

January 2020

## LOCAL WISDOM IN CLASSICAL PERSIAN TEXT

Bastian Zulyeno

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/irhs>

---

### Recommended Citation

Zulyeno, Bastian (2020) "LOCAL WISDOM IN CLASSICAL PERSIAN TEXT," *International Review of Humanities Studies*: Vol. 5: No. 1, Article 20.

Available at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/irhs/vol5/iss1/20>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty of Humanities at UI Scholars Hub. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Review of Humanities Studies by an authorized editor of UI Scholars Hub.

## LOCAL WISDOM IN CLASSICAL PERSIAN TEXT

**Bastian Zulyeno**

Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Indonesia

[baszeno@gmail.com](mailto:baszeno@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

The literary work of every nation is our window to witness the spirit of the nation. There are many ways in which various nations of the world share their taste, feelings, desires and wishes, one of them is especially through literary works. These are conveyed in theater, tragedy, comedy, and also through the medium of stories and fairy tales, as well as poetry. The Persians chose poetry as the best medium to explore the taste of their inner nature. Local wisdom, also called hereditary cultural heritage, is formed by nature and habitus in the arena of oral and written culture. Word "wisdom" implies a kind of firmness and conviction, and applies to anything solid and impenetrable, whether material or spiritual. Wisdom also is the science in which the facts of things are discussed, as they are in the soul of *al-Amr* as much as human power and ability. The subject of wisdom is matter of things outside and in the mind, its usefulness is the attainment of perfection in life, salvation and goodness. Knowing the local wisdom of other nations can make us feel the cultural values of the nation. This paper there are several examples of poetry and prose from Persian classical writers those contain the meaning of local wisdom. The purpose of this research is to assess and reveal the local wisdom in classical Persia literary works with qualitative approach and method obtaining data based on library methodology.

**KEYWORDS:** Local wisdom, poetry, Persian literature, prose.

### INTRODUCTION

The classical Persian literature is more focused on poetry, because since the beginning the relationship of poetry with the king and the palace had been very close. The poets were directly work under the king or crown prince, these circumstances also affected their work to adapt to the will of the palace or the king. It was usual that almost every dynasty in Iran was surrounded by a collection of poets who each had a characteristic and a distinctive style. This also led to the periodisation of literati in the Persian history based on the dynasty and its own literary history.

The modern Persian language is a derivation of the classical Persian language that has its origins in the Indo-European languages. As a result, the grammar and vocabulary are almost identical to Kurdish and Pashto. The Persian language is also widely adopted from Arabic, especially the modern Persian language. The script is also a modification of Arabic script or called Arabic-Perso script. This script also forms the structure in Persian poetry so as to produce rhymes and poetic metaphors of Persians.

The Persian literary periodisation after the arrival of Islam is no different from the

**International Review of Humanities Studies**  
[www.irhs.ui.ac.id](http://www.irhs.ui.ac.id), e-ISSN: 2477-6866, p-ISSN: 2527-9416  
**Vol. 5, No.1, January 2020, pp. 254-262**

---

periodization of Persian history, there is almost no striking limits between the two. After the arrival of Islam, the Persian language and literature were difficult to develop because it was still overshadowed by the Arabic literature. The knowledge in Arabic language was very important because the rulers of that time were Arabs, and also for the sake of spreading Islam. Therefore, the Arabic language became dominant and became the official language for approximately one and a half centuries. As a result, Persian scholars and scientists wrote their work using Arabic, among them were Ibn Sina, ar Razi, al Biruni, al Ghazali and Shibawaeh the founder of Nahwu. Many Persian poets also wrote poetry in Arabic, one of which was very famous in the world of Arabic literature, Abu Nuwas, the Ahvaz-born poet, Iran. It is said that there were four hundred poets who gathered at the palace of Sultan Mahmoud Ghaznavi (970-1031 CE), among them were the most famous Unsuri, Farrukhi, Manouchehri and Asadi. The most famous prose writer was Biruni, the author of *The Chronology of the Ancient Nation*, who wrote exclusively in Arabic.

The development of Persian language and literature actually took place in the days of Bani Ghaznawi. Not only in the north and southwest of Iran, it was also in the western region of Iran that the Persian language replaced the roles and position of the Arabic language. The Bani Ghaznawi were also active in spreading the use of Parsi to the east when he conquered India in the early twelfth century. From that time to the beginning of the nineteenth century, Persian was used as the language of education and culture in Northern India.

During the reign of Ghaznawi Dynasty the maturity of Persian literature was increasingly apparent. At this time there came a famous epic writer, whose work is still remembered and read widely by the Persians until now. The author is Abu al-Qasim al-Firdawsi. The greatest masterpiece of the maestro is the Shah-Nameh written about 60,000 stanzas for 30 years since 980 AD. The book was written in the form of a beautiful narrative poem, recounting the heroism of the old Persian kings, especially the kings of the Sassanid Dynasty. This work is regarded as a sign of the awakening of Persian language, because of all the verses of poetry in this book there is almost no use of Arabic vocabulary. Here is a fragment of the famous stanza of Shah Nameh:

*For thirty years I suffer from fighting hardships  
By the Persian language I revive the people of 'ajam*

The Seljuq Era (1037-1194 AD) is considered the second classical period of Persian literature rich in prose and poetry. The famous and influential prose work of this period was the work of Imam Ghazali on religion using the Persian-language entitled *Kimiya-e Sa'adat* (the Alchemy of Happiness), *Tarikh Baihaqi*, *Siasat Nameh* —a treatise on the art of government by Nizam ul-Mulk, a minister of Alp Arslan and Malik Shah—, *Qabus Nameh Kai Kawous*, a translation of a collection of fable stories from India entitled *Kalila va Dimnah*, *Chahar Maqala* or Four Nizami Aruzi Discourses, and *Fars Nameh Ibn al-Balkhi*. The four works above -Chahar Maqala, Tarikh Baihaqi, Qabus Nameh and Siasat Nameh, were four major early works of Persian proses. A number of authors of this period wrote proses as well as poetry. One of the most glorious was Nasir Khosrow, the author of approximately fifteen works in prose and 30,000 poems, and only less than half of his work survived. His most famous work of prose is *Safar Nameh*, containing the story of his wandering to Egypt. Most of Nasir Khosrow's poems are long religious and ethical ghazals and were famous due to his purity of language and fascinating

technical skills. Other famous poems of this period include the works of mystic Ansari, Abu Sa'id and Baba Taher Uryan from Hamedan, and Diwan of Masoud-e Saad-e Salman. Not to forget the seven other poets from this period who achieved remarkable fame were Omar Khayyam, Sana'i Neishaburi, Moezzi, Anwari, Khaqani, Nizami Ganjawi and Atthar Neishaburi.

## **LOCAL WISDOM IN PERSIAN LITERATURE**

According Keraf, (2010: 369) what is meant by local wisdom is all forms of knowledge, belief, understanding or insight, and customs or ethics that guide human behaviours in life in the ecological community. Hence local wisdom is not only about the knowledge and understanding of indigenous people about human beings and the good relationships among them, but also concerning knowledge, understanding and customs about humans, nature and how the relationships among all the inhabitants of this ecological community must be built. All of this traditional wisdom is lived, practiced, taught and passed from one generation to another that simultaneously shapes the patterns of everyday behaviour of humans, both to humanity and to nature as well as the unseen.

Knowing and preserving local wisdom means taking care of and preserving the traditions of the ancestors, which are also important because those who guard the culture are those who protect the identity of the country and the historical background of its own people. For those who study local wisdom, they will know the cultural life of a nation as a reflection of the past of a particular tribe.

The local wisdom in Persian literature mostly has ideological and religious modes, in particular the metaphysical relationships between microcosmos and macrocosmos, aside of that there are also non-religious ones. Religion is considered as the human guide in all dimensions of life in the world. Humans are considered as the objects that are affected, causing them to be able to interact individually and socially. The individual religious influence is the humans' relationship with their creator, while the social religious influence is also the religious responsibility that teaches people to work together at all points of righteousness and positivity in life. The following points are the local wisdom contained in the classical Persian literary texts we have compiled.

### **1. Surrendering to Destiny**

Surrendering and believing in destiny of what will happen in the future in mind and in the nearest imagination are always attached to the minds of the local society. Believing in destiny is the teaching of the *qat'i* religion of Islam which is written in holy scripture and hadith strengthened also by the '*aqli daleel*'. One of the Persian poets and scholars who supported the belief in destiny was Ibn Sina who lived between 970-1073 AD in one of the verses of his poem as follows:

*Az q'are gole seyah ta ouj e zuhal*  
*Kardam hame moshkelate geiti rah al*  
*Birun jastam ze qeid har makr o heil*  
*Har band gushadeh shood magar band ajal (Loghatname Dekhuda)*

From the base of flowers to the dome of saturn  
All the problems of the world, I have solved them  
All the knots of deceit, I have learnt them  
And all are revealed except the knot of death.

He reminded the people of that era so as not to be negligent until the end of their life from the scenario of *qadha* and *qadhar*. This is also addressed to us in the present that there is a time when we realise that one day everything is not under our control. It is death that stands firm before all deeds.

## 2. Believing in the Result of Effort

In Persian literature, text relating to the teachings of Islam other than to believe in destiny is also believe in punishment and rewards. The return of every good and evil done in the world can also be seen and felt in the world. This is an example of a proverb: do not be neglectful from work, such as wheat after being planted. The general proverb for the rewards in this world is like "the hand that receives is the same as the hand when giving." The same goes for the term "God's staff is silent, which there is no cure when stamped". In the work of *Shah Nameh Firdowsi*, the longest epic poem in the world containing 60.000 stanzas of poetry was completed by Firdowsi on March 8, 1010. One stanza of the poetry is as follows:

*Chu bad afrah iezadi khast bud*  
*Mokafaat badha badi khast bud*  
*Haman bar keh kari haman bedravi*  
*Sokhan har che guyi haman beshnavi (Shah Name-II)*

When the wind from the side of God's tenderness responds  
The return of bad intentions will also be paid badly  
Such work you do, such is you will receive  
Such comes out of your mouth, such is you will hear

## 3. Believing in The Day of Resurrection

Believing in the day of resurrection in Persian is called *rastakhiz*, which means the day of resurrection and that the end of human activity is death. Muslims believe that man was created from the land and will return to the land, in connection with this is a stanza of the poetry of Umar Khayyam (1048-1131 AD). He was a poet, as well as a mathematician and an astronomer, who mentioned in his *Rubaiyyat*:

*ze madar hame marg ra zاده iem*  
*Hame bandeh iem ar cheh azاده iem*

We were all born from the mother's womb

We are all servants despite being freed men

#### **4. Believing in *Lauhu al Mahfuzh***

*Lauh* according to the language means a sheet that can be given pictures and writing, and the sheet of breath is commonly called by the place to draw something. Thus, *Lauh al Mahfudh* means that everything in the rotation of the earth with all conditions have been drawn and written with pen on sheets of *Lauh al Mahfudh*. It is also said that the contents of the sheets are fixed and protected (*mahfudh*) of all changes and alterations. (Sajjadi, 2000, p. 1647)

*Lauh al Mahfudh*, in the general view of the scholars, is an object present above the seventh heaven which has always been there even until the day of the resurrection and it is already written. The first object that God created was the pen then the sheet, on which everything was written until the doomsday (Yahaqqi: 2010, p. 729).

Rumi, the greatest Persian Sufi poet, wrote in one of his stanzas of poetry in *Masnawi Maknawi* volume five as follows:

*Choon malak az lauh e mahfuzh an Kherad*  
*Har sabahi dars har rooz bud*

Like a king who knows *Lauh al Mahfudh*  
Every morning is the way of assessing the day

*Bedangah keh lauh afraid o qalam*  
*Yazd bar hame budaniha raqm*

Know that the sheets and the pen were created  
The Lord began to write all that ever existed

#### **5. Believing to Keep the Rights of Bread and Salt**

One more thing about the beliefs related to the teachings of religion is to keep the rights of bread and salt. In the belief of the ancient Persian, bread is the blessing of God therefore it should not fall to the ground, and when it falls take it immediately and keep it in the wall. The same thing goes for salt which gets a commendable place that must be respected. In the belief of society, when a person eats bread and salt that is not his own, that person will not be safe. This is supported by Persian proverbs about shameless and greedy people: *namak ra khurd namakdan ra shekasht* which means "someone who after eating the salt of others then also breaks the place." Keeping the rights of bread and salt to date is still believed by most Muslims in Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan. To this day, there are still many people who swear by using the words bread and salt, such as "I swear by the bread and salt that I eat," and also "salty hand" which means a hand that has done no evil and is full of blessings. (Hedayat: 1999, p. 97).

#### **6. Believing in the Evil Eye**

In the beliefs of the ancient Persians, the evil eye was considered as a bad omen that there would be something bad to happen. To ward off or keep away the bad things that would come forth, the people used to do it by slaughtering animals as a sacrifice or by breaking eggs.

Evil eye, in the beliefs of Iranians (Persians), is an act of seeing something accompanied by calamities, or people who have a malicious intent to harm others. It is believed that there is a power that can directly harm people. There are many ways in which people reject disasters and almost every place in the world has their own way to do this in their rituals. One of the beliefs of the Iranian people who to this day is still protected is to place the writings of the Quran verses 68:51 and 52 on the inner walls of their homes. The writing of the two verses is sometimes also hung on the hat or the collar of infants / small children to avoid them from the evil eye.

## **NON-RELIGIOUS**

The local wisdom that we have grouped into the category of non-religious wisdom is the local wisdom or customs which exist in Persian society in general and are written in their literary works without any relation to the Islamic teachings. Most of the customs had already begun before Islam entered the ground Persia or when the Persians still adhered to Zoroastrian and Mithra religions. The customs or parts of local cultural wisdom were the result of reflections of the people to give meaning to life and to search for guidance in order to solve various difficulties. These local values are kept protected through word of mouth from generations to the generations, delivered with the unique style of writers from the classical until the contemporary periods. The local wisdom is also the interpretation of the ancestors regarding the events of nature and life itself. Usually, this only came from word of mouth and from one generation to another without any information in regards to whom it was begun from.

### **1. Decorating the City (*Bastan Azin*)**

Decorating the corners of the city is a ritual when the city is welcoming the kings and ministers. The ritual of decorating the city is still done to this date in the host cities. The public joyfully welcomes and participates in the welcoming ceremony. This welcoming ceremony is estimated to have been done since 2500 years B.C., as recorded in the work Firdowsi Shah-Name which he finished writing in 1010 AD.

*Choon nazdik shah andar amad sepah  
Bastand azin beh birah va rah*

When the Shah approached and the army came  
Adorned the street corners and alleys

## 2. Celebrating the Day of Nowrooz

The holiday of the Persians is the day of Nowrooz. *Nowrooz* is composed of two words, *Now* which means 'new' and *Rooz* which means 'day'. Nowrooz is the "New Day" that falls on 1 Farvardin or 21 March, which is the first day in the Persian calendar. It is considered to be the oldest celebration in Persian history, the beginning of spring and the first day the universe was created. According to Zoroaster, 1 Farvardin is the return of the world life which, according to astronomers count, is the day where the total time of the day and night are equal and balanced. The ancient king of Persia, Jamshyd, on that day sat on his golden throne at the time humans were fighting against their own shadows.

Wearing the best or new clothes while reveling on the day of Nowrooz is one of a series of rituals performed by ancient Persian society that started from before the holiday until the 13th day. This activity was recorded in many classical works of Persia, one of them is the work of Saadi Shirazi (1210-1291 AD) in *Diwan Saadi*:

*Bar amad bade sabah o bou e nowruz*  
*Be kame dostan va bakhte peiruuz*  
*Mobarak badet emsal va hame saal*  
*Hamayun badet emrooz va hame rooz* (Diwan Saadi, Volume II)

The morning wind and the fragrant of Nowruuz has blown  
 With the hope of friends for the fate of victory  
 Happy new year and years to come  
 May this wind be with you everyday

The rituals that done on the day of Nowruuz are *Khāne Tekāni*, which is cleaning the house or replacing old furnitures with the new ones. There is also a ritual *Haft Sin* dish from seven plants that is consumed starting from the letter 'S': *Sib*, *Sabz*, *Sanjad*, *Serkeh*, *Samaq*, *Sir* and *Samanu*. As for the complementary tools of Haftsini, such as mirrors, candles, milk containers, a jug containing orange juice, colored eggs, decorating fish and the Quran. Everything are placed in one dish and served until day 13. *Sizdah be dar* is the day of union of man and nature or is considered also a day of getting rid of bad luck, when every family is required to leave the house from morning until late evening. *Did-bazdid* is a visit to relatives and friends, starting on the first day until the 12th day.

## 3. Kissing the Hand

In ancient times, one of the common habits of the Persian people was to kiss the hands of the royals when visiting the royal palace. The habits of kissing the hands, in addition to the habits undertaken in the palace environment, is also done within the Persian family in honor of the elderly on festival days. This custom that started thousands of years ago has been abandoned by the present generation in the most of Persian country. This custom was written in the poetry of Firdowsi in his magnum opus, *Shah Name*, as follows:



*Choo Zal andar amad be pishe pedar  
Zamin ra bebusid o gustarde bar*

When Zal came before his father  
He bowed kissing the father's hand

#### **4. Believing in the Whispers of the Unseen or Fortune-Telling**

When one is in a state of treatment and depression, that is when common sense occupies the lowest position. Hoping for the river to reach the sea would not come to happen. This is when people feel as if there is a whisper from the unseen that approaches him. This is where astrologers and fortune-tellers play roles. Predictions of any name and category are claimed to be able to retrieve the news coming from the unseen world, which in classical Persian literature is called *Lisan al Ghaib*. Believing this to be included in the category of *khurafat* in the teachings of Islam. In Persian mythology, there are so many stories or legends about the unseen, especially in the legends of Rostam and Esfandiyar in Shah Name Firdowsi

#### **CONCLUSION**

Knowing and introducing the local wisdom of a culture is an important effort in learning the culture to obtain information one certain society. It will undoubtedly be very important to the study of anthropology and sociology. Moreover, learning and teaching literature based on local wisdom will also be very helpful to be able to understand it more quickly. We live in a land of innumerable local wisdom, our efforts to protect and preserve it is our way of caring for the heritage of our ancestors of the nation. Eventually, culture is the foremost terrace to advance a nation and vice versa, if one wants to degrade a nation then put its own culture on the back porch. After conquered by Islam, the land and the civilisation of Persia became the gate of collaboration between the two Eastern great thoughts: Semitic and Arya. The Persians began to recognise Islam and Arabic through the Arabs, this collaboration made every science that developed at that time to be strong and rapid. Indonesian culture also developed into a big culture after coming into contact with foreign cultures for centuries, one of which was Persian culture. Persian literature born of these times through the Persian intellectuals also reached the land of Malay, the traces are clearly visible especially the aspect of literature. Hopefully further research can reveal even more about Persian culture and its relation to the Indonesia-Archipelago.

#### **REFERENCES**

- Assagaf, Muhammad Hasyim, 2009, *Lintasan Sejarah Iran dari Dinasti Achaemenia-Revolusi Islam*, Jakarta: Kedutaan Besar Republik Islam Iran.
- Axworthy, Michael, 2008, *Iran Empire of the Mind A history from Zoroaster to The Present Day*, London: Penguin Books
- Braginsky, V.I. 1998, *Yang Indah, Yang Berfaedah Dan Kamal: Sejarah Sastra Melayu Dalam Abad 17-19*. Jakarta: INIS.
- , *Erti Keindahan Dan Keindahan Erti Dalam Kesusasteraan Melayu Klasik*. Kuala

- Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.1994.
- Dekhodā, Aliakbar,1998, *Loghatnāme Dekhodā*, Tehran: Tehran University Publication.
- Dipodjodjo, Asadi, 1999, *TĀJUSSALĀTIN: Naskah Lengkap Dalam Huruf Melayu-Arab Beserta Alih Hurufnya Dalam Latin*, cet. 1, Yogyakarta: Lukman Offset
- Firdowsi, Abul Qasim, 2006, *Shah Nameh*,cet.3, Tehran: Hermes.
- Lubis, Bukhari, Muhammad, 1990, *Bunga Rampai Sastra Parsi*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka,
- Rumi, Jalaluddin, 2006, *Masnawi Maknawi be Koosheshe Karim Zamani*, Tehran: Ettelaat Publisher
- Safā, Zabihullah, 2007, *Tarikh Adabiyyāt dar Irān*, Tehran: Firdowsi.
- Sharifi, Muhammad, 2008, *Farhang Adabiyyat Farsi*, Tehran: Moien Publisher.
- Shirazi, Saadi, 2000, *Divan-e Gazaliyyat be Koosheshe Khatib Rahbar*, Tehran University Publisher.
- Thousi, Nizam al Mulk, 2010, *Siyāsat Nāme be Kushesh Ja'far Shuār*, Tehran: Amir Kabir
- Tabatabāi, Sayyid Javād, 2010, *Khouje Nizām al Mulk Thousi: Gooftār Dar Tadāvoom Farhangi Irān*, Negah: Tehran
- Zulyeno, Bastian, (Unpublished Dissertation) *Tarjooma Kitāb Tājussalatin Asare Bukhāri al Jauhari az Matne Mālāyi Qarne Hifdahum Milādi Wa Tatbigh ba Siyāsat Nāme Khauje Nizām al Mulk Thousi*, (Tehran: University of Tehran, 2012).