say that "Persian language is created for poetry and poetry for Persian." In Persian poetry he finds lessons about morality and philosophy, two fields that are very important for life of human being. (Ş. Sami, 1885:2).

2. 1. Sami Frashëri 's criticism on the Persian poetry:

As serious thinker he was, Sami couldn't forget to express his critics for the Persian poetry and to highlight the defects that he thought this poetry had. In the second continuation of his article titled "The poetry and poets in the East", when he speaks about Persian poetry, he expresses his critical attitude on two aspects of this poetry.

The first defect of this poetry according to Sami - is love, which according to human and nature rules is not addressed to women and this poetry doesn't speak about them, but is found in an unusual act. Even though in the "Gazelles" of Iranian poets, the mentioned words "dilber" and "janan" (sweetheart and soul) have mainly to do with the love of an imaginary person, even if that person ever existed, without doubt he would be a lover of a kind of love that was exposed by Plato and other Greek philosophers and that at Eastern people unsuccessfully was understood as "Real Love" Ş. Sami, 1298, no. 6:87-88)

As Sami in this point doesn't specify a certain poet or a particular Persian poetic creativity, he gives us the right to think that he shares this attitude towards all the Persian poets, which is unsustainable. Such a critic can be addressed rightfully to the poets, who are numerous,

nuresidegan that means 'new poets'. Therefore, this word has nothing to do with a certain poet of the period of Sami.



who were not able to escape from the influence of Persian great poets like Ferdusi, Senai, Attari, Mevlana, Hafiz, or Saadi. Now let us find the source of this approach of Sami for poetry.

Even though at the beginning he had a solid education on Islamic sciences, afterwards Sh. Sami continued learning at a Greek school called "Zosimea" wherein except western languages, he was acquainted with Philosophy and modern sciences. As a result of his familiarity with modern conceptions and philosophy, he had huge reformatory and critical ideas toward many phenomena that for him at that time were unsuitable for the Turkish and Islamic society in general.

There is a huge distinction in ontological and epistemological viewpoints among classical thinkers of the East and the modern ones of after Renaissance to whom Sami belongs. Normally his critics towards classical Turkish and Persian poems are based on modernist conceptions for the universe and the existence. The new philosophical viewpoints in the West influenced on the changing of attitudes on all the life spheres, including the poetry. The art where the poetry belongs to in antiquity for example at the time of Plato or Aristotle, was "Mimesis". Mimesis means a discoverer or a person that discovers the "Physis" - which means the universe, and not the description of the nature, as it is usually understood. According to this point of view, the artist is just a discoverer but not a creator, and between them there is a huge distinction. The classical poetry reflects the form of an example of an act, while the passivity that exists inside the poet by any means doesn't submit to the realities that exist out of him. Therefore, the Persian classical poetry, as much as the Arabic poetry and the Turkish one of Divan - is composed of subjective and universal conceptions, of a priori literary stereotypes and in particular and limited forms. In such a poetry, there cannot exist historical and calendar times, and that's why its functionality is permanent and of any mentality. The Persian classical poetry didn't reflect the real human life, but was more as a result of life transforming into a memory, and for that, for this poetry the real words were unnecessary.

Sami makes the distinction between subject and object, and this way attempts to describe the object rightfully, in this case, the woman to whom the poet sings. While in the classical poetics from Plato, Plotinus etc. that were inherited by the classical Persian poets, the subject and the object in the mind of the poet are inseparable and this is the reason that the characteristics and the epithets of poetic figures are approximately the same. We should say that object centrism in philosophy than in all other spheres of life emerged with Descartes (1596 -1650) and was later shaped by Kant (1724-1804) that is later seen in the same modernist ontology and epistemology to which Sami Frashëri belongs too. Kant thinks that the beauty is a valuable act, which gives pleasure to people, and accordingly a relative act that can change from one person to another (I. Kant, 2002:42). While in the Islamic world, beauty has an ontological / existential character (genesis). So, according to this premise, the being itself is beautiful (art) and talking about it is the same as talking about the Being itself. Beings are beautiful, and this is not subjective⁴. This way, the humans are not an object of an esthetic realization and the beauty has an external realization.

⁴ In the discussions on the esthetics that were made in the eighteenth century in the West, especially in the beginning by Baumgartner and later by Emanuel Kant, a special interpreting was dedicated to Beauty, as a result of which in the western philosophical thinking emerged the esthetics as a divided term and sphere. Therefore, in the classical Christian, Islamic thinking, even in the eastern philosophy we cannot find such discussions or conceptions on the esthetics. And if we approach to the esthetics with its modern conception that was placed after the eighteenth century, we cannot find such a thing in the classical Islamic thinking. When we read the book "The critics of Judgment" of Kant we see the principles that he mentions while assessing the beauty are related to the character, the taste, the geniality and the subjective creation in Art, things that we cannot neither in Islamic nor in the eastern philosophy. This means that it is worthless to look in the classical Islamic teachings for discussions relating to esthetics or the philosophy of art. as we



Shortly to focus in the subject means to concept the phenomena, the world outside, even the God from the prism of a human, so to understand and realize this things as your human being capacity allows you to do so, and not as they really are. That's why everything is understood according to the human interest and art is created and is being liked according to the tastes of humans themselves. So the distinction between the modernist and non-modernist approach is that modernists influenced by Kant are anthropocentric, so they view everything from the human specter, while non-modernists are transcendental or God centered. If we take this approach to the poetry and to the art in general, than we say that according to the modernists art or poetry is a creation that affects the taste and the pleasure of a person, while for the non-modernist world, mainly for the classical Islamic world, poetry and art are only tools that are used for discovering or highlighting of the Divine beauty (Sh. Pazouki, 1388:24).

This is valid especially for the literature of tasawwuf which is perhaps more original and more universal than the lyrics and epics of the Islamic world. For poets like Mevlana, poetry is not a creation to fulfill people's tastes, but a tool that is used to highlight the hidden beauties of the Creator. For poets like him, poetry actually is not a profession, and this is the reason why in many cases Mevlana distances from the poetry and considers it as an invaluable thing. According to him, the real art is reflected through a soul that is clean of every evil and greed, especially of the greed of being an artist. Only such a soul can reflect the beauties of the visible and invisible world.

That's why I think that when Sami Frashëri criticizes the Turkish poetry of Divan, the Persian literature or the classical literature in general, he is under the influence of the modernist philosophy, so he doesn't even consider at all the viewpoints that old people (and most of the Muslims today) have toward the phenomena, metaphysics, and God in general⁵.

Such an approach about literature, especially about the poetry which had a long and very rich tradition in the Islamic world, influenced the eastern intellectuals, who were looking for reforms in every sphere of life in their societies. As in the Arab world, Iran and Turkey too, many interesting and useful debates were made pro and against the classical and modern poetry, from where Sami Frashëri was also influenced. The biggest critic that the critics of the classical poetry made was that it didn't actually describe objects and phenomena the poet spoke about. That's

can understand from the word aesthetics itself, the origin of which is the old Greek word aesthesis in the meaning of subjective taste-feeling, that reducing beauty only as a feeling is a nonsense for the philosophers of classical Islamic tradition.

⁵ Hegel and Heidegger approximately share the same thought. Hegel writes: "The word aesthetics some time was used to describe the beauty, though artistic works were only to evoke the taste, but it is unacceptable the usage of this word when we talk about the beauty and art. He adds: Whether the reality of beauty is something that I can percept it with my feeling senses. It is worthy to mention that Hegel was the first who reacted against the reduction of the perception of the beauty only in subjectivity and for the first time he spoke of "the death of art" in the modern time (Hegel's Lectures on Aesthetics. Volume 1, p. 1). After him, it was Heidegger who spoke about the end of Art, but unlike Hegel, Heidegger said that in the modern age the "great art" is dead. In his book, "Introduction to Metaphysics", he writes: For modern people like us, beauty is the source of peace and comfort, and we aim to taste, and so art resembles to the components of a cake, and today there is no distinction whether it is a source of release of feelings or a source for a spiritual education. Whereas, at the ancient Greeks, the existence and beauty had the same meaning" (Heidegger: An Introduction to Metaphysics, p. 20). For Heidegger, art was a discovery / disclosure of the essence of the essential". Another distinction between the thoughts of Hegel and Heidegger relating to the end of art was that Hegel thought that art is already over and would never gain the role that it had in the past with the creation of the spiritual life on nations. But Heidegger thought that art will still have a re-born and will gain its role in the society.



why Sami requires that phenomena and realities that the poet describes to be more objective as he sees them. He writes: "When we want to make the right definition about the poetry, we should put aside the relationships like rhyme and meter, but instead to be careful with its real and spiritual characteristics. Therefore we can say that: just as the painter paints and exposes bodies and the nature sights, the poet also describes with words, particular human thoughts and feelings, and also the situations and events (Ş. Sami, 1298, no.2:28). Therefore, Sami as the other critics of the classical poetry thinks that through description, the reader takes under his control real scenes that are described in the poetry, and coordinating them, he is able to create a true image for the messages that the poet wants to deliver.

Because, according to them, if the reader is focused only in rhyme and meter, he won't be able to catch the messages of the poet properly. Sami Frashëri writes that rhyme for the ancient poets was totally unknown. It was discovered by Arabic poets and they transferred it to the Turkish and Persian poets and then it was brought to Europe in the Middle Ages together with the works of Islamic civilization. Today, many people consider the rhyme and the rhyme is considered as the necessary condition for poetry. There are also two ways in meter. Some of the poets take care for the syllabic meter in verses to be numerically equal, and some other poets do not take care about the number, they replace long syllables with two short ones but they just focus on one thing, the verses should have at least one voice extension (Ş. Sami, 1298, no.6:87-88). For this reason, in the introduction of Hurdaçin he declares that he supports the new modern Turkish poetry and says that it is valuable, even though according to him, this poetry is still too limited. But he doesn't share the same opinion about the classical Turkish poetry.

The second critic of Sami Frashëri about the Persian poetry has to do with lyrics, Persian songs that are limited in some words like: "rose, nightingale, cypress, hair braiding of girlfriend, vine, tavern, Tavernier, always turning around to these and the additive care that they have given to some unusual comparisons, to that level so they get out of the limits of the ordinary. Inability of Iranian eloquent poets to count these impossible situations deprived their poetic works from the taste and beauty that they aimed. Even though inside of a Persian Gazelle of love, you can find a verse or a Bayt that sounds good in every aspect, inside such a Divan (collection), you can rarely find a Gazelle that is naked from the above-mentioned defects (Ş. Sami, 1298, no.6:88). Like many other critics of classical eastern poetry, Sami criticizes excessive ornaments, formalizing, repeated metaphors, figurative expressions and allegories etc. of poetry, for which he thought that they cause strangulation of the objectivity of poetry.

But the literary critics of the recent decades have noticed that these figurative expressions should be understood as wider and deeper literary archetypes and not only as stereotypes with very tight meanings as they look by the first sight. Archetypes are personalities or esoteric structures that revel through symbols elements and conceptions of a particular culture. Therefore, this symbolic should be understood within the ontological and epistemological frame of Islamic mysticism, particularly the mysticism with ancient Iranian elements. The symbolic of Persian classical literature, especially the poetry of tesavvuf, is very deep and exceeds rational definitions. For example the word tavern in literature, mainly in mystic literature should be considered as an emplacement of a mystic, whether a mosque or a Tekke, where he, released of any diablerie or complex, so like a drunk person who reveals from his mind and soul the most beautiful words and prays or his Lover, even in some cases this inebriation goes to Enel Hak (melting into God).

Conclusion

With all the admiration that Sami gained for Persian poetry and the pleasure he felt with this literature, he never hesitated to point critics toward it, and he had identified – according to him – two defects of Persian poetry: The first defect of this poetry according to Sami – is love, which according to human and nature rules is not addressed to women and this poetry doesn't speak about them, but is found in an unusual act. Such a defect was also found by later Iranian



critics of the literature who stated that love of every Iranian poet is similar, and has the same features and characteristics. The second defect that Sami pointed out is the use of stereotypes like the rose, nightingale, vine, tavern etc, which according to him are excessive and unnecessary that influence in diminishing the content of the poem. But we should state that the later results of literary researches witness that not all of these critics were sustainable, but we should understand them according to the time and space circumstances and realities in which Sami lived.

Kaynakça

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