

Investigations on Zar Phenomenon in Southern Region of Iran, Bandar-E-Abbas

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ABSTRACT

This article tends to survey, describe and analyze different aspects of a regional ceremony in the southern region of Iran 'Bandar-E-Abbas', from its origination to how the ceremony runs. In this article, the research area is introduced and definitions of 'Zar' defined by different scholars are reviewed. Besides, Zar wind and Zar ceremony are explained in details then the article is followed by investigations on Slavery and Slave trade in Bandar-E- Abbas. In addition, the relationship between slavery and Zar phenomenon are studied and the hypotheses regarding how Zar beliefs entered to this southern part of Iran are per used. Furthermore, the preparation for a Zar ceremony is represented and the roles and types of music used in the ceremony are noted. Overall, this article particularly studies Zar ceremony in Bandar-E-Abbas.

KEYWORDS: Bandare-E-Abbas, Wind, Zar, Ahle Hava, Evil spirit

1. INTRODUCTION

Different economic, geographical, political and social situations in different properties creates diverse ideas and beliefs that cause to make the traditions. Sometimes these traditions seem to be more complicated to the extent that they are considered as a wonder. Anyhow, these different beliefs and opinions whether simple or complicated, real or unreal, make the culture of a society that people are accustomed to this. Nowadays there are many strategic, geographical and political researches about Persian Gulf but less researchers paid attention to the social conditions, culture and traditions of the people who live in this zone. 'Bandar-E-Abbas' is the capital of the southern province of Iran ' Hormozgan' which is located in Persian Gulf Coast[1].



This hot and scorching land has been the main center of trading in Persian Gulf shore [2]and an appropriate location for business and transferring ideas. Bandar Abbas's adjacent to the sea is the most significant reason of differences in customs and traditions of this area in comparison with other parts of Iran to seem extraordinary. In this article, one of the most complex traditions in Bandar Abbas, 'Zar Ceremony' is described and analyzed.

Many people of the Southaven opinion that every wind which blows, has got supernatural powers that the inner and outer world are under their control and no one has the power to fight against them[3]. These winds are able to penetrate the human bodies[4]and capture their souls. Also there is no way of medical treatment for them except a special method that is common for centuries among the lowlander. Further, Ahle-Hava (a group of people who suffer from wind)believes that these winds have different types which are contagious[5]and transferable from one body to another.

1. "Zar" Definition

According to the Islamic notions of the south people, there are two types of winds, "Muslim and Infidel"[3]. "Zar is one of the most dangerous types of wind that is considered as an infidel one" 'and it is also called "Red Wind"(Bad- e – Sorkh)[6] which comes from different places. Several scholars have determined various definitions for Zar that according to Richard Natvig, "Zar is basically a woman's religious activity"[7]. He also states in the same article that:"Zar expresses

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basic conception of self and the world including the entire realm of man-woman relationship"[7]. Pedram Khosronejad has an opinion that "Zar refers to both the beliefs and practices associated with a certain kind of spirit"[4] and Behnaz Mirzaei believes that "Zar is the result of slavery in Iran"[8] and according to a research done by Saeid Zaviyeh and Mahdi Asl Marz, "Zar is regarded as a way which human have chosen it to release their tensions and relive their stresses"[9] Richard Natvig states that Zar is spirit possession[7] and Craig S. Keener brought in his article that "spirit possession trance can produce violent behavior toward oneself and others"[10] and also "this spirit possession is considered as superhuman feats of strength"[10] Iraj Afshar Sistani writes in his book that "Blacks came together at nights and sang traditionally in order to decrease their sorrows and sufferings"[11] Ali Farokh Mehr, the Iranian author states: "Zar and Wind are the men illusions"[12].

2. Zar wind and Zar ceremony

The Term 'Zar' was used by the well-known Persian poets and writers such as Ferdowsi, Khaghani, Naser Khosrow and etc that the etymology of the term refers to the bad and disturbed feeling[13]. Zar is one of the dangerous type of wind[14] which has several varieties such as Maturi, Dingmaro, Sheikh Shangar, Omgare, Chin-yase, Namrud, Babur, Pepeand.

Bumiryum[3] Dayketo, Bujambe, Babur, Namrud, Tagruri, Gesas, Seyf, Keshamsham, Jaber, Belgeis, Ofmameat, Zaboard, Ziman sa, Seyx Salman, Semetro, Ketymary[14]. Each one causes different physical and mental disorders which needs special ceremonies to ward off the evil spirit from the body [8]. Ahle - hava are of the opinion that there is no scientific practice for Zar and the only way to recover the sickness is in the hand of Mama and Baba, the old magic therapists[9] to set up the special ceremonies. Zar ceremony is certainly one of the most complex and wonderful ritual that has been implemented for several years in this southern part of Iran. Dr. Saeid Zaviyeh and Mehdi Asl Marz in their mutual article classified Zar ritual performance into three parts: Mojarati, Practice of veiling and the last one is warding off the evil spirit from the patient body in order to tame the spirit"[9]. After Zar is diagnosed by Baba or Mama, they inform the patient's family to prepare a Zar ceremony. Each Zar wind has a language that speaks through the patient's throat and gives information about its origination to Baba or Mama, who are the only one can understand the language. Baba or Mama ask a person who calls 'Khizarani' or 'Dokhtarane - hava' to invite other members of Ahle- hava to join the ceremony. In Zar ceremony Baba put the patient on his side and starts to beat Dohol (a kind of drum). The biggest Dohol which plays by baba is named Modendow which usually gives the main beats"[15] that its smashing continues till the patient reacts to a piece of music. The vibration of patient's body shows that the evil spirit is warding off "[16]. In this part of the ritual to make the evil spirit to speak, the patient has to drink the sheep blood sacrifice mixed with rosewater, saffron, cardamom[14] Drinking blood can be a sign of patient dependency to the wind and the level of Mama and Baba's fame is based on the amount of drunken blood. In this step the patient begins to speak in unknown languages that only Mama or Baba translates them to others.

3. Bandar Abbas and Slaves

According to the researches done by several scholars such as Thomas Ricks, Behnaz Mirzaei, Pedram Khosronejad and Ahmad Sayebani regarding to slavery and slave trade in Middle East, particularly Iran, the old Bandar-E- Abbas was considered as an entry and transfer center of Black Slaves[17] from AD1500 to 1900 in Asia [18]. During this time, the country needs to increase the number of labors to flourish its economy specially to propagate the export of cotton, rice, tobacco, opium [18], date and fabric [19] that is why many slaves were brought from different places such as Zanzibar, Somalia, Abyssinia [8] and sometimes from "India and Arabia"[3] to this southern region. A majority of slaves in AD1626 equal to 1005 Solar, when British ambassador and his retinue were entered to 'Bandar-e 'Abbās', three hundreds slaves were on the ark that Iranian merchants purchased them from India. These slaves were salable like stuffs [17]

4. How Zar entered to Bandar-E-Abbas

5.1 Zar and Slavery

According to the various observations and studies have done, the relationship between slavery and Zar phenomenon in Bandar-E-Abbas is found. The people of the south believe that black Africans who brought to Iran are affected to a type of wind that is transferable to the next generations. Furthermore, different conditions in this area could be one of the main reasons of spreading the Zar beliefs. As in the ancient times, life in Bandar-E-Abbas was associated with fear, fear of starvation and drought, hard-working, scrimmage with illness and severe heat[3] all these problems made these people's lives boring; therefore they were always looking for an event to change their mood in order to wash out the color of death and despair. Black Africans, who brought to Iran as slaves settling in Persian Gulf coasts, tried to adapt themselves with the new life and whenever they felt homesick, started to sing in their mother tongue at nights. Various reasons such as international agreements specially Brussels Act in 1890[17], Islamic Laws, State Laws [8] and the Constitutional Movement of 1905-1911[18] helped the slaves to slowly be a part of society and gradually display and introduce their culture to the people of Bandar-E-Abbas. Accordingly, the traditions and the culture of Blacks became a part of society and the customs of Ahle- Hava spread quickly.

5.2 Zar, result of Trading

Additionally, the people of Bandar -Abbas believe that Jashovan (The local seaman) who went to Africa for trading, in their return, were attacked by a kind of wind. As the journey of the local seamen who had sailed to Africa for trading took many months, these seamen were far from their mother land, family and friends in the search of hope. Consequently, bringing the customs and beliefs of Black Africans was the only solution for their mental drain. Most of the people who suffer from Zar are those Black who suffer from life and don't have comfortable lives. Furthermore, it is found that the only reason of suffering is their disability to combat with the harsh living conditions so the strange superstitions are the

reasons of suffering a large number of poor women in comparison with men. This related to women strong beliefs in supernatural forces.[3]

5. Zar ceremony preparation

To hold up the ceremony some special things are needed that can have special meanings. For example Dohol, Kondorook, Flag, Harmal, Sheep Sacrifice Blood and Bamboo. Dohol is a kind of Drum which is beat by baba in Zar ceremony. This action can be regarded as the stimulation of human inner forces. 'Kondorook' is fumed in front of Ahle-hava's nose in Zar ceremonies that this act represents the alliance and coalesce of Ahle-hava [18] Flag is another important tools which is used in Zar ceremony. It refers to one's system of beliefs and values [13]. Each type of Zar has a particular kind of flag. Using flag in Zar ceremony can be a symbol of preparation for the spiritual and mental battle.



6.1 Zar Expectations

Winds are categorized into two distinct categories conforming to their expectations; low expectation and high expectation winds[3] that according to them each ceremony hold up differently. Some Zar winds are satisfied with a bamboo but some others ask for a table full of variety of food and others ask for something more expensive like gold or Silver to leave the patient's body. As Ahle-hava obey these winds and meet their needs and requests, they are safe from their harm and annoyance [21]. It is believed that Zar ceremony is a kind of ceremony which provides an opportunity for the patients to discharge mentally through music therapy, singing therapy and dance therapy. Accordingly, music plays a significant role in the treatment. "...this is where the sound of music aid the attacked man and music feed his heart and his soul"[12]

6.2 Zar and Music

Baba and Mama are regarded as the professional masters of music who are skillful in playing this type of music. According to each type of Zar, particular type and number of musical instruments are used. For example in Matury ceremony six Pipe and one Zamri are used rather in Sheikh Shangar ceremony, a double sided Dohol and one Circle drum are required [3]. The rhythm of Zar music is always fast and varies in different areas [22], so the patient never pays attention to surroundings. As music is playing, Ahle-hava start to sing together and this practice shows the coordination and integration of Ahle-hava. Moreover, there is a special song for each type of Zar that its language is the blend of African Swahili languages, Arabic and Hindi that sometimes seems incomprehensible even for the old magic therapists.

6.3 Rules during the ceremony

There are also several rules while running the ceremony that patient, Ahle- hava and Baba and Mama should observe. For instance, they should never become drunk [4]. And as Zar is considered as an infidel wind, it is forbidden to utter the name of God or prophets during the ceremony and if someone do it by mistake, the evil spirit don't ward off from the patient's body. Another rule is when a person enters to the ceremony should not say 'Salam' to others who are in the ceremony[3] or when the people finish drinking tea or coffee should not put the cups down rather they should wait for someone to take the cup.

7 Conclusion

Zar can be regarded as the consequence of human mindset regarding their living conditions because the formation of cultures and customs are based on human beliefs and thoughts. Bandar-E-Abbas due to its geographical location has been an appropriate location for the cultural exchanges; therefore, difficult and intolerable living conditions in this zone made the life of the local people boring and they were looking for hope in order to remove the color of death and despair. As a result, the customs of Black Africans accepted by the lowlanders and the ecstasy dancing and singing chose as a temporary treatment for hardships and despairs. Generally, Zar can be the cultural effect of slavery and slave trade in this region.

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