

Childlikeness in Sepehri's Poetry

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Abstract: Child's eye view is the thinking and poetic style of the contemporary poet Sohrab Sepehri. This view is present in various ways in Sepehri's poetry. He used childhood memories as a poetic asset. Sepehri maintains a sincere, honest, and, yet, simple tone to explain his mystical revelations and apperceptions. His tone is a mixture of childish, poetic, and symbolic verbiage. His far reaching imaginativeness resembles a child's unlimited imagination trying to establish new relations and pertinences between objects and events. Sepehri's child like approach to poetry helped him create novel, strange, and unprecedented imageries whose variations and freshness are unconscious reminders of heterogeneous and diverse reflections of childhood imaginations. His child's eye view observes activities and events without conventions, prejudice, and predispositions. Sepehri presents a trickle of freshness, wonder, and pleasure in his poetry that rivals with what children experience. This article is a study into the resemblance between Sepehri's mythical views and children perceptions. It is an attempt to uncover and explain Sepehri's thoughts, emotions, imaginations, and language as presented in his poems.

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Introduction

Children are endowed with natural artistic and poetic creativity. This property enables them to create a different and unusual world. A world that represents their unlimited imagination and they can make creative alteration to its property and the governing rules. Children have pure perceptions and their observations are free of predispositions and prejudgments. This property turns every perceived moment or object into a new experience providing many opportunities to wonder and enjoy.

Every child has the sensational and physical capabilities required for becoming an artist (Rid, 1352/1973, p. 132). There have been many relevant statements linking artistic world, especially poetry, to children world: Every poet is a grown up child (Novak, 1374/1995, p. 51); poetry is a return to childhood (Baraheni, 1371/1992, p. 53); or childhood is the birth ground for poetry (Sattari, 1366/1987, p. 28). These statements relate poetry to childhood. They do not make a claim for an exact likelihood between poetry and childhood. Rather, they point to the fact that childishness should be considered as an approach or as a portal to poetry (Aminpour, 1387/2008, p. 11).

Certain literary schools, including romanticism, believe in return to childhood as a prerequisite for poetry. They view childhood experiences, emotions, and dispositions as sources of poetic inspiration (Sattari, 1366/1987, p. 28). Poets constantly relive all or part of their childhood to energize their artistic creativity in adulthood.

Sohrab Sepehri

An important dimension of contemporary Persian poetry is the conscious and unconscious use of childhood experiences as a nostalgic source of inspiration. We can find the traces of childhood experiences in works of notable contemporary poets such as Nima, Shamloo, Akhavan, Farrokh Zad, Sepehri, and others. These poets presented different aspects of childish behavior, thinking, and memories in their works based on their current feelings, special norms, and reliance to their early experiences.

Sohrab Sepehri was a mystical poet with a special mental capacity and strong adherence to eastern mystical thoughts. He felt a strong indebtedness to his childhood experiences because of their influence in his life. Sepehri poems provide his enthusiasts with opportunities to return to childhood to make new discoveries or recall the accounts of what befell. Sepehri's thinking, emotions, imaginations, and expressions are, in many forms, associated to and reflections of his own childhood.

Sincere and uncommon language

A childish simplicity and sincerity is always present in Sepehri poems. It is the recognized symbol of his poetry. The narrator of his poems is always an immaculate, sincere, naïve-looking child. The conversations, explanations, and narrations offered by this child appear childish, though they are not so in reality. Some reviewers have been critical of Sepehri's poetry style and believed he was suffering from poetic credulity (Barahani, 1371/1992, p. 281). Nonetheless,

Sepehri was able to achieve a standing as a poet with a recognized style.

Sepehri's poetry style makes use of a natural and simple language to apply its various verbal capabilities. He created a new style of poetry with his way of using a simple language. His works are poetry marked with sincere and attractive childish language. Sepehri is the first and foremost poet who grafted free style of poetry to the verbal language (Mosavi Garmarodi, 1368/1989, p. 137).

Sepehri has frequent use of symbolism, projections, and foregrounding in his poetic language. His unusual and unexpected words and phrases make anticipation of the words to come difficult (Shamisa, 1373/1994, p. 60). Sepehri took a new and unusual approach toward language, applied defamiliarization, and gave it a new look by adopting a childish verbal style in his poetry (Aminpour, 1374/1995, p. 1).

Defamiliarization is an artistic technique to alter reality in unfamiliar and strange way, change common perceptions, and turn familiar into unfamiliar (Nafici, 1368/1989, p. 35). Defamiliarization can be looked at as one of characteristics of childhood. Children look at everything with natural curiosity. Common things are naturally uncommon to them. They take any impossible task as if it was possible (Karimi, 1376/1997, p. 43). Sepehri masterly applied these characteristics to his works. He resorted to paradox, sensationalism, symbolism, comparisons, and metaphor to relive childhood experiences through his poetry (Jalili, 1378/1999, p. 282).

Sepehri uses a special language in his poetry that is a projection of childishness. He applies different elements of poetry and creates a concoction of verbal simplicity and artistic poetry. His language has come close to his mystical thinking in its gradual evolution. Sepehri's thinking, wisdom, and emotions have become the natural ground for his different and common words. On the other hand, his uncommon language influenced the formation of his mystifying and uncanny thinking and emotions.

Imagination versus Intuition

Sepehri poetry is definitely close to Indian style because of its delicate nature, strong imagination, mental imagery, and meandering verbiage (Hossieni, 1368/1989, p. 56). The justification for this characterization is his frequent use of surrealistic imagination to depict his mental perceptions. If we take surrealism as a way to demystify the mental perception of the extraneous world (Seyd Hossieni, 1387/2008, p. 788); or as a mental expression of a real thinking process (Eliot, 1375/1996, p. 284); then, we suppose it as the consequence of childhood imaginations.

Children can use their limitless imaginations to recreate and delineate different concepts merely based

on own rational mentalities without consideration of exoteric realities. This is possible because children's relation with their surrounding and the influence they take from it is largely the product of their imagination (Bethlehem, 1369/1990, p. 146). This childish approach to surrounding is not much different from what is produced in surrealistic context. Sepehri used his own imagination to create sensible and artistic forms of his surrounding that remain unparalleled.

Sepehri's mental property mixed with mystical thinking drove him through a journey of discovering the uncovered dimensions of the existence, whether intended or not. His high flying imagination put the wisdom for the unity of his existence into poetry by resorting to various forms of symbolism with no boundaries (Hossinei, 1371/1992, p. 23). New pertinences and relations are formed between objects and events in the domain of such mental imagination. Novel, nostalgic, and unprecedented vignettes found in Sepehri poems are manifestations of such mental imagery. The freshness and versatility of Sepehri's portrayals are unconscious reflections of heterogeneous and diverse childhood imaginations.

One cannot evaluate or explain Sepehri's use of mental imagery within the familiar context of poetic fervor. His views are intuitive and, with such perspective, it is impossible to form definite and predetermined mental images of objects and events. Intuition is either the consequence of mystical thinking, which occurs only within the theism framework that describes it (Pullen, 1380/2001, p. 45); or, it is the result of pure and childish encounter which does not follow common wisdom and norms, for being free from conventions and predispositions. That is the property that provides the extraordinary feelings of freshness and pliancy to Sepehri's poetry.

Sense of wonder is strongly connected to childish attitude (Motiashu, 1372/1993, p. 44) and is inherent in children. The resemblance between Sepehri's imaginations and childish embellishments is worthy of consideration. He discovers new understanding with every fresh perspective of objects and events, as if he has never known or seen them before. This approach provided him the opportunity to present various portrayals for a single event or a fixed object.

Sepehri has gone beyond relying on history or looking into future to learn about the perceptibility of living in the moment (Sakalovski, 1384/2005, p. 240). He succeeded to open his mind and receive pure ideas without meditation in order to experience uninterrupted joy and happiness. When he touches tangible objects or elements in his surrounding, he invites readers to re-experience them in a loving fashion with the glow he projects on them (Babachahi, 1371/1992, p. 59).

Portrayals

Sepehri's childish views and thinking moved beyond common and formal vision to create a wave of various imageries by applying such elements as color, form, meaning, motion, contrast, and the like (Hoghooghi, 1370/1991, p. 30). The changing frequency and variations of these images resemble a slide show that flips through and changes the scene in front of the reader's eyes (Hosseini, 1371/1992, p. 23). Professor Shafee called this type of portrayal as dynamic imagery made by a creative, innovative, and attentive mind (Shafyiee, 1370/1991, p. 253). The imagery may have uncommon structure and be alien to the logic commonly used in poetic expressions, but they find poetical justification and become believable in Sepehri's childish pretensions and rationalization.

Anthropomorphism

The statement that "poetry is the language of early human and human childhood" represents the commonality between poetic mind and early human attitude (Wellek, 1377/1998, p. 348). Mircea Eliade said: every great poet rebuilds the world and tries to see it as if there were no time and history; therefore, such an approach has exceptional similarities with early human attitudes (Eliade, 1374/1995, p. 36). Early human may have lived in an environment full of excitements and affections and, therefore, could not differentiate between reality and imagination (Rid, 1352/1973, p. 31). Early human had a child like view of the surrounding world and considered dreams as reality.

Legendry figures and mythological worlds represent an endeavor to define an objective world in subjective terms and to interpret it according to mental attributes (Cassirer, 1378/1999, p. 246). The legendry figures have roots in the childish perspective upon which early human viewed the existence. Dreams and myths are not mutually exclusive and, therefore, one can construe both of them in the same way. Legendry figures are manifestation of psychological disappointments a community may have experienced during childhood. In the same token, dreams may reveal childhood desires of an individual (Propp, 1371/1992, p. 23). Therefore, it is possible to define an association and relation between mythical mind of early human and childish dream and imagination. Child's mind has been resembled to a configuration that creates a companionship and interaction between aspiration and myth (Hejri, 1383/2004, p. 36).

No doubt, Sepehri's poetry style is tied to mythical world in many aspects. This characterization is the cause for structural cohesiveness and unity of his poetry (Hosseini, 1375/1996, p. 20).

Sepehri presents different forms of mythology in poetry, with anthropomorphism and animism as the

most notable. Anthropomorphism and animism make the foundation of mythology. Myth has been defined as a characteristic based on animism (Barahani, 1363/1984, p. 181). Professor Kozazi believes that "the silent lifeless figures in a vigorous and feverish world of mythology look so human that one may think of them as humans of another type (Kozazi, 1372/1993, p. 34). This line of thinking about mythology has a lot in common with childish mentality of a poet like Sohrab Sepehri and the mythical mind of early human.

Sepehri uses anthropomorphism to the extent that becomes impossible to characterize that as a style or a literary technique. It is rather a reflection of his mystical thinking. He perceives every element of this world as an embodiment of human full of life, motion, and reason of its own. Everything in his poems including concepts, properties, objects, plants, etc. have the capacity to become a living and thinking subject. His way of thinking is so empowering that constantly overshadows other artistic and aesthetic aspects of his works.

Ugly and Beautiful

Feelings and emotions are closely related to our beliefs, habits, ideals, and complexes. They interfere with our logic (Azad, 1382/2003, p. 108) and present conflict to our views. This conflict inhibits the natural expression of emotions and the direct encounter without mediation. Children do not face the events in the same way. Their mind is pure and free of conflict like a plane white paper. They maintain a neutral position when valuing things without negative or positive predisposition (James, 1383/2004, p. 46). Children encounter objects and events free of any influence from conventions and prejudgments. Acquired tools for validating or invalidating do not come into play during childhood. What adults define as good or bad, and worthy or worthless; do not enter into children perception. Everything is valuable for children and would have equal values if it were not for the influence from their elders (Rajab Zadeh, 1374/1995, p. 14).

Adult mental blindness is the outcome of habitual living that influences human perceptions and attitudes. This mental blindness has not yet made entry to world of children, so, they are not affected by it. A child views the world with liberty and broad-mindedness. Children have the capacity to encounter anything in a new and simple way – as if spellbound by the experience - regardless how unimportant it may be for adults. They perceive every new experience with a sense of wonder and respect. They see even the most common things as something unusual (Karimi, 1376/1997, p. 43). Adults perceive creatures like

worm and bird as ugly and beautiful. But, children do not differentiate them as such.

A poet can break the line of habit for us (Johnpers, 1385/2006, p. 6). Sepehri accepted this recommendation and took it as the base of thinking and a feature for his poetry. He reflected his acceptance in various forms. He tried to close the gap between the observer and the observed. Professor Shamisa in reviewing one of Sepehri's poem said: disparity results from our prejudgments. It is looking an object by a view inherited from the past. When we look at an object with an eye that has a base in the past, we do not see it the way we should. We see it as good or bad from the other's perspective. We ascribe dead ideas to the object. With no reason of our own, we judge horse as gentle and culture as ugly (Shamisa, 1368, 1987, p. 28). Sepehri unconsciously takes reader to a place where mental anchors and predetermined habits do not fully cover human thoughts and feelings. Such space is not unlike a child world.

Will Durant believed that poetry presented the beauty that our untrained eyes could not see (Durant, 1383/2004, p. 3). What is the hiding agent that prevents us from seeing beauty? Sepehri believed that the interference by predisposed negative thinking is the barrier to perceiving the beauty. He did not give much credit to ugliness. He, instead, believed that ugliness was the reflection of the predetermined ideas that others imposed upon us. Sepehri takes existence as inherently beautiful, attractive, and fresh with all its dimensions and elements.

One can realize the beauty only by moving away from traditional conventions and beliefs. Our perception needs new appreciation and attitude free of predisposition. Such attitude, which is basically similar to childish view, can help us face reality directly and without mediation. In such a framework, any differentiation between ugly and beautiful, good and bad, or worthy and worthless would be misleading. Because, it would rely on mental and inherited conventions that Sepehri rejects.

The Journey

Sepehri is dubbed a travel and memory poet (Ashkevari, 1366/1987, p. 89). His symbolic and remarkable descriptions of events resemble the experiences and observations made by someone travelling through a fantasy world - a wayfarer whose journey is usually unreal, sometimes real, and occasionally both. Sepehri offers symbolic descriptions of journeys that are void of time and space - a portrayal that combines movement, search, discovery, wonder, and amusement. Sepehri's journeys are similar to the fantasy tales of children.

An attribute of Sepehri's travel poetry is the movement along conscious-unconscious line.

Fantasy is a combination of illusive and imaginary portrayal with sensual perceptions (Needleman, 1379, p. 17). It is a journey between alertness and drowsiness. A pure and unlimited childish fantasy free of any restriction and rules (Sheikhholeslami, 1381/2002, p. 139) can set the ground for such journey. Sepehri searches through his made up journey to rediscover common sceneries and familiar spaces looking for new roadways, and unknown places such as "nowhere land" and "nothingness", or inaccessible and imaginary lands. Logically, it is difficult to believe in what happens in a fantasy land. However, the creators of these stories resort to some way of suspense to alter the sense of non-believing in readers to increase the believability of the stories. A hidden and inner coordination between events, movements, personalities, positions and time is one of the most effective ways to create suspense, which is observable in Sepehri's poems. He combines symbolic language and narration and also makes continuous movements between mind and reality and vice versa in order to strike a balance between his own mental reflections and external objects and make his claims acceptable. In other word, Sepehri creates suspense between reality and dream, the outcome of which is non-severability of thoughts and observations. At last, he creates such an effect on his audience which rivals with the effect of fantasy on children.

Ideal World

John Paul Sartre believes that: "literary world is a portal from the real world with all its cruelties to an ideal and evolutionary world; it is a platform to cross in order to reach utopia" (Gris, 1363, 1984, p. 21). Arts and literature constantly endeavor to create ideal spaces and utopias by denying objective world realities. A critic called arts as "a cover for those who cannot accept reality" (Haverz, 1363/1984, p. 124), because, "the materialistic and real world have never been suitable to satisfy human idealism" (Yoosa, 1367/1998, p. 29). The ideal world in Sepehri poetry relates well with what was just said. He constantly searches for a way to achieve inner serenity and eternal purity. In fact, he is looking for a life like childhood and what was lost then. A life that is not accessible in present surrounding. Sepehri denies commotion and norms incongruent with human nature. He uses different ways to express his estrangement with what is happening in the real world. This attitude constantly engages his mind to depict and describe, in a childish manner, a different world to some extent ideal.

Sepehri's poetry presents partial and general aspects of a wishful and pleasant world free of difficulty and ugliness where one can live a more simple life than it is possible in the known world. He feels childish joy and happiness from being in such an imaginary and comfortable world. Sepehri experiences inner joy and happiness free from complications of outside world, just like a child whose happiness escapes from being affected by gloomy manifestations of extraneous world. He proposes inner motives and simple, and perhaps, childish tools for his own convenient and joyous life. In his vocabulary, "apple", "tree", "cornflower", or anything else form nature finds a new definition and turns into an impetus for gratification, satisfaction, and tranquility.

However, acceptance of such childish contentment and Sepehri's attachment to an imaginary world is not easy for everyone and made him subject to criticism by his critics. Ahmad Shamloo, the contemporary poet, is one of these critics. Shamloo considers Sepehri's type of mysticism unwarranted and nonconforming with time. He says: "Innocent people are being slaughtered next to waterway, and then, I go down few steps and recommend not dirtying the water" (Shamloo, 1365/1986, p. 48). Other critics found Sepehri's optimistic thoughts and mood nonconforming with painful reality of the contemporary Iran and labeled him as a person with "no social awareness" (Jafari Tabar, 1375/1996, p. 29) and "inattentive of the world" (Sar Koochi, 1375/1996, p. 102).

Audience

Those who encounter Sepehri's poetry feel some sort of artistic influence regardless of their line of thinking and tastes. Such influence cannot be explained easily. Sepehri's inherent and childish sincerity have developed a special effect for his poetry which is beyond known themes. Although, he is not endowed with poetic skills at the level that one can find in other poets, but he succeeds to make a sensual and emotional connection with his readers. His poetry is pure and more than any other feature is artistic. Sepehri runs his words through hidden layers of his audients' minds with this artistic essence.

Sepehri's enthusiasts have always this opportunity to experience a different world. They unconsciously put aside their own ruling mind and taste to enter the path provided by his poetry. Capacities in Sepehri's words provide opportunities to his readers to separate themselves from what they are and enter in another world which resembles to world of childhood. Arts can experience and develop what human affection has in its most inner and hidden layers (Hegel, 1363/1984, p. 91). Different dimensions childish attitudes in Sepehri's poems

create momentarily a childish clarity and acceptance in his audiences, and in turn, induce the unconscious joyfulness and strange feeling Sepehri's audience.

Conclusion

Child's eye view is the thinking and poetic style of the contemporary poet, Sohrab Sepehri. This view is present in various ways in Sepehri's poetry. His emotional link to childhood has played a significant role in the formation of various elements in his poetry. He has used this approach to depict his poetic moods and mystical thinking. Sepehri is a poet who has masterly applied his childhood memories and assets to create his works. This does not mean that he was unable to pass childhood state and reach the maturity like everybody else. Rather, he has relied on his childhood memories and experiences as a source of artistic inspiration for his poetry.

There have been many critical reviews and studies about the mystical views of Sepehri. None of these studies ever examined the link between his childhood predilection and mystical views and intuition. This study is an attempt to review Sepehri's childhood states and norms in order to relate them with various dimensions of his poetry. This paper included the following undertakings:

- Examine the attractiveness and sincerity of Sepehri language versus childish verbiage.
- Explain the link between childish mediation-free astonishment and understanding and Sepehri's intuitional views.
- Identify the similarities between Sepehri's peculiar and uncommon imaginations with childish fantasizing and its heterogeneous reflections.
- Discuss the similarities between childhood animism as an inherent children property and Sepehri's mystical thinking which sees everything as intelligent being.
- Deliberate about the relation between Sepehri's utopia and children's world full of tranquility and void of ugliness.
- Compare Sepehri's travelling accounts that are void of time and space, representing movements between reality and illusion within a symbolic space, and travels depicted in children stories representing a journey on conscious-unconscious line.

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