

## Social Dimensions of Man in *Shahnameh* and *Mahabharata*

Faranak Siyanatand and Nasrin Mozafari

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### Abstract

The beginning of human lives in human communities is inevitable because human's evolution would take place in these structures. People's Physical and psychological needs are born and grown in these social structures. If these relations and transactions were not complex, there would never be any goodness or evilness, and beauty or ugliness in human's life. That is why every aspect of human's life intertwined in human's societies. Society and human are in a two-sided relationship which remains together to show their both bright and dark sides. Firdausi's *Shahnameh* and *Mahabharata* are respectively two great ancient epics of Iran and India which each one according to the context of its society has its distinct characters. Although it goes without saying that human societies have different religions and beliefs, what the historical process will show is the progress of each of them which each religion aims to present a distinctive, unique pattern of human beings' prosperity and happiness. Society is the same as a live stream in which human beings are the connected drops of a river, and in a general overview all are moving to become the sea. The means of this movement are nothing except humans' unique social aspects. In this relation, *Mahabharata* and *Shahnameh* also have particular, vivid views which this study attempts to refer to some of these cases.

**Keywords:** *Shahnameh*, *Mahabharata*, human, society

### Social Aspects of Humans in *Shahnameh*

#### Freedom

One of the human's dignity is his freedom and liberality. Liberality is one of the human's virtues, "in *Shahnameh*, freedom is considered as not being subordinate to anyone

which is the same conception of liberty as in the ancient history. Iranians made their best efforts to be independent, that is, no other nation ordered or ruled over them. So individual liberty, as it was deemed in Greece, did not have any meaning to them. What was important was communal liberality and freedom, and the country was not subordinated to any other country. The Iranian nation called themselves free people. In Iran, "Anirany" meant being less freedom. "1

The man's true freedom is seen in Rostam and its peak in the story of Rostam and Esfandiar. "If you look closely to the thoughts and ideas of one of the heroes of Shahnameh "Rostam," it could be clearly observable that to what great extent man's virtues and greatness of a perfect man were gathered in him. But the most visible and obvious attribute that Firdausi allocated to Rostam is his rebellion against kings' tyranny and oppression. This moral led Rostam to stand against any injustice and changed the present condition of his time to the best-desired one. Firdausi in the world of encomiasts' harmless flattery, subservience and servitude of Kings' tyrannies and shameful oppressions, was the preacher of self-esteem, courage, bravery and freedom that human dignity. "2

In the story of Rostam and Esfandiar, the primary cause of war is looking for freedom and liberality. "Rostam adheres to the regulations. He respects the laws, and he respects the king as the king. But for him one thing is above the law, and that is 'the humans' essence", that should not be undermined and blemished, if it was so, the life was going down to the degree of humiliation which can be worse than death .."3

Sarami also says:" declaration of human freedom and the efforts of its heroes to reach to this point was displayed in every part of Shahnameh and in the following verses:

I am created to be free; I am only the servant of my Creator

Who ordered you to restrict Rostam? Even the world cannot force me to be a slave."4

Firdausi's point of view, human beings are born to be free, and if they want to be slaves, it is better to die:

The best choice will be death

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If I suppose to be a slave." 5

## Moderation

Moderation means avoiding extremes in anything, "Moderation is essential to healthy social and individual living." 6

The Holy Qur'an also invites people to be moderate as it orders the Holy Prophet to be moderate even in doing good things:

« وَ لَا تَعْجَلْ بِذِكِّ مَغْلُولَةٍ إِلَىٰ عُقْبِكَ وَ لَا تَبْسُطْهَا كُلَّ الْبَسِطِ فَتَقْعُدَ مَلُومًا مَّحْسُورًا.

"Neither tightly close your hand in helping the needy nor open it too much since each one you do, it will cause you to regret. Try to be moderate in everything."7

The principle of moderation should prevail over throughout the human individual and social life. The policy of restraint/moderation must be considered in thought, word, and deed.

The origin of all human decisions is in his mind. If it is moderate, human's behavior will be direct and temperate too. If his thought is sick, the man cannot indeed behave in the right way. So this may lead to his failure, excesses or poverty in life. As it was mentioned, in all aspects of life both material and spiritual such as sleep and food, work and worship, the man should be moderate. Because man has both physical and mental needs and he must take advantage of both sides. The Holy Quran says:

« وَ ابْتَغِ فِيْمَاءِ اِنَّكَ اللّٰهُ الدّٰرَ الْاٰخِرَةَ وَ لَا تَنْسَ نَصِيْبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا. »

"In what God has given you, ask for the paradise and hereafter, meanwhile don't forget to enjoy the earthy world too."8

The real typical man is one who divides his life between the world and the Hereafter. He spends enough time for each to reach the salvation. Firdausi also highly emphasizes on the issue of moderation, His superior human is the one who is moderate in everything:

"Be moderate and live alive

Others will call you wise and sane ".9

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Human being should be moderate in every aspect of his life:

"If you need something  
And if you have gold and silver and adorned horses  
Spend your money appropriately  
Neither too much nor too less".10

### **-Philanthropy**

Historians and scholars **who** have researched **about** Iranian peoples' ethos, mentality and customs from the most ancient times, **all** approve the altruism and kindness of the Eastern nations, especially the Iranian nation. 11

Saheb-al-Zamani also talks about the perfect man's altruism: "The perfect man is not selfish, he is thinking about others welfare, he is sympathetic to the universe, he thinks he is in charge of the people, he feels a sense of duty and mission to guide, lead them. A perfect man wants people to become conscious, help others not to do wrong things, lead the immature ones to the maturity stage. He intends to familiarize the claimed leaders to their social responsibilities too." 12

"Forgive the poor people  
Stay away from the evil and be afraid of it" 13

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Firdausi emphasizes on altruism and helping subordinates

"Do not ask for too many things  
Try to forget and donate what you have  
Who has to hide his needs  
The bad people cannot bother him  
One who used all his wealth in vain  
Now he stayed in pain and insane  
One who has a good reputation but impecuniousness  
He does not need any trader to help  
Seeing orphans without any wealth  
Seeing needy women with dead husbands

Without any money or job to afford their lives

Forgive them and grant what you can

Enlighten their lives and spirits."14

### **- Happiness**

Imam Ali - peace be upon him - said:" Take advantages of time, before any sorrow chokes you up."15. Taking advantage of the blessings of the Almighty and enjoying life is a basic life principle which is emphasized many times. "Firdausi believes that being good and doing well are the only ways of redemption of the temptation of absurdity. He thinks that human beings are not being created to have a life of austerity. As far as he does not harm the essence of his well-being, he should enjoy the pleasures of this world."16 From Firdausi's view, "life is neither forsaking nor captive, life is something to be grabbed gratefully. So the war and banquet can be side by side. This idea cannot prevent one from being hardworking and diligent, and everyone does his work regarding this fact that life is not everlasting. This moment of opportunity may not happen another moment. "17 Chubineh also writes: "Man's life is his precious but limited capital, so he must do his best to get the greatest benefit of this limited, short capital both in this world and the Hereafter and reach the perfection."18 Firdausi's man prefers the happiness to the sadness:

"Do not let anything except happiness influence in your heart

Do not let your soul be nest of suspicion"19

### **- Knowledgeable**

Firdausi thinks that a wise man is a person who takes the utmost advantage of his time and opportunities:

"Do not worry about the sorrows

Your soul will be free of them all"20

Influenced by his stories, Firdausi adjusted his worldview consistent with the heroes and heroines of his book, *Shahnameh*. Like them, he believes that we should spend our life in a happy mood and do our best in the present moment and time. He believes that the best way to tolerate and defeat the world's harsh games such as being old, being ill and death is to be happy and enjoy the present moments:

" Finally, we will be buried in the ground

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And our eyes should be closed  
Let' help each other to be good  
Let's do not give this earthly world to the bad ones." 21  
"Cheer up one who takes a glass in his hand  
Drink in the memory of the Unitarian kings "22

"According to Firdausi, the only thing that a dead person can leave in this world is his name and nothing else. A good reputation will remain if the man would rather have a normal happy human life. A person who bothered himself in the world –did not spend his life in happiness at the time that he could have been happy - is the same as one who did not let others enjoy their lives." 23

#### **- Effort**

Imam Ali - peace be upon him - said: "If you do your best to reach  
Something, you will get either all or some part of it."24

"Patience against adversity in battles and resistance to solve the problems are the signs of maturity of the perfect man. The perfect man does not escape from the problems. He has fought to his last breath; he is not proud of his happiness. Meanwhile, he does not feel to be a failure at the time of depressions and sadness. In happiness, he thinks of hard times and vice versa. Suffering is the spice of life, and he tries to do his best to overcome any possible problem. He considers the patience principle as one of the leadership's pillars. He will not be disappointed in any way, try to improve and strive to make sure that his heart will be satisfied and in rest. "25  
Firdausi emphasizes on human endeavor and effort too. Effort is the key to the success and the health of man's body and soul:

" Do not be lazy, take it away  
Try to be active and do your best"26  
"Being energetic makes a man the man  
Being lazy makes him a jellyfish and a liar"27

#### **-Consultation**

Consultation is critical in Islam, and the wise man is one who will consult with others in the works. The Holy Quran says: "they consult each other to do their jobs." 28

Following the Holy Quran commands, Firdausi emphasized the importance of this point:

"As a senior, try to do the best things  
Consult the wise men in your problems" 29  
One need only consults the wise men:  
"Consult just the wise man  
Follow the steps of the king"30

Imam Ali also bid:

« مَنْ اسْتَبَدَّ بِرَأْيِهِ هَلَكَ وَ مَنْ شَاوَرَ الرِّجَالَ شَارَكَهَا فِي عُقُولِهَا »

An opinionated person will perish, and one who consults with qualified men will be shared in their knowledge."31 Consultation is one of the wise man's most famous works in Shahnameh.

### **-Bravery**

One of Human's distinctive character is courage and virtue. Bravery is very significant, and God loves those who are brave:

« إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِهِ صَفًّا كَانَتْهُمْ بُنْيَانٌ مَرصُوصٌ. »

Of course, God loves those faithful people who help each other in jihad and fight as robust and stable as iron barriers. "32

Razmjû introduces one of the heroes' good and social features: the spirit of chivalry and courage. He also says: "one of the heroes' moral characteristics is the feature of their generosity and bravery. So that in many cases they sacrifice their rights for others. Even in situations, they retaliate evil deeds with good ones. They show mercy and be compassionate to their enemies." 33

Firdausi praised the courage and bravery and considered them as the features of highly qualified people:

"Being brave is the sign of being clever  
The brave one should be praised  
Anyone who escapes from work

He could not be a great fighter."34

"You must be brave to look for good reputations  
There are many evil ones in this world."35

### **Kindness and Gentleness**

Other characteristics of a highly qualified person are being calm and meek in word and deed. Sometimes meek and gentle speech can work stronger than serious actions. Imam Ali bid:

«رُبَّ قَوْلٍ، أَنْفَذَ مِنْ صَوْلٍ».

Perhaps, the words can be more effective than the attack."36

Irritability cannot solve the problems, but it can cause a lot of troubles. Imam Ali bid:

"الْجِدَّةُ ضَرْبٌ مِنَ الْجُنُونِ، لِأَنَّ صَاحِبَهَا يَنْدَمُ، فَإِنْ لَمْ يَنْدَمْ فَجُنُونُهُ مُسْتَحْكَمٌ

Irritability is a kind of madness because the irritable one will regret of his fierce reaction. If does not feel sorrow, he will be mad inevitably. "37

Firdausi highly respected the people who did their best to be calm in every condition:

"One asked him who the most qualified one is

The answer was the calmest one."38

"The secret of being respected is patient

The hasty one will be contemplated."39

### **Human's Social Aspects in Mahabharata**

#### **-Moderation in Affairs**

Moderation in affairs is essential in personal and social life. One of the most important issues that Mahabharata emphasizes is about behaving moderately in every aspect of life: "All the people should not be happy in their happy time or sad in their bad times, but they should thank God for whatever the God grants them."40



"In the happy time, a man should behave kindly. In the anger and grief time, he should be patient too. One who follow this command, he will never face any trouble."41

"The government and the monarchy should not be too harsh nor too kind, but just be moderate."  
42

"One who is wise, he considers his goodness, advantageous, misery, comfort, and downfall. He becomes neither too much happy." 43

### **-Take Advantages of His Opportunity**

Human life is like a river roaring through. Almighty God blessings men with abundant things to facilitate and satisfy his needs. He must do his best to use them in such a short life. He must not waste his time in sorrow. Best use of life and what God grants men are important points that reemphasized many times in Mahabharata. "Everyone who is sad, he is ignorant too. He just adds his soreness." 44

"Clever people do not pine for dead or living people."45

### **-Hope and Optimism**

The most important motivation for living is hope. The man of Mahabharata is also hoping to the bounty of God. He does not be disappointed and will not stop trying: "Those whose trees of hope are not fruitful, and they are not knowledgeable, their hearts are in peace."46

" The fruit of hope is good behavior. "47

### **- Be Patient in Doing Work**

Human being is innately impatient, and this may be due to his restless soul and wandering mind to achieve his goals. On this ground, he considers to do the useful works as his aims and does his best greedily to reach them. The rush to achieve the desired aims is sometimes against him and lead him to ignore the analyzed results as accurately as possible. Finally, it takes him to repentance and regret. Mahabharata's demand of the human being is to be patient in all matters to

reach his destiny. "He who does not rush in doing his affairs and things and get used to being patient in doing them, he will never regret. He must learn not to cry over spilled milk." 48

### **- Humility**

Another aspect of the human social teachings is human's humility. Mahabharata emphasizes and recommends people to be humble." Be humble to everyone. Try to have this slogan: neither be wrathful and nor think that you are better than others." 49

"The way to Salvation is when you respect somebody, it will deeply be from the bottom of your heart not from duplicity." 50

### **- Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is a sense of altruism and lack of worldly concerns. One of the Features of the transcendent man in Mahabharata is human's generosity, and the wise men consider it as a sign of chivalry. "Generosity put you in peace and also cause the individual's social relationships strengthen. The wise men will also encourage people to have this character." 51

The saved person will be Generous. He will forgive and give everything enthusiastically. He will not be regretful after forgiving." 52

Forgivers will go to the heaven: Generous man gives his best objects to others.

"And whatever the best you love and have at home, give it to the good people who will have good results. Whatever you forgive, you will get a lot of the same things again." 53

### **-Good-Tempered and good Self**

Showing good-tempered and good self to people are the sign of wisdom and causes to soar the general population's kindness towards each other. This issue is one of the human's aspects which was also dealt with in Mahabharata." Benevolent and good-tempered means to be happy to see others' happiness, to be sad to see others' sadness and to be satisfied with your fate and destiny.

Good self-person be glad to see his relatives and friends wishes the best for those who help him." 4454

### **-Piety**

Another human's aspect of the Mahabharata is related to restraint and self-control feature, overcoming over temptation, passion will lead to his redemption. Therefore, the wise man will try to overcome his temptation and control himself: "The origin of all worship and goodness depends on how the owner can control his passion and senses, so he cannot see or hear the unappropriated ones." 55

A self-controlled person has the following characters: "He is meek, patient, truthful, honest, righteous, tolerant and modest." 56

### **-Gaining People's Hearts**

Another social aspect of man in Mahabharata is to gain people's hearts. The best thing a man can do to his fellow is to be kind and compassionate. In this way, he can go through the bottom of the people's hearts and capture their hearts and love. "In short, there is nothing in the world better than getting respect and helping and providing others' comfort and peace of mind. The richer you are, the better you can be in this respect." 57

### **Endeavor**

In all parts of the Mahabharata, in the essence of endeavor gets blown in the human spirit and it recommends man not to be lazy. The real man is one whose slogan is to do your best and not to be lazy. The optimum requirement of achieving the goals depends on your efforts. With the efforts, you can overcome all of your difficulties: "Rajah and all the noblemen should do their best to the highest degree to reach their grand ambitions. In this way, the difficult tasks will become easy to solve." 58 A wise man never stops trying to make his efforts: "Although your fate is preplanned in advance, your efforts are prerequisites." 59

A wise man should have tasted the pain and suffer. He should not be a lazy one. 60

## **Contentment**

Another significant issue in Mahabharata is about being contentment and adorn with this ornaments. A perfect man also should avoid greediness and be satisfied to what God bestows on him. He knows that greedy ones will go to the hell, so he is pleased with his day. "The real man is the one who controls his greediness." 61

Satisfaction will pass away all sadness

Some recommendations take away the wrong thinking and sadness: studying science, leaving the temptations and whim and accompanying the righteous people. Another important point is to leave everything and be satisfied with the least." 62

## **-Contentment Leads to Salvation**

"Don not be each other's enemy. Try to love each other. Do not ask for others harm. Do not be greedy in this life. In this way, you can reach the salvation." 63

## **- Dignity and Freedom**

A free man will keep his dignity. The most prominent features of a free man are his dignity and freedom. He is rebelliousness against looting and resists against any oppressions. A person is worthy of praise which has human's dignity, freedom and liberation are his motto, and never accepts any oppressions.

"I neither blindly obey anyone nor force someone to do the same." 64

"God created you so proudly that you should not blindly bow to anyone." 65

"The best comfort is freedom."66

## **- Good Words**

A successful man should not only be good in his deed but also in his thoughts, words speech. He should not talk utter nonsense too. Troubles can gradually be faded and disappeared by good words:" Good words will help to solve the problems." 67

### **-Asking for Advice**

The principle of consultation is a prerequisite to achieving the desired results in life; this principle is one of human beings' social aspects too. Consultation means to ask for others ideas. The principle about something which help man to decide better and choose the proper solution. of consultation with knowledgeable and qualified people has also been emphasized repeatedly in the Mahabharata: "In the time of hardship, consult just with the wise ones. Listen to their recommendations and choose the best piece of advice." 68 The informed person never consults with ignorance:" The leaders have advised not to consult with fools."69

### **-Hospitality**

Having good and respectable behavior and communicating appropriately with people and relatives are the other social and moral teachings of Mahabharata. It emphasized that the exalted people are those who respect and follow these recommendations. "And those who love their guests and serve and respect them ..... they will go to the Heaven." 70  
"There is no guilty worse than disrespecting your guests." 71

### **- Reputation**

One of the humanistic aspects of Mahabharata is to get a good reputation as a righteous man in a way that everyone tries to go ahead of others: " Dying with a good reputation is worth than thousands of years of living in misery." 72

### **A Reputable and Upright Man will Go to Heaven:**

Whoever is killed in the war doing valiant acts and thus gets a reputation, it should not be right to cry for or say that he is dead. He does not need to be washed. It is not necessary to cook food for his soul's salvation either. Since undoubtedly he has an everlasting life in heaven." 73

### **-Goodness and Charity**

Two topics of interest to the authors of the Mahabharata were kindness and charity and they emphasized on avoiding evil and oppressive behaviors very much. Kindness and charity will lead man to salvation. If Mahabharata's man have good deeds, he can evolve and save himself from reincarnation cycle.

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### **- Good Deeds will Remain Forever:**

"Man's body is mortal, but his good works are immortal." 74

### **Doing Favors will Leave You in Peace:**

Everyone who is good in his behaviors and does not intend to harm anyone, let him be far from grief and suffer in any way." 75

### **Forming Friendship with Righteous People**

Another social - humanistic aspect that is emphasized in Mahabharata is about developing friendship with righteous people which has the good effect on man. Therefore, the Mahabharata's successful man always seeks to have good companions to improve his ethics too. "The elders have said to avoid talking to the bad people and serve the righteous." 76

### **The Wise Person is the One who Accompanies the Elders:**

"Your mind will reach to its accomplishment after serving the gifted elders for many years and without doing so you cannot hope to receive anything." 77

### **Accompanying the Elders or the Righteous will Remove All Sorrows:**

"Three things help to efface the crazy thoughts and sorrows. They are including: learning the righteous people. Therefore, it science and knowledge, leaving the whims and accompanying is better for a man to live in his loneliness and be satisfied with what he has already had." 78

### **Conclusion**

The social aspect of human has particular importance both in Mahabharata and Shahnameh. They both considered man as a social being within the community who has involved in its affairs and relations. They both believed in human's origin beyond religion. Topics such as freedom, consultation, moderation, family relationship, happiness, work and good deeds and speech are repeatedly paid much attention to in both books. Although

Shahnameh refers more to the man's social presence, Mahabharata pays more attention to the social aspects of man in great details.

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