



On the Issue of Death: Four Perspectives on Death in Post-Islamic Persian Literature

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Citation: Homayun Shahpesandy (2019) On the Issue of Death: Four Perspectives on Death in Post-Islamic Persian Literature Curr Perspect Depress Anxiety: CPDA-104. DOI: 10.29011/CPDA-104.100004

Received Date: 02 February, 2019; **Accepted Date:** 15 February, 2019; **Published Date:** 26 February, 2019

Abstract

Death is certainly one of the greatest mysteries of life, and one of the most significant events of a person's existence. Throughout history this mysterious phenomenon has been attracting the attention of scientists, artists and poets. The question of death in the classical Farsi-Dari or post-Islamic Persian literature that covers the period between the eighth and sixteenth century is a common theme, but there are four distinctive outlooks:

1. Death-condemning perspective, largely embodied by Khayyam who questions the meaning of life and views death as the "end" of man, suggesting a rather hedonistic life style.
2. Death-glorifying perspective represented by Sufi mystics as Rumi, and Bidel. Sufi spiritualists admire death and perceive it as "liberation" from the "prison" of the material world, and reaching the desired world of reunion with the Beloved. Bidel, nevertheless, views life as an "illusion" and compares world with a "mortuary" or a "trap-land", and believes death is the only "hope" of living and end of man's suffering.
3. Death-accepting perspective; represented primarily by Sa'di who deems life and death as two faces of the same coin; to "avoid" death and become "immortal" man should utilize the time on Earth creatively to make himself a "good name".
4. A diverse perspective; a mixed, at times rather ambivalent viewpoint; depending on the author's state of mind; intermittently condemning death, glorifying death, or accepting death.

Keywords: Death; Psychiatry; Farsi-Dari; Khayyam; Rumi; Bidel.

Introduction

The Farsi-Dari literature is described as one of the greatest of humanity [1, 2]. Based on Avesta, a collection of sacred texts of Zoroastrian religion, introduced by Zoroaster, born in Balkh around 6th century BC [3] first states in greater Iranian lands were found across the river Helmand, and across the Oxus River (Amu Darya) in Northern Afghanistan. The first centers of culture in greater Iran are identified as Samarkand (Uzbekistan), Marv (Turkmenistan) and Balkh (Afghanistan). In around the middle of the sixth century BC, Cyrus the Great (559-529 BC) formed the Achaemenid empire, with Ancient Persian, a language resembling the Sanskrit language, as its official language. After the defeat of

the Achaemenid Empire by Alexander the Great in 323 BC, the vast Persian Empire disintegrated and Greek became the formal language. Around 250 BC, there were two imperia; in the east, it was the Greco-Bactrian state, and in the north-west it was the Parthian kingdom, which was subsequently succeeded by the Sassanid Empire (224-652 AD), with the Middle Farsi (Pahlavi) language as its main language. The Sassanid Empire was conquered by Islamic invasion and collapsed in 651 AD. With the spread of Islam, Arabic became the official language [4].

The post-Islamic, or new Persian, called Farsi-Dari language evolved from the local languages of Herat, Balkh, Tus, Sistan, and Sistan. However, its true history started with the rule of the Herat-born Tahirid dynasty that governed from 821-873 AD. With the formation of the Samanid Empire (892-999 AD), founded by Saman Khuda the ruler of Balkh, the Farsi-Dari became the official

language of a massive region of Central Asia and eastern parts of present-day Iran [5]. Farsi-Dari became the official language of Western Iran only during the Buyid dynasty in the tenth century AD [4].

Throughout history, from ancient times to the present day, there has been no question that occupies the mind of man more than the subject of death. Death, certainly, is one of the greatest mysteries of life, and one of the most significant events in a person's life. This mysterious phenomenon has been attracting the attention of society in general, as well as the devotion of scientists, artists and poets. To reduce the horror of death, or to find an escape from death, people have approached it in different ways, including creation of heroic epics, myths and works of art that seek immortality. The epic of Gilgamesh, king of Uruk in south Mesopotamia, now Iraq, written around 2800 to 2500 BC is perhaps the oldest world legend on death, the mystery of dying and ways to defeat it [6]. The extra-terrestrial soul journey of ArdāWīrāz (The Saint Man) was written originally in the fourth century BC, during the fall of Achaemenid Empire, and again between 224 AD and 651 AD in Middle Persian language or Pahlawi. It includes a description of heaven and hell, another example of humans attempting to search for enigmatic ideas of death and an afterlife (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/arda-wiraz-wiraz>). This legend was later followed by Sana'i in his book "Sairulebad elalmead" (The Journey of Servants to the Place of Return) had written in the 12th century AD and Dante's "Divine Comedy" from the 14th century AD, both of which are examples of artistic efforts describing death and afterlife events.

The topic of death is a common theme in the Farsi-Dari literature and a regular subject of debate for Persian speaking writers and poets, and attempts to find "the water of life", or "the tree of life" testifies to their efforts in reducing the horror of death or endeavoring to defeat it and enjoy eternal life. However, there are in general four different views on death: (1) Death-condemnatory perspectives, denouncing death, represented mainly by Omar Khayyam; (2) Death-glorification perspectives; represented largely by Sufi mystics as Sana'i, Attar and Rumi, who perceive death as reunion with the Beloved; (3) Death-accepting perspectives, a rather realistic evaluation of death, embodied mainly by Sa'di and others who perceive life and death as two faces of the same coin; (4) Diverse and rather contradictory perspectives, depending on the author's state of mind. At times, condemning death, whilst on other occasions glorifying life, or sporadically accepting death

Death-Condemning Perspectives

Perspectives of condemnation of death have a relatively long tradition in classical Persian literature, and it appears that the proponents of this view perceive death as the "end" of man. Hence, they suggest a rather hedonistic way of life, self-indulgence, sensuality and self-satisfaction. Rudaki (born circa 859 AD in Rudak, Tajikistan) also known as the "father" of Persian literature

is one of the first who condemns death, and encourages self-satisfaction. He advises that man should enjoy life, and should not worry about the past: "Enjoy the time with black-eyed beauties, do not worry about the world that is nothing than a myth and a wind. Look forward to the future, and ignore the past. This life is alike a cloud and a storm, instead pour your glass with wine: whatever will be, will be" [8].

Manuchehri, the famous poet in the court of Sultan Masood of Ghazna similarly to Rudaki perceives life as a "wind and decadence" and implies that man should "gulp" the world before the world swallows man: "Do not worry for the world in vain as your sorrow will not lessen its pain. Crush this world and have a mouthful of it, before the world squeezes and swallows you" [9]. He also states "this world is as a mad dog that would bite you; you would never catch or hit him. Ignore its plots, as you would never resolve it. Instead pour wine into your cup as there is nothing better than wine to free man from the claws of the world" [10].

Abu'l Bath Omar Khayyam (born in 1048, Nishapur, Iran) is a genius mathematician, astrologist, philosopher, and poet, who is worldwide famous for his quatrains. Khayyam appears to be seeing death as the "end" of man, therefore suggesting that man should enjoy life on earth (while there is time) as there will be "nothing" after death. Khayyam, similarly to Rudaki and Manuchehri, believes that the "world is nothing more than decadence". In contrast to them, Khayyam quite directly advocates hedonism and in total opposition to Islam that prohibits alcohol, encourages excessive consumption of alcohol, individualism, and self-indulgence: "drinking wine; this is the eternal life; drinking wine is the joy of your youth. It is the season for wine, roses and drunken friends. Be happy for this moment; as this moment is your life" [9].

What makes Khayyam helpless is the fact he struggles to unlock the mystery of life; the purpose of man's life: "realise this: one day your soul will depart from your body and you will be drawn behind the curtain that floats between us and the unknown. While you wait for that moment, be happy, because you don't know where you came from and you don't know where you will be going". Khayyam frankly admits that "no one has got behind the curtain of destiny; No one has unlocked the mystery of life. I have been thinking seventy-two years, day and night; nothing has revealed, and the story continues" [9]

A literal reading of Khayyam's quatrains leads to the interpretation of his philosophic views as a mixture of hopelessness nihilism, Epicureanism, fatalism and agnosticism [11]. However, Khayyam's perspective on death originates from the Quran, and reiterates the mortal nature of man: "Everything is to perish except His face" [12], "every soul shall taste death" [13], and "everyone is ephemeral" [14]. In fact, Khayyam looks at death as a source of edification, and a reason to appreciate the value of life. He

advises to enjoy life before it is too late: “Before time takes you by surprise; ask for good red wine and get wise. You are not of gold, don’t believe the lies. You are put to dust, once again you will rise” [9]. He proposes that if man can’t change his mortal destiny, he should enjoy himself; “There is no promise of tomorrow; so, keep happy this worried heart” [9]. Khayyam’s pessimism and frequent contemplation on the universe and its origins is not a sign of paganism, however. On the contrary, Khayyam’s speculation on death is of a holy nature based in Quran scripture, that calls for con-templation about the creation of the universe; “Verily, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the succession of night and the day, there are indeed messages for all who are endowed with insight” [15].

It appears that Khayyam was strongly influenced by Abu al-‘Ala’al-Ma’arri (born in December 973 AD in Ma’arra, Syria) a blind Syrian philosopher, who allegedly, never ate meat, never married, and considered reproduction of offspring as a crime. Al-Ma’arri believed that “reluctantly we have come to this world, and compulsively we are leaving this world; we have no choice in this coming and going”. Similarly, to Khayyam, Al-Ma’arri is skeptical of a second chance, or afterlife, stating “have you ever seen a dead man raised from the grave to tell you of what he had seen or heard?”. Al-Ma’arri seems to be a fatalist and completely, bluntly is putting into question man’s freedom of choice, with the proclamation “I had no freedom in my birth, nor had I any liberty in my life or death. Will I have any right after my death?”. He is of the view that almost no one has resolved the mystery of creation, or death, indicating “Muslims have shaken legs, Christians have not found the right way; Jews have become perplexed, and fire worshippers, and Zoroastrians are confused”. In Al-Ma’arri’s viewpoint, the whole earth is just a massive graveyard, and alerts the reader to this: “When you walk on earth; walk slowly as I think the whole earth’s face is nothing but bodies of people. Many of the graves have been used as tombs so many times that they have their mouths open with a smirk saying they have seen so many different dead bodies” [9].

Death-Glorifying Perspectives

Glorification of death is based on Abrahamic religious interpretations that view death as the end of man’s suffering in this world. The advocates of this view perceive death as a window to the light, or a bridge that takes man to the beloved. From their perspective, death is a reunion of a friend with a friend, and not a source of fear.

Abdullah Ansari, (born in 975 AD, Herat, Afghanistan) also known as the “saint from Herat” perceives the world as a pitfall where man is unluckily trapped, concluding “this world is a snare, how would a prey be calm in a trap” [16]. Ansari is warning that man should not spare his life with physical pleasures, should be mindful of his mortal nature, and should regularly contemplate

death and visit graveyards “where you will see bone yards of thousands of deplorably sleeping people, where you will ultimately rest too” [16]. Ansari believes “man cannot rely on three things; on his heart because it will rust, on time because it will change, and on a life, be-cause it is short” [16]. Therefore, Ansari states that a “man who loves the world, is the enemy of God” [16]. In Ansari’s opinion “life has a higher value than death only if one truthfully believes in God; can control his greed; respects elderly; is kind towards children; is attentive to his friends; is just to his enemies; is humble to wise; is generous to poor; and taciturn to injudicious” [16]. Ansari perceives the world as a “dark well” or as a “narrow road” or as a “passage, where the wise man would not abide for too long” [16]. Ansari defines the world “as something that a man attains in pain; looks after with fear, and leaves it with regret” [16].

Nasser Khosraw (born in 1004 AD, in Qhubadyan near Balkh, Afghanistan) compares the world with an avenging and unloving mother, and complains “we are your children, and you our cruel mother. Mother! Why you are so avenging?”. Nasser Khosraw equates the physical body to a “prison” that man would never make handsome “even if it is dressed in silk clothes” [17] and “soul’s transitory home, only a handful of soil, man therefore should not cultivate it” [17]. He also compares it to an “ignoble and revenging neighbor, whose affection is nothing else than sleeping and eating” [17]. Nasser Khosraw perceives the world as predatory animals, such as a «fast flying hawk whose intention is to prey on people”, a “shark that unexpectedly attacks man”, a «voracious lion that is in continuous crusade and daily hunt; steals everything that comes his way, small or big, and never feels fatigue whether he hunts one or a thousand” [17], and even to a rat that “consumes people as if they were pieces of cheese” [17]. Therefore, in Nasser Khosraw’s opinion “a wise man would avoid this ugly, deceiving devil that would drive him to deep dark waters” [17], and through “worshiping and obedience to God, and by cutting its throat with the blade of faith; and only with the light of wisdom man could bring this impious (monster) that is inside his body to creed” [17].

Abul-Majd Majdud Sanai (born in c. 1080 AD in Ghazni, Afghanistan) is the first great Sufi poet, and his masterpiece, the Hadiqhatu’l Haqiqhat (The Garden of Truth) formed the model for the Attar’s Mantiqhu’ ttair (The Conference of Birds) and Rumi’s Masnawi Ma’nawi. Sanai describes the world as a “place of dread”, a “house of mourning”, a “man-eater”, and as a “wolf”; hence insinuating that man should run away from it. “This world is a house of mourning; how long will you try to turn it into a happy home [18]. In Sani’s view, man should distance himself from life and better “enter to the garden of death” where he will become alive. He states: “Set fire to this ancient tattered blanket before the Lord gives your bones to those savage dogs. Bravely put forward this house of bones to death. Don’t be afraid of death,

be afraid of this existence. Come to the port of death, where there is relief and refuge. Cut off this artificial life. Don't call this haze of smoke life. Death will take you to the pure world as the death is the gateway to the other world. Death will liberate you from this dirty corpse, because death is the principle of life. You will see the face of happiness only when your face becomes saffron white from death. Only death will tell you that you are a guest, and not a host. Only death will bring you to the path of truth" [18].

Fariddudin Abu Hámid Mohamed Attar (born in 1120, Nishapur, Iran) in his chef de'uvre, the "Conference of Birds", describes this world as a "drop of water" that is both "existing" and "not existing", as a drop of water has several different forms. However, any picture or color that is depicted on (a drop of) water will ultimately ruin [19]. Attar, referring to Quran (20) is reiterating the unstable nature of this world, and compares life's affairs to a spider's web, which could be demolished within a blink of eye. In Attar's opinion "this dustbin of world is an enemy and plague for both man's body and soul" [19].

Jalaluddin Mohammad Balkhi-Rumi (born in 1207 in Balkh, Afghanistan) glorifies death. He does not fear dying, conversely, he excitingly welcomes it. Rumi perceives death as union, and not separation. Rumi advised that no one should cry at his funeral: "When my bier moved on the day of death. Think not my heart is in this world. Do not weep for me and cry "Woe, woe!". You will fall in the devil's snare: that is woe. When you see my hearse, cry not "Parted, parted". Union and meeting are mine in that hour. When you place me to the grave, say no "Farewell, farewell!". For the grave is a curtain hiding the communion of Paradise. After beholding descent, consider resurrection [21].

In Rumi's opinion, death is not the end of man, as Khayyam suggests. Rumi thinks death is one of the phases of man's transformation, and believes that transition from each stage of life leads to man's evolution and supremacy: "First you were mineral, later you turned to plant. Then you be-come animal: how should this be a secret to you? Afterwards you were made man, with knowledge, reason, and faith; Behold the body, which is a portion of the dust-pit, how perfect it has grown; When you have travelled on from man, you will without a doubt become an angel; After that you are done with this earth: your station is in heaven" [21,22].

Rumi believes death is the mirror that reveals an individual's moral and immoral characteristics, and welcomes death: "When you take my soul, like sugar is death; from you my soul is mulled; sweat is death. Why run away from death when living is in death. Why should I turn away from the wealth, when the golden treasure is death? When God calls you; he calls you to Himself, death is Eden, and heaven is death. Death is the mirror of your face; the mirror will show you the beauty of death. If you are sweet and pious, pious is the mirror. If you are bitter and wicked, wicked is the mirror [23].

Rumi understands death as freedom for man's spirit that is imprisoned in his physical body, saying "I am sure my soul is from the heavens, surely I will travel there back. I am a bird of the Angeles garden, for a few days they made me a cage" [22] In Rumi's opinion, people should remember their "divine" origin, and should not sell their soul for a handful of dust "do you know where you have come from? From the midst of all glorious sanctuary, do you not remember at all those happy spiritual stages? Those things have become forgotten by you, so necessarily you are bewildered and distraught. You sell your soul for a handful of dust; what kind of bargain sale is this? Give back the dust, and know your own value; you are not a slave, you are a king, an emperor. For your sake, there came out of haven the fair-faced ones, the sweetly hidden" [24].

Self-annihilation or "fana", absorption in the glory of the Creator and by contemplation of the Truth: "annihilation in God and existence in God", which is the principal subject matter of the Islamic Sufi philosophy, is also found in the classical Greek philosophy. Socrates, similarly to Rumi, glorifies and welcomes death: "Not only am I not afraid of death, I am excited because after the death another life exists; and as it is often said, good people will have a better end than the bad ones. Righteous philosophers are longing for death, and least fear death" [9].

Life is also frequently compared to an ugly "hag", who falsely presents as a seductive "bride", or as a "wife of a thousand husbands" [25]. The brilliant composer of the Persian epic "Laila and Majnun", Nizami-Ganjawi (born in 1141 AD, Ganja, Azerbaijan), describes the world as an "old woman that has a face of an angel but the temper of a dragon", therefore, "man, should avoid his affection to this faithless beldam by any mean, and evade being tricked by her" [10]. Ghazali in his famous "The Alchemy of Happiness" refers to an allegory, where "Jesus sees the world in one of his revelations as an old woman, and asks her how many husbands she has had. The old woman replies, there were too many to count. Jesus asks again, whether she divorced them, or they have died. The old woman responds, she did not divorce them, but killed them all. To which Jesus express-es his amazement to those (mad men) who still desire the world and have not learned a lesson despite knowing what she has done to so many before them" [26].

There is no one more pessimistic, negative, unenthusiastic and unconvinced about life than Abdul Qadir Bidel Dehlawi (born in 1644 AD, Patna, near Delhi, India), known as Bidel, who defines life as "an ocean of imagina-tion, and only humidity, an illusion of existence and nothing than nihility". Bidel perceives world as a danger-ous place, warning "this congregation, do not think is our place; like the melting candle with every step we shed a tear. We die buying illusive happiness; like a flower, our smile is our ransom. In the grasp of corpus, it is im-possible to hear the song of

life; this earth is too thirsty for our water of life” [27]. In Bidel’s opinion life is a constant suffering, “a sting in the liver and a needle in the foot; until the last breath, there is a needle in our shirt. This co-existence of teardrops and eye-lashes when will it end? We are entire wound; the world is entirely needled [27]. Bidel complains “there is no place of peace in the horror-land of the world; there is no particle that would not be obsessed with the desire to getaway” [27]. Bidel appears to be totally fatalistic and desperate, and complains that “everything is compelled to the verdict of destiny; do, or don’t, there is no choice. Supervene, superiority or inferiority; man, or woman, there is no choice” [27]. He expresses deeply depressive thoughts, wailing that “this world is a mourning house, how be cheerful? O friends, mourn, people do not smile in a funeral” [27]. He also says that “you will not raise your head in this plantation of edification; as a seed, there is no head that would not be stamped” [27]. Bidel apathetically questions any achievement in life, appealing “how would you inflate with pride of your terrestrial achievements? You are drowned in this disgrace of glory. When you open your eyes; you would see nothing. Life is like a flash of lightning; it is not worth opening your eyes; the entire world is like a haze [27].

Similarly, to Khayyam, Bidel expresses perplexity about the purpose of life when he doubts “I do not know what my harvest from this fruitless plantation is? I was dust, I became blood, I don’t know what else” [27]. Bidel sees man as a flawed device, stating “you will not find us outside of these two qualities; either we are imperfect in our perfection; or perfect in our imperfection” [27]. He laments that “for the sake of my mood, sadness was created; for the sake of my eyes, river was created. For the sake of my wings; a cage was created. For the sake of my joy, mourning was created. A fist of dust you can squander; they mixed with blood, a man they created” [27]. Bidel expresses the intensity of nihilism: “I don’t know; am I an imagination or a fog of amazement; as a mirage from the distance; they made me credible. (But) from head to toe, I am a faulty device. As eye-lashes, I am sting into my own eyes. As a spark, I desire to fly, as the world is a stockyard of death. To what small particle I could compare my integrity? I am so small that they made me ashamed of myself” [27].

Bidel, again in line with Khayyam’s views, questions the existence of man, roaring: “O futile nation! You’re nothing; don’t hang on your imaginations and illusions. This is the absolute answer for both worlds; if you wish, look at the sky, if you wish look at earth; Up and down there is nothing more than this. The fables of existence were left in the solitude of annihilation; No one has opened their eyelids from this absolute coma. Maybe with the sparkle of love, we will awake from this oblivion [27].

Bidel in his desperation and hopelessness expresses frankly suicidal wishes when he sobs “life, if it has any hope, it is the anticipation of dying” [27], and that “no kind sound is heard in

this land; unless a graveyard opens its mouth and shouts: come here!” [27].

Death-Accepting and Realistic Perspectives

In total contrast to Khayyam and Bidel, who appear to be uncertain about the purpose of life, representatives of the ‘Death-accepting’ outlook see life and death as two faces of the same coin? They accept that “death is the messenger of death” [9], and the fatal nature of life. They, nevertheless, suggest that for man to avoid death and become immortal, he should utilize the time on earth as an opportunity to appreciate life, using it creatively and making a good name for one. They believe that the purpose of man’s life is the discovery of the unique “tree” that consumption of its fruits brings man “immortality” [22]. This tree is none other than the tree of knowledge, and there is no higher knowledge than the knowledge of God through His creation. In line with the Quran and Islamic Tradition God says “I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known, so I created the universe in order that I might be known” [21, 22, 28]. Every object reflects one or more of the divine attributes, but Man, as the microcosm, reflects them all: “Man is the eye of the world, whereby God sees His own works” [21]. Knowledge of self is the key to the knowledge of God, according to the saying: “He who knows himself knows God”, [23], and as it is written in the Quran, “We will show them our signs in the world and themselves that the truth maybe manifests to them” [29].

One of the greatest scholars of the Islamic world Ahmad Ghazali (born 940 AD in Tus, Iran) in his famous book *The Alchemy of Happiness* describes “the world as a stage or market-place passed by pilgrims, on their path to the next (world). It is here that pilgrims are to provide themselves with provisions for the way. It is here where by using his bodily senses man acquires knowledge of the works of God, and through them, of God Himself, the sight of who will constitute his future beatitude. It is for the acquirement of this knowledge that the spirit of man has descended into this world of water and clay”. In Ghazali’s belief, “while man is in this world, two things are necessary for him; firstly, the protection and nurture of his soul and secondly the care and nurture of his body. The proper nourishment of the soul is the knowledge and love of God, and to be absorbed in the love of anything but God is the decay of the soul”. In Ghazali’s view, “the physical body is simply the riding animal of the soul, and perishes while the soul endures. The soul should take care of the body, just as a pilgrim on his way to Mecca takes care of his camel; but if the pilgrim spends his whole time in feeding and adorning his camel, the caravan will leave him behind, and he will perish in the desert” [26].

Abul Qāsem Firdausi (born in 1020 AD, Tus, Iran) the author of famous *Shāhnāma* (The Book of Kings) believes, “man is from dust and to dust he will return, and hence he should not forget his finiteness and while he is alive, he should focus on good

deeds and avoid harming others”. Firdausi stresses the importance of good deeds: “Who comes from the dust should not fear returning to dust. What to expect from this guesthouse that is from head to toe an ordeal. You know well you will not stop here too long, why (then) put the hat of hope on your head. Realize this shortness of life and rather focus on worshipping the God. Do noble endeavors and do not harm as this is the only path to salvation.” Firdausi is mindful of the faithlessness and atrocity of the world (life), and is of the attitude that man should not rely on it because “this ugly hag whose nature is to withhold milk even from her own infant. Anyone who relies on the world will find his head under the soil. You should live happily and do not allow sorrow to enter your heart. This is how the world is; she gives you by one hand, and takes it with the other hand. Our infinite pain is the ambiguity of life, and its ups and downs. Why not enjoy the moment; taking and giving; and not annoying life?” [9].

Abu Mohammad Muslihuiddin Sa’di Shirazi (born in circa 1210 AD in Shiraz, Iran) looks at death as a reality of life; however, he recommends that one should value life. In Sa’di’s opinion the whole universe is obediently working so man can obtain food: “Cloud and wind, moon and sun move in the sky; that man may gain bread, and not eat it unconcerned. For man, all are revolving and obedient. It is against the requirements of justice if he does not obey”. Sa’di *Gulistan* (The Rose Garden) is full of aphorisms and guidance on how to make the best of life, and live a fruitful life. He advises “now, while you have the power of utterance. Speak, O brother, with grace and kindness; because tomorrow, when the messenger of death arrives. You will of necessity restrain your tongue” [30], Sa’di acknowledges the transient and volatile nature of life, therefore warns “o brother, the world remains with no one. Bind the heart to the Creator, it is enough. Rely not upon possessions and this world; because it has cherished many like us and slain them” [30], Sa’di recommends that man should use the opportunity of life, and make himself a good name: “Many famous men have been buried under ground; of whose existence on earth not a trace has remained; and that old corpse which had been surrendered to the earth; was so consumed by the soil that not a bone remains. Do well, o man, and consider life as a good fortune; the more so, as when a shout is raised, a man exists no more” [30].

Diverse, and Ambivalent Perspectives

Representatives of this outlook view death rather inconsistently, depending on their state of mind; at times, they condemn death like Khayyam and call for self-indulgence; on other occasions, they glorify death like Rumi, or occasionally, they express hopelessness and suicidal ideations.

Rudaki, when young and successful, wrote in celebration of life, on bravery, magnanimity, wine and love: “The blooming spring has arrived, vivid and fragrant; it brought abundance of happiness

and beauty. Now is the time to drink wine, and live happily; and now is the time friends appreciate friends. Want the cupbearer, take glass of wine, drink and sing loudly as nightingale in the fields, and blackbirds in the gardens [8]. On other occasions, Rudaki calls for generosity, self-discipline and kindness; “If you control your carnality, you are virtuous; if you do not disapprove deaf and blind, you are the virtuous. Kicking the weak is not bravery; If you take the hand of the frail, you are virtuous [8]. However, when old, sick and poor, Rudaki’s attitude on world changes; and he becomes melancholic, and laments “we are all prey of this world; we are like an accented hawk, and death as a hawk. As every flower that fades from death; death will crush us under its crusher” [8]. Rudaki is astonished at the world’s hypocrisy, which he compares to an “unstable mother who treats her children intermittently as a mother, or as a stepmother” [8], advises to “forget this bed of silk in the guesthouse named earth; remember, your ultimate rest place is deep down, under dirt. Forget people and their companionship, remember; inevitably, your ultimate companions will be flies and insects” [8].

Shamsuddin Mohammad Hafez (born in 1327 AD, Shiraz, Iran) is an exceptional poet, who has an interestingly diverse view on death. At times, he explicitly condemns death like Khayyam; however, on other occasions, he glorifies death similarly to Rumi, or in other instances, similarly to Sa’di, accepts death. Hafez is also called as the “second Khayyam” [9], because, like Khayyam, he often calls for extravagance, sensuality and self-indulgence: “What is better than fun, chatting, garden and spring? Where is the cupbearer, what is the reason of waiting? Appreciate any happy spell you catch; no one knows what is the end of this affair of life. Beware! Life hangs from a strand of hair. Take care of yourself; why do you worry about the world? The true meaning of the elixir of life and the garden of Eram (paradise) is nothing but the side of a stream and some savory wine” [25].

Hafez similarly to Khayyam often calls for self-indulgence and excessive drinking; “stand up and pour the blissful water (wine) into the golden bowl; before the bowl of our skulls become a dustpan. Ultimately, our home is the valley of silence; for now, cast a tumult in the dome of skies” [25]. He states that the ideal approach includes “love-making, youthfulness, and ruby-colored wine; a well-matched friend, intimate assembly, and forever drinking. The sugar-mouthed cup bearer and the sweet-singing minstrel a beneficent companion and a well-reputed associate. Whoever defies this society does not deserve happiness, and whoever refuses this assembly is not worth of life” [25]. This attitude is summarized by his reference to holy days: “Ramadan has finished, the Eid has arrived, and hearts exulted; Wine begun to boil in the tavern; we must ask for wine. Why blame the one who drinks such a wine; what is wrong with this folly and what kind of sin is this? The drinker without pretense and hypocrisy; is better than the hypocrite who pretends to piety [25]; or “fill the cup with

wine, and hurry up, for the sphere of the sky does not dally over its rotation. Before this ephemeral world is ruined; ruin me with a glass of rose wine. On the day, the wheel of time makes bowls from my clay; make sure you fill the bowl of my skull with wine” [25].

Hafez, like Khayyam, laments about tenuousness of life affairs and its infidelity when he guides the reader: “Come, for the palace of hope (world) is mighty frail in foundation; Bring wine, for the foundation of life is on the wind. I am humbled by the magnanimity of the one who is free from whatever that takes the color of attachment under the azure sky. Let me give you a piece of advice; learn and practice it. Do not seek constancy in this weak-natured world; for this crone is the bride of a thousand grooms. Grieve not for this world; be content with what you have been given and untie the knot of your brow; for the gate of choice is not open for you and me [25]. Or: “O, cupbearer, bring wine as Ramadan has passed. Hand me the bowl, as the season of fame and name has passed. Precious time was wasted; let us make amends for the life; that in the absence of the decanter and the cup has passed. How long can one burn like aloe in the fire of penance? Give me wine, for my life with a futile fancy passed. Make me so drunk that in this coma (blackout) I may not know; who came into this field of illusion (world) and who passed” [25].

At other times, Hafez is clearly complaining of suffering from sadness, and uses alcohol to self-medicate the sorrow, admits: “If wine does not make our heart forget its sorrow; the dread of events will carry our foundation away. If reason does not anchor itself in drunkenness; how can it pull the ship (of life) out of this maelstrom of calamity? Alas everyone loses the game secretly to the fate; no one has ever won a hand from this charlatan. I am the medicine man of love, drink wine; because this potion brings peace to your mind and takes away worries” [25]. Hafez clearly recommends alcohol to escape fear and misery and instructs: “If you wish to free yourself from sadness, and if you want to stop your heart’s bleeding; do not expect peace from the world. Ultimately you will become the clay for the potter; now rather fill your cup of wine. If you are one of those who desire heaven; you would better be enjoying your time now with heavenly beautiful people” [31].

At times, Hafez laments and expresses passive suicidal thoughts “I want some intoxicating wine that would knock me out; so, I may rest for a moment from the world and its troubles. Bring wine, for one cannot be safe from the heaven’s ruse, because of the lust of the harpist Venus and the warrior Mars” [25]. Hafez complains: “In the whirligig of life, helpless, and with bleeding heart, I am getting nowhere; Disgraced and degraded to the level of dust, but cannot get a piece of loaf. If I bite once at a bone, I get a thousand bites into my bones. I am miserable, and have had enough of this life, but what can I do when the order of departure is not coming [31].

Hafez echoes Khayyam by complaining of his hopelessness to determine the mystery of life, and helplessly turns into drinking and self-destruction when he directs to: “Untie the knot of your heart and say nothing about the world; for no philosopher’s brain, has untied such a knot. Do not marvel at the revolution of time, for the world remembers thousands over thousands of such legends. Come; come; let us be wasted by wine for a while. Perhaps we find a treasure in the wasteland [25]. Or: “The world and all its affairs are absolutely nothing; I have investigated this matter a thousand times. Woe and alas, I did not know until now that the elixir of happiness was a companion, and only a companion. Go to a safe place and appreciate the chance given to you; for the bandit (of time) is in ambush of your life” [25].

On other occasions and in line with Firdausi, or Sa’di; Hafez calls for moderation and munificence: “The ten-day kindness of the world is a deception and lies; use this opportunity, my friend, be good to your fellows. The comfort of both world is explained in two phrases; generosity to friends, tolerance to enemies” [25]. Hafez accepts the mortal nature of life and tells “since departure from this twin-portalled hostel is necessary; what matters if the level of one’s living is high or low. Be happy, and do not bother your mind about to be or not to be; because the end of any perfection is nihil” [25].

On other occasions, correspondingly with Rumi, Hafez perceives the physical body, and the world in general as a prison and death as freedom and a meeting of the Beloved; “I am a bird of paradise; how shall I explain how I was banished, and how I fell into this snare of troubles (of life). I was an angel and my abode was in the highest of paradise. It was Adam who brought me to this desolate place” [25]; or “we have not come to this door to seek pomp and glory. We have taken refuge here from the malice of events. Heading for the house of love, we have come all the way; from the border of non-existence to the clime of existence. Having seen the beauty of your face we have come from the garden of paradise in quest of that man-drake” [25]. Hafez seems to be excitedly waiting for departure from physical world; “my body, like dust, covers the face of my soul, blessed is the moment when I drop the veil off that face. Such a cage is not worthy of a sweet-singing bird like me; I must return to the paradise, for I am the bird of that garden” [25]. Hafez like Rumi and other mystics sees death as a reunion with the Beloved; “blissful is the day when I leave this desolate house; seek my soul’s comfort and go after my beloved” [25].

Conclusion

The subject of death is a common theme in the classical Farsi-Dari literature; however, there are four different viewpoints of death. Firstly, it is the death-condemning perspective, represented primarily by Khayyam who seems to believe that death is the ‘end’ of man, therefore advising that, while alive, man should enjoy

himself, and generally exercise a hedonistic way of life. Secondly, there is the death-glorifying perspective, represented largely by Sufi mystics who see death as a freedom from the prison of the material world, culminating with meeting the Beloved. They praise death and incline to austerity, piety, moderation, and self-discipline. Bidel venerates death because in his opinion, man's life is a constant suffering, and if it has any hope, is the expectation of dying. Bidel believes the abandonment of desire is the only solution that would help man to cope with the torment of life. Thirdly, it is the death-accepting perspective, represented by, Firdausi, Sa'di, and Jami, who understand death and life as two facets of the same coin and believe the whole universe is working for the benefit of man, hence suggesting that man should appreciate this. Life is perceived as an opportunity for man to carry good deeds, and make himself a name. Lastly, there is the diverse perspective on death, dependent on the author's state of mind, intermittently condemning death, glorifying it and at other times accepting death.

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