

Sadegh Hedayat's Historical-Materialist Views in "The Case of Chrystal Salt" (Qazieh Namak Toriki)

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**Abstract**

Sadegh Hedayat is one of the most renowned contemporary writers whose various works are discussed by many literary critics. His short story "The Case of Chrystal (rock) Salt" is a humorous and satirical story is collected in *Tittle-tattle* alongside with five more short stories. The narrator of the story explains the history of human civilization and evolution based on his own perspective. "The Case of Chrystal Salt" is not among his best-known stories, yet it can be employed to facilitate a deeper understanding of Hedayat. Rereading and exploring the story illustrates that Sadegh Hedayat was acquainted with the writings on the subject of history of man's civilization and evolution, and his materialist attitudes towards the subject are similar to those of Freud and Will Durant.

**Keywords:** Sadegh Hedayat, "The Case of Chrystal (rock) Salt", materialism, human evolution

**Introduction**

"The Case of Chrystal Salt" (Qazziyye Namak Toriki) is one of the six stories collected in Sadegh Hedayat's *Tittle-tattle*. It was published in 1944 alongside with the story "Alavieh Khanom" that had been already published in 1933. Each of these six stories resemble an underdeveloped sketch of a single story. Probably using the title "Case" as their title and collecting them

in a collection under the title *Tittle-tattle* can suggest that the writer himself avoided considering them to be among his well-structured stories. The most obvious characteristic of these stories is their humorous, parodic and satirical tone. Hedayat extensively parodies and satirizes beliefs, values, and rites in these stories. This is not true only for past beliefs; he also satirizes the technological achievements of the contemporary world.

What Hedayat has named a "Case," *Ghaziyeh*, is similar to the notion of parody in literary terminology. *Ghaziyeh* in Persian literature tradition is similar to parody in its western counterpart. A parodist imitates or mimics the tone and diction of a literary work in order to satirize or disparage it, to foreground its humorous aspects, or to show his or her own sense of humor (Parsinezhad, 1997, p. 97).

Discussing Hedayat's stories, Parsinezhad argues,

Many of these stories feature scathing elements aiming at them [traditionalist literary figures] and satirizing the sonneteers and poets of traditional literary circles. Sadegh Hedayat created *Ghaziyeh* to use it as a new technique to fight the stale, unimaginative and imitative works of Persian literature at the time. That is the reason we must note the critical role of *Ghaziyeh* and his poet friend Masoud Farzad when we are treating his work in a critical manner. (Parsinezhad, 1997, p. 108)

Hedayat narrates the history of human civilization in "The Case of Chrystal Salt" with a Darwinian approach in a parodic manner. The correspondence of events occurring in "The Case of Chrystal Salt" with theories on human evolution may not be grasped at the first glance. But Hedayat's accurate rewriting of the history of human civilization is actually based on the theory of evolution and in line with his own materialist approach toward human being. Comparing it to the account of cultural evolution, this study explores "The Case of Chrystal Salt."

### A rereading of "The Case of Chrystal Salt"

#### Morgan's Three-Stage Classification

Part of "The Case of Chrystal Salt" refers to Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881) whose subdivision of human cultures attracted Marx and Engels, "Morgan is the first man who, with expert knowledge, has attempted to

introduce a definite order into the history of primitive man" (Engels, 2002, p. 615). Morgan classifies the social history of man into three epochs: savagery, barbarism, and civilization (Morgan, 1877, p. 4). Considering this classification, Hedayat writes,

In the dark times of savagery, violence and ignorance, when there was no trace of ideas frequently associated with civilization like freedom, brotherhood, equality, patriotism, war and peace, exploiter and exploited, the rich and the poor, and the powerful or the weak, "human-ape" tribes were living peacefully in tropical forests on the branches of the trees or in depth of valleys. (Hedayat, 1977a, p. 109)

Hedayat's narration corresponds to savagery epoch in Morgan's classification. It is when people were living on trees in tropical forests, and they were providing their food from fruits and roots of edible plants. Finding a way to express themselves was among the major achievements for human beings at this stage (Engels, 2002, p. 616).

"Primary commune" is yet another significant idea as mentioned by Hedayat. Primary commune was a stage in the history of the life of primitive man in when there was no injustice dominating a capitalist society, where people could enjoy social equality resulted from communal cooperation. In Hedayat's words, "there was no trace of war and peace, exploiter and exploited, the king and the poor, or the powerful and the weak . . ." Besides, matriarchy was pivotal in this pseudo-communist system (Reed, 2002, p. 12). Therefore, "in a matriarchal society there was no gender, social, or economic inequality" (Varastehfar, 2004, p. 55).

### **Women rule in pre-historic societies (matriarchal age)**

Hedayat has pointed out to the dominance of women in pre-historic societies, i.e. matriarchy, in another section of "The Case of Chrystal Salt."

Well, in any case, at the time, the rites and rituals were completely different from now; in that, the chief of the tribe and the person in charge was a woman (in the words of modern westerners, it was a matriarchal society). Husbands were not regarded respectfully, they dared not to speak, and whenever they met their wives, they were shivering in fear. They named their innocent children after their wives

– one reason might be that these husbands were full of deceit and did not trust their own wives, so they would not take responsibility for children with doubtful births. (Hedayat, 1977a, p. 110)

Behind this humorous façade, Hedayat is actually relating important issues from pre-historic ages of the lives of human-apes.

In archeologists' view, "Matriarchal reign" was a part of primitive history of early human beings in which women were fully in charge of the households and enjoyed management and high social positions (Reed, 2002, p. 12). Exploring this structure, Hedayat has examined women's absolute domestic domination, marginalization of their husbands and their compliance to their wives, besides addressing the matrilineal system of hereditary.

Archeologists maintain that fathers had no role in these societies, while mothers determined lineage, and their sons relied on their maternal uncles for their pedigree. The father was not responsible for bringing up and protecting his children and his duties were entrusted with their maternal uncles. Moreover, the sexual duty of men in reproduction was ignored and sexual relationships were not regulated; thus, it was not easy to identify the father of a new-born. However, as patriarchal societies emerged, the role of the father was consolidated, husbands asked for their wives' full loyalty in marital life to ensure their progeny (Kamallou, December 2010, pp. 17-18; Durant, 1958, pp. 48-53).

Totem is also among the tenets of matriarchy to which Hedayat refers, "In any case, the chief of these upright human-apes was one of these bold, old and vicious females, and because she was of wolves' totem, they called her auntie wolf" (Hedayat, 1977a, p. 110). Totem emerged out of matriarchal thought when women invented this notion to survive and avoid fratricide (Reed, 2002, pp. 12-16). Tribe members considered totem to be their kin or ancestor, and they were, in fact, known and called by their own totem (Azadegan, 1993, pp. 31-32). Meanwhile, wolf totems were especially common; they "refer to the totem tradition in which the civilians were trying to name their children after their wolf-like ancestors" (Rezaei Avval & Shamian Sarukolaei, 2009, p. 128).

### **Patriarchal domination in pre-historic societies (the patriarchal epoch) Symbols for fertility**

Following Freud, Hedayat links the emergence of patriarchal systems and domination of women by men in agricultural societies to sexuality. He considers the physical development in the stature of humanoids to an upright position as the cause of the transformation from matriarchy to patriarchy. He maintains that it was due to this development that "shame, poetry, sonnets, invectives, literature, and pornographic materials emerged and romantic sentiments were intensified. As the result, male human-apes gradually dominated matriarchal female human-apes matriarchs" (Hedayat, 1977a, pp. 6-7). This conviction recurs in other works by Hedayat including *The Pearl Canon (Toope Morvari)* (Hedayat, 1977b, pp. 6-7).

The reasons why Hedayat believed shame, poetry, sonnets, invectives, and pornography originated from sexuality can be also traced back to the Freudian ideas. Freud believed, "sexual drive has transferred from consciousness to unconsciousness and when it accumulated there and could not get outside, it changed into another form and poets, artists . . . are formed in this way. . . . In other words, repressed impulses reincarnates in the form of poetry, art, and religious teachings" (Freud, 1989, p. 22; Challaye, 1969, pp. 106, 148, and 150). Therefore, Hedayat contends that sexuality provided the grounds for the domination of female matriarchal human apes by their male partners.

### **The biological weakness of women as another reason behind the transformation of a matriarchal society to a patriarchal one**

In "The Case of Chrystal Salt", the biological weakness in women is considered to be another influential reason in the transformation of matriarchal society to a patriarchal one: after the threatening speech of Nane Nasnas (mama ape), human-apes elect a mother figure as a representative to bring back their lost power. However, as this representative fails in her duties due to illness and fragility, Dabury Khargardan (thick necked tramp), her husband, takes over the position. This marks the point of time when male human-apes gain power as the chief of the tribe, so matriarchy diminishes: "This threatening speech affected upright idle human apes deeply, and as the

chief of the tribe Ame Gorg [aunt wolf] was on her period, and because she was ill, they elected her husband Debury Khargardan . . . after the incident, Debury Khargardan became the respected leader and the chief of human-apes" (Hedayat, 1977a, pp. 114-116).

This is a variation of the same argument stated in anthropological and archeological references in more formal language. Women failed to take responsibilities in pre-historic tribal societies because of their biological weakness as caused by pregnancy and their caring attitudes. Due to such physical inabilities in many walks of social life, they consequently became submissive to men, and in a way they pioneered the rise of the patriarchal system (Durant, 1958, p. 51; Varestehfar, 2004, p. 53; Reed, 2002, p. 13). Based on "this cliché, the firm courageous man was reigning over women and children and provided food for them and protected them against threats" (Varestehfar, 2004, p. 53).

### **Social developments caused by the transformation of the matriarchal society into a patriarchal one**

After the immigration of human-apes to waste lands, when the lifestyle changed from hunting-gathering to agriculture, and after the domestication of animals and construction of pre-historic shelters and determining borders, it was time for a change from a matriarchy to patriarchy in the power structure in domestic life. The event took place by depriving women of their choices and responsibilities and bestowing them upon men. Hedayat explains this alongside with the change in the structure of society from a hunting one to an agricultural one:

In any case, these two tribes, one with chief Khik-tirkhorde (shot balloon), and the other with chief Nist dar jahan khanom (like-no-woman -in-the-world). . . , after many struggles and conflicts determined their borders and each dwelled and lived on a piece of land next to one another and formed families so that they may be remembered by them afterwards. In contrast to the tribe of the tribe Khik-tirkhorde with no air in him, which was almost fifty per cent patriarchal, in the tribe of Nist dar jahan khanom which was still a bit matriarchal, certain revolutions occurred and a male human-ape named Ghul-e bi-shakh-odom [hideous monster] took women's power and responsibilities from

them and entertained them with fortunetellers and wish trees and the like . . . women in retaliation cooked foul things and made their husbands eat. So that in this way they could take vengeance by ruining their taste. (Hedayat, 1977a, pp. 118-121)

As already stated, according to many accounts of the history of human civilization, in the beginning, women were in charge of responsibilities and they had contributed a lot to the formation of human society, families and the macro social system; however, men replaced them by and by and put an end to the matriarchal system (Reed, 2002, pp. 12-18). This change was concurrent with the competition over natural resources and the delegation of the responsibility of agriculture from women to men. This was when humans had settled on a piece of land and learned how to provide food for themselves and their herds. Settlement decreased their dependence on nature and enabled them to channel their energy, previously spent on hunting and migration, into establishing an established society. However, as population grew, the competition for gaining natural resources increased and it gradually brought about wars and conflicts over boundaries. In this stage, men, through domination of agriculture, deprived women of the economic power they had previously gained through such means. They made it possible for the patriarchal family, in which the greatest man was in charge, to establish itself in the society as an economic, legal, political, and moral unit (Durant, 1958, p. 52-53).

### **War as a consequence of patriarchy**

Will Durant believes, "Property was the mother, war was the father, of the state" (Durant, 1958, p. 37). He adds, "Societies are ruled by two powers: in peace by the word, in crises by the sword" (Durant, 1958, p. 36). A similar belief can be seen behind Hedayat's satirical expression.

In any case, for protecting the interests of chiefs and leaders and thugs, they called strong and naïve Malulis—who were muscular with huge arms and chests, and their miracle was to eat one whole sangak bread with 3 kilos of fat as one morsel and belched —champions. And they gave them weapons like arrows and bows and shields and helmets and the like and encouraged them to get stronger. In the time of peace, they

entertained them with soccer ball and gave them championship trophies, or took them to stinky Zoorkhanehs to exercise, and at nights, when they were free, they became drunk and shouted like gang of thugs. When the interests of their country was at risk, they sent these strong cavaliers to war in the name of religion, country and heroism to be wounded or killed. (Hedayat, 1977a, p. 124)

Razi (2003) states

When the power was not exclusive . . . and the whole power was not granted to one person entitled a king, and there were no kings, there was a kind of democracy protected by the elderly members of tribes and chiefs of families. There were no wars either, as . . . communal ways of economic life in that time could not lead to wars, in the modern sense of the word. Conflicts and probably struggles, as we know them, occurred in the periods when the way of communal life changed to feudalism and capitalism and when the asymptotic accumulation of wealth was on its way. (p. 36)

### **Government and slavery: two direct results of the patriarchal system**

After patriarchy, as characterized by power and wealth, brought war and conflict to human life, the emergence of government and slavery followed. On this issue, Will Durant writes,

When the focus shifted from communism to individualism, it brought wealth, but it brought, also, insecurity and slavery . . . . Agriculture, while generating civilization, led not only to private property but to slavery . . . . The rise of agriculture and the inequality of men led to the employment of the socially weak by the socially strong; not till then did it occur to the victor in war that the only good prisoner is a live one. Butchery and cannibalism lessened, slavery grew . . . . Probably it was through centuries of slavery that our race acquired its traditions and habits of toil . . . . Gradually, through agriculture and slavery, through the division of labor and the inherent diversity of men, the comparative equality of natural society was replaced by inequality and class divisions . . . . the class war began to run as a red thread through all history; and the state arose as an indispensable instrument for the

regulation of classes, the protection of property, the waging of war, and the organization of peace" (Durant, 1958, pp. 29-33).

Like Will Durant, Hedayat explains government and slavery as two direct results of the patriarchal system in a satirical manner:

The young, still unfledged, were listening to, however not acting upon, the wise sayings of the elder people. Eventually, it came to the point when they traded them like herds of cattle, and as there was not enough money, they exchanged them for raisins, beans, nuts and the like. Husbands became blunt and ordered around and the society had become patriarchal. (Hedayat, 1977a, p. 120)

### **Religion and State**

On religious conduct of the government in neo-lithic age, Ralph Linton writes,

In Polynesians' view Rongo was the god of 'fertility and cultivated food' and supporter of agriculture and Tangaroa was the god of sea. In addition, in the regions where some countries emerged governments were holding formal rituals and ceremonies to worship these gods, and wherever tribes gathered and formed a government, these formal rituals took place in temples built in the order of governmental officials. The participation of people in these rituals was indicative of their fidelity and loyalty to the central government, and the penalty of violation of the rules was execution. Central government insisted on and demanded participation of people in the rituals. (Linton, 1958, p. 181-182)

The elderly of these tribes held absolute power. "The chiefs of every tribe in Melanesia were the governing elderly who were in fact true leaders of the society" (Linton, 1958, p. 189). Among Micronesians, "the power to rule was in the hand of a person with sufficient knowledge of magic and information of the tribe and had the charisma and power to rule the tribe" (Linton, 1958, p. 191). Thus, he founded his religion based on magic and considered it as "an inviolable element" (Linton, 1958, p. 184).

Hedayat also accounts for the government conduct on religion in a section of "The Case of Chrystal Salt."

Strong fearless guardians, instead of saying their morning prayers, gathered people with whips and beating in public squares of the city, and then, the moral preacher recited following wise comments which everybody had to repeat: we are not Maluli anymore; we are human. We worship the wise sage who dwells in skies – we respect the elderly of our tribe. We listen to the wise sayings of the elderly – we worship the dead – we worship the Golden calf. We have progressed because of our great government. If we can walk, eat and reproduce it is all for its will. We worship the hideous monster. If gods are in peace and it rains, if wheat grows it is because of him and his will. We fear the hideous monster – we fear fires of hell – we respect the magician and foreseer of the tribe. We will not sin with our fathers' wife. We are meek and submissive. Generally, we are robots. The young should work and provide for the elderly. Our reward is in the hand of the old one dwelling in heavens. This world is temporary and brief. The other world is permanent. It is in our fate that we should give what we gain to the hideous monster to eat and drink and take pleasure . . . we blindly give away our lives and family to prove our loyalty for the interest of the hideous monster. We are the herds of hideous monster fated to be sacrificed in his marriages and funerals. It is written in our fate and it is of our greatest honors! We live for the dead . . .

The giants were watching and whoever was not reciting it loud and clear was punished. It is how worshipping the dead went viral, and whoever powerful was dead received respect and honor with no reason. Few people were endo-cannibalist and others were dead-worshippers. (Hedayat, a, 1977, pp. 118-120)

The subject of worshipping the dead can be explored through its relation with the fear of harm from them. This view can be seen in all ancient cultures and to which Hedayat frequently refers (Hasanli & Naderi, 2012, 9-32). Linton states (1958), "The only supernatural beings, worshiped everywhere, were tribe ancestors. There was a sacred place in every tribe for the worship and funeral ritual of the dead. In Polynesians' view, the soul of dead leaders had too much power . . . that after the blessed souls it was the gods and

goddesses who could control and observe human activity and natural forces" (pp. 180-181).

Will Durant, like Freud and Russel, regards worshipping and religion as a result of fear and frustration and writes as follows:

. . . for worship, if not the child, is at least the brother, of fear. Men who had been powerful during life, and therefore had been feared, were especially likely to be worshiped after their death. . . . Gradually the cult of the ghost became the worship of ancestors. All the dead were feared, and had to be propitiated, lest they should curse and blight the lives of the living . . . fear, gradually . . . changed into love . . . later aroused the sentiment of awe, and finally developed piety and devotion (Durant, 1958, pp. 97-99).

Gradually, as religious rites became more numerous and complex, they outgrew the knowledge and competence of the ordinary man, and generated a special class which gave most of its time to the functions and ceremonies of religion. The priest as magician had access, through trance, inspiration or esoteric prayer, to the will of the spirits or gods, and could change that will for human purposes. "Since such knowledge and skill seemed to primitive men the most valuable of all, and supernatural forces were conceived to affect man's fate at every turn, the power of the clergy became as great as that of the state; and from the latest societies to modern times the priest has vied and alternated with the warrior in dominating and disciplining men (Durant, 1958, p. 105-106).

In "The Case of Chrystal Salt", this approach is evident when addressing the subject of religion and worshipping: "eventually, in frustration they went to the elderly, mentors, and magicians and wanted to gain a convenient luxury life in the other world . . ." (Hedayat, a, 1977, p. 122).

Based on this belief, Hedayat writes about the first fire in the forest, "Human-apes were anxious at first; since they were fully ignorant, they assumed the incident as the embodiment of their ancestors' curse" (Hedayat, a, 1977, p. 112). Following this line of thought, Hedayat points in "The Case of Chrystal Salt" to the belief in magic, totem, soul,

and even Mana in the minds of tribe leaders and many other objects of worship (Hedayat, a, 1977, pp. 119-120).

### Conclusion

Sadegh Hedayat is one of the most renowned contemporary writers whose works have been subject to debate among many critics and scholars. Studying and examining every single work of him can further extend our appreciation of his oeuvre. "The Case of Chrystal Salt" is one of Hedayat's writings that recounts the history of human civilization in a satirical manner. The story is not a fully-developed and well-structured story; however, it reveals at least two points about Hedayat.

First, behind its satirical tone, one can discern the narrator's familiarity with the history of human civilization and his approach toward this significant topic. In other words, the narrator points to some details and chronologically narrates the history of human civilization, so he shows he is familiar with the literature written on the history of civilization. Second, Hedayat follows materialist philosophy in his conceptualization of the history of human civilization. Hedayat's materialist perspective on human evolution is extended throughout this story and can be easily compared to the view of other materialist thinkers.

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