



# Sustainable Behaviour and Ecology in Persian Literature – With Special Reference to Qabus Nama

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### **Abstract**

Qabus Nama is a well-known prose work in the Persian language, which was written by 'Unsurul Ma'ali Kaikaus son of Iskandar. Kaikaus wrote this book for his son Gilan Shah in 11 century A.D. Qabus Nama consists of forty-four chapters, written on different topics, related to day-to-day life. Persian literature is known for the teachings of morals and ethics however, in Persian literature glimpses of sustainable behaviour and ecology are also found. Though the topic is of modern origin and widely discussed subject in the present time, in Persian literature this topic has been a matter of concern for a long time and this is substantiated by one story of Qabus Nama. Kaikaus, the author of Qabus Nama, informs us in the said story that the women of Baya Mountainous Village took care of green worms while going to fetch water from the fountain, located far away from the village. Women's concern for the green worms shows that they were aware of the role of green worms in the ecological system, and their method applied for the safety of green worms suggests that they believed in sustainable behaviour.

### **Keywords**

Baya Mountain, ecology, green worm, Kaikaus, Qabus Nama, sustainable behaviour, and Bissavar.

## Introduction

Sustainable behaviour and ecology are both comparatively widely discussed subjects in modern times. The reason behind this is day-by-day increasing environmental problems, that have resulted in global warming. The basic cause of all environment-related issues is the excessive use of natural resources by human beings. If the excessive use of natural resources by mankind is not stopped immediately, it is possible that the survival of human beings on this planet will become endangered in the future, owing to a scarcity of natural resources. To sort out environment-related issues, there are no alternatives but to stop the excessive use of natural resources and for that, it is necessary to inculcate the habit of sustainable behaviour among the people. Inculcating sustainable behaviour among the people is not only the duty of the government but also of every individual. However, poets and writers can play a greater role in educating people about the environment, ecology, the use of natural resources, and the adverse effects of excessive use of natural resources.

Though in the modern time, the environment is a burning issue for some people, it has been always a matter of concern for others and they have been educating people about coexistence, preservation, and conservation of the environment through various means and one of the means have been literature through, which since inception peoples are being educated. Among various literatures, one is Persian literature, which has always shown concern about the humanity and environment in different ways. One such Persian literary work is Qabus Nama, which contains one story exhibiting the best example of sustainable behaviour, ecology, and coexistence.

A story narrated in Qabus Nama points towards the fact that how human beings can live and take care of their surroundings by using the available resources according to their needs and without putting the lives of other species in danger and thereby, contributing to the protection and preservation of the natural resources and the nature, which ultimately leads towards the preservation of ecology. In this story, it has been pointed out that how green worms, being an

important stakeholder of the ecology, are taken care of by the women folk of the village of Baya Mountain.

## **Review of literature**

Review of existing Persian literature especially, literature consisting of prose suggests that the topic Sustainable Behavior and Ecology in Persian Literature- With Special Reference to Qabus Nama is quite new and so far no article of this kind has been written in Persian language and literature on this topic therefore, this topic has been chosen and this article is the first attempt of its kind on this topic.

## **Case Study**

Qabus Nama is a well-known book in Persian, written in the 11th century A. D. by Amir 'Unsurul Ma'ali Kaikaus son of Iskandar son of Qabus son of Vashmgir son of Ziyar. Qabus Nama is a prose work and consists of forty-four chapters, which have been written on different subjects. Kaikaus has addressed this book to his son Gilan Shah. This book has been written in simple Persian and through small sentences, author has tried to explain different subjects. While narrating events he is seen very honest and this is proved from the narrations of the events about his grandfather Amir Qabus, which led to his dethronement. The simplicity of the language of this book not only made this book popular in Persian circles, but both the author and the book have become immortal. The popularity of this book can be gauged from the fact that almost all the major writers who wrote their works afterwards have mentioned Qabus Nama.

Kaikaus belonged to the Ziyarid family, a descendant of Ziyar bin Vardan Shah who belonged to the Gilite royal clan, living in the Dakhil region. Mardavij bin Ziyar, one of the members of this dynasty who had entered the Samanid service<sup>1</sup> laid the foundation of the Ziyarid dynasty in around 934 A.D. However, in 935 A.D. he was murdered by his Turkish troops<sup>2</sup>. After the death of Mardavij, his brother Vashmgir succeeded him however, in 967A.D. he was killed by a boar on a hunt. After Vashmgir his elder son, Bisutun claimed succession. In 977 A. D. after the

death of Bisutun, Qabus, the younger brother of Bisutun gained the support of the army and succeeded to the throne.<sup>3</sup> Due to his religious policy, some of the chiefs of the army conspired against Qabus and he was compelled to resign in the favour of his son Manuchehr and retired to the castle of Habask where he spent the rest of his life in devotion<sup>4</sup>. The remaining two sons of Qabus were Dara and Iskandar<sup>5</sup>.

In 420 A.H. /1029-30 A.D. or 421A.H./1030-31A.D. after the death of Manuchehr his son Anushirvan succeeded to the throne but as he was a minor his maternal uncle and chief minister Abu Kalijar bin Vaihan Al-Quhi held effective power.<sup>6</sup> Available sources reveal that in 433A.H./1041-42A.D. Toghril, the Saljuq sultan arrived in Gurgan accompanied by one Mardavij bin Bishui. This man and Anushirvan son of Manuchehr divided power between themselves placing Toghril's name in the khutba and paying an annual tribute to him. Shortly afterwards a collateral branch of the Ziyarid dynasty took over continuing as Saljuq vassals.

According to Sa'eed Nafisi Kaikaus was born in 412 A.H. but he has not mentioned the source of his date of birth. Qabus Nama is also silent on this point. The author of this article also did not get any information in this regard in the sources available on Kaikaus. However, from Qabus Nama, page no.192, it appears that the writing work of this book was initiated in the year 475 A.H./1081-82 A.D. and the book was completed when the author reached the age of sixty-three. Thus, if number 63 is subtracted from the date of completion of the book, the date of birth of Kaikaus shall come out as 412 A.H./1021-22 A.D. It seems that Sa'eed Nafisi has also calculated the date of birth of Kaikaus in the same manner<sup>7</sup>. The date of demise of Kaikaus is not known.

Chapter twenty-seven of Qabus Nama entitled "Upbringing of Child" sheds much light on the upbringing of Kaikaus. From the referred chapter it seems that Kaikaus was brought up in a princely manner."<sup>8</sup> According to the poet Mas'ud S'ad Salman, Kaikaus believed in a life full of joy. He was as strong as an elephant and even could defeat the elephant. He was like a wounded lion from whom lions of the forest were afraid. He was full of knowledge in different branches of contemporary oriental sciences including poetry and astrology and was enjoying the title of Amir (king).<sup>9</sup> From Qabus Nama it is learnt that Kaikaus was married

to the daughter of Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi (971-1030A.D.)<sup>10</sup>. From 441A.H./1049-50A.D. until a date after 475A.H./1082-83A.D. Unsurul Ma'ali Kaikaus son of Iskandar and the author was the ruler of the mountainous parts of Tabaristan and Gurgan<sup>11</sup>. Gilan Shah, son of Amir Kaikaus was the last ruler of the Ziyarid dynasty during whose rule the chief of Assassins of Alamut Hasane Sabbah conquered the mountain regions of Tabaristan and Gurgan, and after 483 A.H./1090-91 A.D., the Ziyarid dynasty disappeared from the history<sup>12</sup>.

From Qabus Nama it appears that Kaikaus was a very courageous man and a great warrior. In Qabus Nama, he writes: "In the year in which I returned from the holy pilgrimage of Mecca after performing Haj, I participated in the battle in Ganja (in Rome) and fought along with Amir Abul Asvaar Shavar bin Fazl"<sup>13</sup>. According to Saeed Nafisi, apparently, this was the battle, which was fought in 435A.H. against the Roman Empire of Constantinople<sup>14</sup>. It is here in Ganja that, one day, Kaikaus is asked by Amir Bissavaar to tell about his country and its speciality and Kaikaus tells one story, which sheds light on the sustainable behavior and ecology. This story is the best example of sustainable behavior and ecology, which points towards the age-old tradition of the peoples of Baya, a mountainous village of Gurgan whose acts not only exhibit their sustainable behavior but also their belief in coexistence with the nature and different species, its use according to their needs and conservation of their surroundings.

In chapter seven of Qabus Nama Kaikaus writes that: "Amir Bissavaar was a great king, well behaved, learned, a courageous man and very kind to me. He often conversed with me and liked my conversation. He did not want me to go back to my country. He behaved in such a manner that I also felt attached to him and stayed in Ganja for a few years. He further writes that one day he inquired about my country and its speciality. I told him one story about one of the villages of Gurgan, situated in the mountain of Baya"<sup>15</sup>. I told him that: "There is a fountain far from the village where women of the village gather and collect water from the fountain and putting the earthen pot on their heads go back to their houses. In the group of women, one comes without an earthen pot. She must look on the road, search the green worms, and keep them aside so that women fetching water do not step on the worms. If any of the women does so, and a worm dies, water becomes dirty and all must go back to the fountain and fetch fresh water

after washing the pot". Kaikaus further writes that: "When Bissavaar heard my narrations expression of his face changed. He shook his head and for few days did not talk to me". Meanwhile warriors of Delam told me that, "Bissavaar was complaining about my childish and false conversation, which I had with Amir"<sup>16</sup>.

From the above narrations, it seems that when Kaikaus told the above story to Amir Bissavar he did not take it seriously and rather became unhappy with Kaikaus, which is proved from the conversation of the warriors of Delam with Kaikaus who informed him about the unhappiness of Amir Bissavar. The reason behind Bissavar's unhappiness with Kaikaus seems to be his ignorance about the importance of the universe and the role of human beings in the protection and conservation of the universe. For Bissavar, ecology, coexistence and conservation of nature were nothing but childish thoughts and therefore, he ignored the story of green worms narrated by Kaikaus for him. But Kaikaus was a member of a literate family, and was a scholar himself who had knowledge of oriental sciences therefore, he was fully aware of the importance of ecology, co-existence, and conservation of surroundings therefore, he was serious about the story of green worms, which he told to Bissavar and to prove the reality of the story he sent one messenger to Gurgan with certain instructions. If it was not so Kaikaus would have taken care of the women and would have paved the way to save the women from hardships because he himself was a king and it was his duty to take care of the people of his country

In the same chapter Kaikaus further writes: "I immediately dispatched one messenger from Ganja to Gurgan and ordered him to prepare a Mahzar (testimony) and mention therein about the existence of a village in the Baya Mountain of Gurgan and women's belief about the green worms and get it attested by Qazi, Rais, Khatib, all Judges, learned and revered men of Gurgan". He further writes that: "After four months, Mahzar reached Ganja and it was presented before Bissavaar. He smiled and told me, "I believe in you but you should not tell the fact, which requires four months and attestation of two hundred right-speaking men to prove it"<sup>17</sup>. When the Mahzar was presented before Bissavar to prove the unique tradition of one of the villages of Baya Mountain reaction of Bissavar was quite interesting. From Bissavar's reaction, it can be inferred that,

for Bissavar, the story, which was told to him by Kaikaus was unbelievable and of little importance because in those days the concept of sustainable behavior, coexistence, ecology, and conservation of surroundings were seldom found and of course, like modern times, people did not think about all these things as they did not face the problem of global warming and natural disasters like we are facing today.

## **Result**

The above narrations of Kaikaus about the village of Baya situated in the mountainous region of Gurgan and the tradition of women who fetched water from the mountainous village shed light on the sustainable behaviour of the women of Baya village and ecology. The act of cleaning the road by women from green worms due to fear that if the worms come under their feet the water shall become dirty and they must go twice and bring the water after cleaning the earthen pot points towards the deep-rooted tradition of taking care of the surrounding environment and preservation of the living beings in the environment. If it was not like that the women of Baya Mountains would not have taken such strict measures to save the green worms from dying. Instead, they would have cleaned the road once and forever. This story also points out that the women of Baya Mountain were aware of the importance of insects in the environment and the maintenance of ecosystem. It seems that the insects are the negligible stakeholders in the ecosystem but it is not like that. The fact is that insects create the biological foundation for all terrestrial ecosystems. They cycle nutrients, pollinate plants, disperse seeds, maintain soil structure and fertility, control populations of other organisms, and provide a major food source for other taxa and therefore, women of Baya Mountain used to take care of the green worms.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, it may not be wrong to say that Persian literature has produced several poets and writers whose works serve as examples of sustainable behaviour and ecology. The reason behind this is that Persian is a subject that has always focused on humanity, brotherhood, nature, ecology, conservation



of surroundings, respect for all species, and coexistence. Modern Persian poets and writers have been focusing much on sustainable behaviour and ecology however, the reason for selecting Amir Kaikaus and his work Qabus Nama is to demonstrate that, while the concept of sustainable behaviour and ecology is a modern concept inspired by global warming, a green hole in the ozone layer, diminishing natural resources on a daily basis, and increasing incidents of natural disasters, Qabus Nama substantiates the fact that, long before the modern concept of sustainable behaviour and ecology, Persian writers were very conscious of it.

## Notes and References

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- 8 Ibid. P. 95
- 9 Divane Mas'ud S'ad Salman. Ed. by Naser Hayyeri. Tehran-1363. PP. 567–568
- 10 Ibid. P. 2
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- 13 Kaikaus. Op. Cit. PP. 28–29
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- 16 Ibid. PP. 28–29
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- 1 Siddiqui, Dr. Zeba. Environmental Culture and Ecofeminism in Selected Indian Women's Novels