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ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF FORTUNETELLING, ASTROLOGY AND PRAYER- WRITING IN THE CULTURE OF THE PEOPLE OF ILAM(IRAN)

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Abstract:-In the very old times, clergymen believed to bring news from the unseen, some of them claimed that their souls admitted all forms of nature because of purity; some others thought that genies informed them of the events that were about to happen. Anyway, awareness of the unseen secrets and knowledge about what is concealed has always been one of the merits claimed by clergymen since very old times. As nowadays fortunetellers, astrologists and prayer-writers, who are heir to those “pure-looking” old ones, consistently believe to own those qualities, and the public too, acknowledge this claim and believe in these convictions. In the cities of Ilam Province, there are some people who are practicing astrology and prayer-writing. Most of these people live in the villages and the suburbs. They use old prayer books and the Quran for prayer-writing. The objective of this study is to identify different forms of fortunetelling and prayers, the way fortunetelling and prayer-writing happen, and their anthropological analysis in the city of Ilam. In this study, a form of anthropology is applied which utilizes tools like interviews, participant observation and camera for collecting data. The results obtained from this study show that women acknowledge fortunetelling and prayer-writing more than men do; fortunetelling and prayer-writing do not belong to a specific class and still live on, like in the past. The main reasons people resort to them are fear of future, darkness of their past, disability to face problems of life, disappointment, despondency about life.

Keywords:Anthropology, Culture, Astrology, Fortunetelling, Prayer-writing, Ilam.

INTRODUCTION:

The night and day of separation from the beloved ended
I had this fortunetelling and the star passed and the task ended
(Hafez)

Beliefs have always had and still have fundamental roles in man's life. Basically, actions and behaviors of man are formed on the basis of his beliefs. It is from this perspective that in order to stop contamination of beliefs with superstition, Islam (and all divine religions) emphasize on purification of creeds and strengthening of true beliefs.

Magic and fortunetelling have existed from the beginning of man's existence as a widespread belief among all nations and tribes; their effects have lasted until our days, although it has faded to a great extent. Development of science and civilization is perhaps one of the reasons that has made magic less popular in the recent years, because the primitive man was unaware of the causes of natural events and attributed most events to supernatural and

sometimes to evil powers. That is why whenever we see the name magic, it is, more or less, collocated with terms like evil, Satan and devil.

Popularity of superstition, which is unfortunately emphasized by some cultural elements too, is harmful for the society and makes people get away from realities of life and makes them resort to dreams and fancy for solving their problems. In such a society, productivity of people decreases and human sources get wasted, and generally, the society loses its dynamism and activeness.

Defense against the evil of enemies, marriage for girls, winning someone's love, extracting genie from a sick body, undoing magic, repulsing evil spirits, solving problems, repulsing evil eye, bringing felicity, and childbirth for a sterile woman are some of the needs that according to some people could be fulfilled by fortunetellers or prayer-writers. (Afshar Sistani, 1997: 411)

In the Iranian culture as well, like many other ancient cultures, fortunetelling was a popular tradition with a far fetching background. Fortunetelling has different forms, among which we can mention palmistry, fortunetelling by coffee, pea and cards. In Ilam Province too, the phenomenon of fortunetelling and prayer-writing is salient and lots of people follow this profession. This study tries to analyze this phenomenon and its effects on men and women of Ilam.

DEFINITIONS

Fortunetelling has two meanings:

One is regarding something as a good or an evil omen, and the other one is foretelling or giving information about future.

1. Good and evil omens have always been popular within different nations i.e. they regarded some things as good and causes for success and progression, and some things as evil and causes for failure and loss (Makarem Shirazi et al, 1990: 144).

2. Fortunetelling in the meaning of foretelling and giving information about future.

One of the effects of fetishism is carrying a prayer tied on the arm to stay safe from the possible dangers. Religious traditions like Kesti in Zoroastrianism, Giar in Judaism, girdle and cross in Christianity and believing in their effects are remnants of belief in fetishism.

Fetish worshipping means belief in the holiness and worship of items and objects which have magic powers. Their effects have remained in the holiness of talismans, forms of nutrition, jewels, faces and other objects from which man expects fortune and bliss, or repulsing of evil. As for repulsing the effect of evil eye, they burn wild rue seeds to smoke out the illness or read some spells to save the person from the vice of the evil-eyed goblin. (Zommorodi, quoted by Rezabeigi, 2005: 54)

Historical conditions of we Iranians, as a civilized nation that has consistently been under attack by Bedouin Arabs from every side, have been influential in development of some people's belief in fate, destiny and in the forces which rule man's life without any logic. Also the geography of Iranian plateau, with earthquakes, floods and droughts due to unknown causes, has had some role in development of such mentality. In this way, belief in planning and struggle for success gradually gives way to destiny, fate and determinism (Fadaee, 1390).

Theories

Theory of Magic

The first idea of man for utilizing natural powers was through magic. This theory belongs to James Frazer. He believed that at the beginning, man resorted to magic to take advantage of the powers of nature, but after a while, saw that these practices were useless, and he could not employ nature to serve him. Man initially resorted to magic to make it rain, but after a while saw that these actions were ineffective on natural phenomena, he eventually passed this phase too, and sought for science. Man of the age of science gets help from scientist of the experimental sciences to fertilize clouds and make them rain. Therefore, the first ideological sparkle utilizes natural forces started with magic (Salari, 2007: 123).

Theory of Dynamism

One of the popular beliefs of primitive tribes was the belief in the force of Mana. Mana is a stable and mysterious force that exists in the whole nature and primitive man employ it to utilize magic. Some anthropologists believe that the origin of religion is existence of such a force hidden in nature. According to this theory, the origin and source of religion is the belief in this unidentified force, in other words, destiny. Also in the theory of dynamism,

magic was the primary religious practice of people (Sharbatian, 1995: 31).

Determinism in Roger's Opinion

One of the thinkers who have talked about determinism in the rural societies is Rogers. He defined determinism as the degree of the individual's understanding about his inability to control future. By conducting some experimental research on determinism in the peasant society, he states: peasants believe that "destiny" is the absolute power to determine failure and success. Since it is difficult for peasants to fight against nature for improving qualities of life, whenever the peasant or his neighbor gets some success in their lives, he attributes this success to super natural powers. He believes that peasants share the same ideas about controlling unexpected events, like passivity, distrust, surrender, patience, gentility and evasion. He eventually concludes that the sense of determinism is one of the preventing factors in the way of accepting renovation and change among the peasants. He describes his replying peasants as submissive, passive, determinist and patient people.

Lewis believes that determinism among peasants depends on the authoritative structure of the family which leads to growing of the younger members as submissive and passive individuals.

On the contrary, Sitose's work shows that existence of the spirit of determinism among peasants is originated from the spread of the feeling of insecurity i.e. a feeling that "no one and nothing could be relied on, not even one's own self"

Therefore, it is only destiny which is blamed or acknowledged in good lucks and failures (Azkia quoted by Kamarkhani, 14).

Evil Eye

According to Ms. Coliuras, one of the strongest beliefs of Iranians in the past was belief in the evil eye. This explorer states: "of course, I have not still found anyone who could explain this force or clarify it in some way, but I have often heard that someone is evil-eyed. Once a man was talking about a very skillful English rider whom I knew; he told me how the woman fell down the horseback when she was riding in the desert. I asked the reason and heard such an answer that she had bypassed a man with evil eyes. He must have looked at the horse."

For protection against such events and blocking the power of other people's evil eyes, some women used to engrave a verse of the Holy Quran and tie it on their arms.

Some people used pieces of rocks against the evil eyes of others as revenge. Some of those people who built houses, according to a common belief, did not put the last brick or put an old brick instead of a new one so that their houses remain safe from disasters (Sherbafian, 2004: 142 quoted from Kamarkhani).

Prayer Therapy

They write prayers for lots of daily activities. Before the prayer-writer writes a prayer for the person, he says a prayer for himself, and then writes prayers according to the situation or to solve the problem.

About talismans, it is believed that they will remain locked until the advent of Mehdi (PBUH), and with his advent, they will all break.

1. Chelle Bori

In the beliefs of the people, Chelle Bori was suggested by Imam Sadeq (PBUH). Before Chelle Bori, two wool cords are prepared, one white and the other black, and they read the below line every time they tie a knot to the cord. Seven knots belong to the infant's mother and seven knots for the mother. The prayer that is read while doing Chelle Bori is the following:

"Allahom ejalou wasle wa hala wa bala wa kala aljinni wa aljinni wa shaayatine bihaghe khatame Soliman"
"I tied Chelle of so-called infant, son/daughter of so, I tied, may it be tied with the right of Muhammad (PBUH) and his purified family"

2. Paralysis

If someone has got polio or loses ability of his legs without any cause, it is said that melaket (all imaginary unseen beings are called melaket) has hurt him; and he is taken to a prayer-writer so that he writes prayers for him.

3. Tirband Prayer

This prayer is said for blocking the bullet of a hunter, stopping evil eye, or preventing someone from doing

something:

“Wa ja’alna min baini aidihim sadda wa min khalfihim sadda fa aghshainahom fa hom la yobseroon” (the Holy Quran, Sura Yasin: Aya 9)

4. The prayer of tying the strength

If someone wants to block the physical and mental ability of the other side, before doing anything, has to say the following prayers for himself so that everything that he says will happen practically too.

After saying this piece, he can review in his mind whatever he wants, so that it happens in reality.

What the prayer-writer reads is as follows: “Bismillahi wa Bala wa min Allahi wa elahi Allah Allahomma alaika walhaide wajhaho foadi wa amri wajhaho azhari afhefzani bihi hazratal imanan min baini yadi wa la hawla wa laghowata illa billa”.

In fact, this prayer is taken from the book *Mafaatih-ul-Jinan* about which Imam Jafar Sadiq (PBUH) has said that Hazrat Ali ibn Hussein (PBUH) said: “I have no fear when I read these words, even if the whole Genies and Mankind come together against me”. For tying the power of the other side, one of the prayers of Imam Jafar Sadiq (PBUH) known as Adia is said and written (*Mafaatih-ul-Janan* pp. 670-671).

5. Prayers of Sorrow and Fear

“Bismillahi wa billahi wa minallahi wa ilallahi wa fi sabilillahi wa ala malae rasulullahi salla Allaho alaihi wa aleh Allahomma elaika aslamto nafsi wa elaika wajjahto wajhi wa elaika aljato zahri wa elaika fawwazto amri Allahoma Ahfizni bihifzil iman min baini yadi wa min khalfi wa min yamini wa an shimali wa min foghi wa min tahti wa ma ghabli wa edfa anni bihawlika wa ghowwatika fainnahom la hawola wa la ghowata illa bika ya Allah”

6. Prayer of Love

This prayer is written for creating more love between wife and husband or between a boy and a girl:

Ahabb (name of husband, man or boy) bihi (Name of wife, girl or any other woman) wa ahabb bain yadi ilaha wa salli ala alaihi wa aali Muhammad (PBUH).

Oh God, stabilize the friendship of so and so.

7. Prayer of Evil Eye

In the past, there lived three jealous persons who had very evil eyes. Whenever these three persons said that such thing is good or evil, if it was an animal, it would have died, and if it was a non-living object, it would have been destroyed by itself. After that when people heard or came to know about this, that someone had evil eyes, for reducing its evil they would say: “evil eye of camel to a pot sends a youngster to grave”

In order to get rid of it, they read after mentioning names of God and the Prophet: “La hawla wa la ghowata illa billahil aliyel azeem”

Or they write this piece on something and tie it to some corner of their clothes. Sometimes the prayer-writer writes the blessed Aya of “Ayatul-Korsi” on a piece of paper and folds it vertically and writes at the back of one of the folded sides “in the name of Farayazdi”; in other parts, he writes the names Ibrahim, Davoud, and in other parts the names Allah, Muhammad and Ali. They believe that because Allah, Muhammad, Ali, Ibrahim and Davoud are always living, they have to accompany the prayer.

8. To Undo Evil Eye Effect

In order to undo evil eye effect, the following things are practiced:

- a. A piece of a branch from the tree “ u_toei” is cut and hanged from house door, workplace, something on the farm, tied to animals, cars, etc. with a string or wool cord.
- b. The blue bead known as “keu” or “ku” which has a hole in the middle and is hanged from something or from the place.
- c. The popular bead of “gezek” which is sky blue and has two small and big forms. Its big piece is applied for animals and the smaller one is specifically for kids and infants. It is tied to the considered place.
- d. Wild rue seeds or so-called “di di” that are burn to smoke. It is also burnt for the newcomer guests.
- e. If a child gets sick by the evil eye, they put a wrapped egg in a piece of cloth between his point finger and thumb, and then they name all persons whom they suspect. If the egg breaks in the time of mentioning someone’s name, they

say that person has had the evil eye, and after that the child becomes well.

9. The Prayer for Repulsing Genie

If they want to stay away from the harm of genie, they go to a prayer-writer and he reads along with the client "Oh God protect us from the harm of genies and humans". Then the prayer-writer writes a piece of prayer from Mafaatih-ul-Janan on a piece of paper and gives it to the client.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF FORTUNETELLING

1. Evil and good fortunetelling

When they want to go on a journey or want to do something, before doing it, they go outside and if they meet someone with a good and beautiful name, they say the journey is good, but if it is someone without a good name, they do not follow up the journey.

2. Shush me Fortunetelling

In the village, at the night of Saturday, someone makes intention about a need or a purpose and goes outside to the alley, street or near the neighbor's house. By hearing the first word or sentence, he keeps it in mind and comes back home. Here again, that intention is interpreted according to the words he has heard.

3. Infant Fortunetelling

They select a 7 or 8 months-old infant and pair his feet, then they make intention and take both feet in hand or on the palm and keep the infant upright and say the followings:

Selection of an infant: is because of his purity and because the worldly matters and life affairs have not still affected him, and that he is naive and innocent. Also this proverb that "truth must be heard from a child" refers to this notion.

4. Chel Serv Fortunetelling

It is one of the most popular forms of fortunetelling, and in the meantime, a very amusing one. This one is also taken by beads. One person takes 40 beads and holds them in his fist. He first passes three of them through his fingers in the names of Allah, Muhammad (PBUH) and Ali (PBUH), then the people around him start reading lines of poems and by reading every line, they pass another one of the remaining beads. If the last bead gets out with a line that has good meaning, they regard it as a good omen.

Writing Prayer-papers and How to Keep Them

The paper on which prayer is written down is a simple, lineless, long and narrow piece of paper.

After writing the prayer, the prayer-writer folds the paper many times and mostly wraps it in a green piece of cloth and gives it to the client. The "client" stitches around the cloth, puts it in a small tin can (in order to protect the prayer paper from any damage), puts it in a leather cover and ties it to his arm or to the arm of the sick person. He sometimes hangs the prayer, with a string stitched to it, from his or the sick person's neck.

Prayer-writers usually write prayers for the following problems:

Blockade of an action, solving a problem, treatment of a sick person, wife's love for husband, husband's love for wife, affection of lover and beloved to each other, bringing bad luck to someone, bringing love and affection between a couple who have broken up, genie-strike, madness, sterility, walking of an infant, talking of an infant, etc.

Prayer-writers take some money from the clients in return for the prayers they write, which is called "niaz" they take this money before writing the prayer and say that the prayer would be ineffective if the money is not paid.

Some of the prayer-writers who go around most cities and villages of Iran are known as "hardogar" (Jadogar i.e. magician). They apparently attribute themselves to Sadat, the children of the Holy Prophet, and make themselves similar to them.

According to Dervish, Kocheh Ali Shah Abadi, who had spent 60 years of his life with dervishes:

“Iranian prayer-writers are almost 10,000 families who are spread all over the country. They are “Ghorbati” (gypsies) and their real dialect is very close to Lori. Most of them are illiterate and a few of them know how to read and write. Lots of them live in Marvdasht of Shiraz and their head is “Naqibzadeh” who sits in the circle of Tehranian Arabs”.

Prayer-writers derive the whole information that they declare about the client, from the client himself with smartness and with a silver tongue.

Philosophy of Number 40

In the old myths and histories of the world, number 40 is considered as a number that represents perfectness; as when the end of something is about to be represented, the number 40 is applied (Salimgan, 1998: 68).

And the holy Prophet of Islam has received prophecy in the age of 40 which is considered as the age of human perfection and mental growth. Sitting for Chelle (40 days) and leading a life of Sophistic austerity, staying for Chelle in the mountain or a holy place, 40th day ceremonies for the dead, etc. are all originated from the holiness of number 40 in the mythical traditions. The Chelle Bori prayer that was mentioned earlier also comes from the same notion.

Analysis (Tools and Applied Material)

Fortunetellers and prayer-writers apply some tools in their profession. We will discuss some of these tools and the way and the reasons they are applied in the following part:

They use a dead person’s bone to expel evil spirits from a house because a dead person’s bone is something that previously owned a spirit and that spirit has abandoned it. It is the same imitation magic (law of similarity).

Lock and key are again for the imitation magic “law of similarity” because lock is a symbol of blockade and key is the symbol of opening and solution.

Skin and fur of black cat are for talisman and evil prayers because cat is the symbol of evil and genie.

It is believed that black cat is the symbol of genie, and genies appear in the form of cats.

Crow is also believed to be a bad omen representing unluckiness.

Hair or a piece of the person’s clothes, or whatever the person has been in touch with, is the magic of transmission “the law of contact” because in James George Frazer’s opinion, according to the law of transmission every act, “talisman” which is done through these forms can be influential on the individual because that object has been in touch with the person.

Egg is usually used for evil eye talismans. The prayers for evil eye are usually written down with saffron on an egg. This is because when egg is broken into two pieces and its stuff is placed in one side, it looks like an eye; the egg yolk and egg white look like an eye and eye pupil; that is why egg is used for that purpose. It is the same magic of similarity. The egg is broken and the evil eye and look also disappear.

For love, saffron is applied to write prayers with, because saffron itself provokes happiness and has a pleasant fragrance.

Rosewater is also fragrant and gives a pleasant feeling to people.

Musk is a symbol of beloved and the desired one because of its pleasant fragrance and because it is taken from deer’s navel and deer is a symbol of love and affection.

Using horseshoe in the prayers is for attracting the other side. It means in the same speed that a horse moves, the beloved also is in hurry to come to the person (similarity or imitation magic).

Throwing a key in the graveyard is for closing a young girl’s destiny and is imitation or similarity magic.

Reading prayer or talisman on collyrium and spreading it in the wind is because when a prayer is read and blown into collyrium and the collyrium is spread in the wind, it is impossible to collect it again, and this symbolizes indestructibility and indefeasibility of that prayer or talisman.

There are other forms of prayers which we ignore to explain or interpret because of our limited time and we only mention them in a list:

Prayers for fever, child cry, swelling of throat, hemorrhoid, headache, sore eye, increase of mother’s milk, enmity and fighting, stagnancy in shop “recession in jobs”, finding a thief, separation between two persons, increase of blessings, stomachache, repulsing loss, escaped slave, sore throat, baby’s milk drinking problem, liver problem and fertility.

The prayer-writing cloth has to be clean, unwashed and green, because green color is believed to be blessed and is popularly a holy color.

The prayer of love should be eaten with sweets or any kind of sweet and delightful edible thing; the effect of sweet taste gives a favorable feeling and the sweet taste and heartfelt love are complimentary to each other.

The prayer of peace between man and woman is written on a piece of paper and placed under their pillows.

In order to bring affection between a wife and a husband: the prayer is written with musk, rosewater and saffron and husband has to eat them in the morning before breakfast; because they have delightful and favorable fragrances and give the person a feeling of gracious joy.

CONCLUSION

Considering the history of fortunetelling that has existed from long ago, up to the present time, it is observed that in the past, people did not have much knowledge and awareness and mainly believed in the supernatural forces. Therefore, fortunetelling was very common in the societies. The persons to whom people referred for fortunetelling were known mostly as: fortunetellers, oracles, astrologists, prayer-writers, etc. These persons believed to know about the past of people and can tell about their futures. Of course, it must be mentioned that this belief existed in all classes of the society, not only in the poor or illiterate class, but the ruling and aristocratic class too referred to such persons for the ruling and administrative affairs of the society. Even in the time of the prophets, these astrologists and fortunetellers existed.

It was so much that followers of Judaism had firm belief in the knowledge of fortunetellers and astrologists, which has lasted to the present day; but gradually, with the development of technology and consequently, increase of people's awareness, this belief has faded to some extent but has not disappeared completely and still the belief in fortunetelling and horoscope exists in different degrees among all societies and classes of people.

Cleric Khalil Mansouri, author and researcher, believes that the most important reason for people's turning towards fortunetelling and prayer-writing is disappointment from God and states: "the Quran mentions one of the deadly sins as disappointment from God and his mercy. Such people easily get targeted to Satanic temptations and lose mercy of God" (Pejvak News Agency).

Dr. Qerati Moqadam, professor and sociologist, believes that social factors are important in people's turning towards superstition and says: "when members of the society are unable to fulfill their mental, economic and social needs, or their heartfelt desires like divorce, etc. they turn to superstitions and fortunetelling.

This sociologist emphasizes that "of course, superstitions are influenced by our cultures too, and our traditional beliefs approve of superstitions, as we see that Iranians believed in the mysterious force of Mana from long ago, which they believed that existed in some trees, animals and objects and can save people or fulfill their requirements (Khanjani, 2006).

Disappointment with what is a person's heartfelt desire, and the sense of curiosity about knowing future, dark and unclear past of people, inability to control the existing conditions of life, looking for a glimmer of hope as well as spiritual and mental peace, social and economic problems, culture and public beliefs that we have inherited from the past, and people's environments are greatly influential on the beliefs of people; and some people refer to fortunetellers and prayer-writers just for entertainment and amusement.

The achieved result is that the further we get away from the traditional life and closer to the modern life in which the first and foremost thing in all aspects of life is science and mind, the less this belief gets, but it still lives on.

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