

## THE POWER AND POLITICAL CULTURE IN PERSPECTIVE OF KELILEH WA DEMNEH (PERSIAN VERSION OF THE PANCHATANTRA)

ARNAVAZ FIROOZIAN ESFAHANI

Ph.D Research Scholar, English Department, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam, India

### ABSTRACT

*Kelileh wa Demneh* has always been regarded as an important book in India, Iran and among Islamic Societies from different perspectives. This importance emerges from the point that one can explicitly see the roles of three great cultures of Oriental world namely India, Iran and Arab territories.

Most of the stories in *Kelileh wa Demneh* are allegorical and stated by animals. Incorporating animal characters into *Kelileh wa Demneh* is due to its political content. The stories in *Kelileh wa Demneh* mostly reflect the triangle of power (India, Iran and Islamic World) in the East and, thus, represent the political culture, the power sources, and its impact on social strata in its best form. Studying the content of *Kelileh wa Demneh* helps in analyzing the structure of then era political culture and its great impacts on social and individual behavior of the people.

The beliefs of the modern theorists illustrate the point that the power and the political culture immensely impact the social and individual behavior of the people, and the pyramid of the power creation in society leads to emergence of some kinds of behaviors and thoughts that directly influence the people's behavior, and even their behavior and relationship with other societies. In other words, the political culture of a society has direct connection with human relationships.

In the present paper the power and political culture and their impacts on the behavior and character of the Eastern society will be surveyed resorting to the content of the *Kelileh wa Demneh*.

**KEYWORDS:** Kelileh wa Demneh, Power, Political Culture, Social Behaviors

### INTRODUCTION

*Kelileh wa Demneh* from the time it entered Iran till it was translated into Persian they had undergone heavy changes. It can be stated that *Kelileh wa Demneh* is a product of cultural interactions between India, Iran and Arab-Islamic world.

One of the interesting subjects that is worth studying in *Kelileh wa Demneh* is power and political culture and their impact on behavior of the society.

*Kelileh wa Demneh* was written based on Indian culture in India, but it was later on mingled with Iranian, Syriac, and Arabic cultures and languages. This book is an extract of these cultures. It is so valuable socio-politically that the Indian Kings refused to let it be taken to other countries. Anoshiravan, King of Iran, wanted to share power with Borzoyeh in order to be able to take the book to Iran for being translated into Persian (*Monshi, 1993, p.36*).

In different parts of the book many sententious stories are embedded which are derived from Arabic language of Post-Islam era. In the original book some of such parts are not present. Translators have added such parts to the original book in following eras. The manner of the selection of the stories to be embedded in *Kelileh wa Demneh* shows that its writers enjoyed intellectual and cultural maturity. The point that in the stories the need for dialogues is explicitly seen show the fact that in then era there was individual and social freedom; the point that allows the readers to reach at a conclusion. As we know, the stories in *Kelileh wa Demneh* are told from the language of the animals and this is done so for the stories were political in nature and the writer could write anything about politics by making use of animal characters. The behavior and humane relations of then era could be determined by studying the culture and politics prevalent in *Kelileh wa Demneh*.

Studying the political culture and the power structure in *Kelileh wa Demneh* provides the opportunity to discover some of such behaviors and human relationships of the Ancient Iran; a culture which had had great share in creation of *Kelileh wa Demneh*.

The political power in *Kelileh wa Demneh* is of two types:

- Power accompanied by strength
- Power based on pattern (standard)

In the stories when it is talked about reign, lion is the King and has the power which is accompanied with strength. Even in the stories where the lion has lost his power, he still owns the right to act as the King, and no other animal regards himself a King. In some of the stories, of course, any kind of animals have their own King. But, this happens only when there is no lion in the story, and also the mentioned King is only King of a group of animals and not all of them. So, it could be stated that as long as there is a lion in the story, no other animal is and can be the King. It has to be mentioned that in culture and politics of then era not only the power accompanied by strength was important, but also the race and the blood of the King was a source for his power. So, “when the society admits the strength, there as power as well for nobody objects to it” (Mohamma dzadeh, 1996, p.394).

In *Kelileh wa Demneh* no animals objects to lion being a King. King, in his turn, orders the down line animals for he has the blood and race of a King and the society admits, and therefore he has power. But where does such perspective come from?

At the beginning of each chapter the King of India (*Raja*) and *Brahman* start talking and the King asks questions from *Brahman* and *Brahman* starts explaining the manner of governance in the country by telling him the stories. *Brahmin* is the symbol of logic and wisdom.

In fact the point that the King is accompanied with *Brahman* facilitates people admitting reign and power of the King. This is the *Plato*'s theses about governance and philosophy. *Plato* established a relationship between governance and power and asks the philosophers to become King, and since this is impossible he recommends the Kings to study philosophy and accompany the philosophers (Rahbari, 2009, p.96).

In *Kelileh wa Demneh* the *Brahman* has the role of a philosopher and always states that the wise people must be chosen only. This has two results:

- Kingdom is acceptable for only the bests are chosen.
- Only the wise people govern.

In *Kelileh wa Demneh* a lion is always the King and usually a jackal or a fox is his minister and they never become a King. This is the culture prevalent in the Orient denoting the point that the power never is given to the elites. It is as such that in some stories such as 'The Lion and the Ox' or 'The Lion and the Jackal' the elites even finally get punished.

As mentioned above, selection of a King in traditional Oriental culture was done based on strength. But, in the stories '*The Monkey and the Turtle*' And '*The Princess and the King's Companions*' it is people who select the King.

Based on cultural and political stipulations of *Kelileh wa Demneh* the King is the prime power holder who secures and takes care of the strata order in the society. Based on such provision each person has to live in his own place and do not get out of his social stratum. King is the person who has to watch for such provision to be executed well. This is the reason why in then culture the marriages of the King's family happened inside the family and nobody married a person out of such family circle.

In '*The Lion and the Ox*' which is based on Indian culture, the ox (*Shenzbeh*), while being chosen by the lion, dies for he gets out of his limitation, or that *Demneh* makes other animal furious for he wants to approach the King's dominating realm and limitation. The murder of *Shenzbeh* and *Demneh* who are of the ministers' and the elites' stratum resembles the murders of the ministers which happened before and after Islam.

*Kelileh wa Demneh* cautions the King about the conspiracies, corruptions, and the competition among his court servants through advice. But, a look at the history shows that power has always been loveable to the human beings, and the advices such as those put forward by *Kelileh wa Demneh* have never decreased such inclination among them.

## **WHAT BEHAVIORS HAVE BEEN CREATED BY POLITICAL CULTURE OF THE *KELILEH WA DEMNEH*? IN OTHER WORDS, WHAT SOCIAL AND INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS HAS THE TRADITIONAL PROCEDURE LED TO?**

### **Holiness of the King**

In traditional system the absolutism was regarded as a value. The immunity of the King from the mistakes and lapses is one of the main features of absolutism which was inspired to the people by ruling power. For such ruling group presenting a picture of the King void from any kind of deficit and taint was an unavoidable necessity, for the King being looked at as a source of all virtues void from all defects leads to power stabilization in such societies.

So in *Kelileh wa Demneh* the Kings mistakes are born by other entities of the stories. For instance, in '*The Crow, the Wolf*', '*the Jackal, the Lion and the Camel*' the lion gives shelter and lets the camel approach him, but the lions companions in the story do not let the mistake be attributed to the lion (*Monshi, 1993, p.107*). This is as such that even if the King makes a mistake he is still adored by his servants and if a person carries out a job successfully, they relate that success to the King for King is the only one who enjoys wisdom. King enjoys all the good physical and spiritual virtues. He is the all-knower of the earth. There is no possible objection applicable to his deeds for he is a wise man (*Monshi, 1993, p: 256*).

The King's being holy is not for religious reasons; it is to make the King's power and strength acceptable to the

people creating hypocrisy and lies in the society.

### **Conspiracy**

In the culture reflected in *Kelileh wa Demneh*, conspiracy and gossips are prevalent. Most of the conspiracies begin by gossips and the society accepts it. *Shenzbeh* gets stuck by the gossips.

When there is fear, gossips appear as a result, and in the societies where the information circulation is not noticeable and no exact news are available, a kind of vague and mysterious situation emerges where the accusations are readily created and believed by the people. In then era the selection of the people was not based on meritocracy, and the authority limitation of the people was not much clear and the law was what the King wished. This is the reason why the regulations changed now and again making the ground for creation of the gossips and conspiracies.

As Kiani states “gossips are utilized by the politician and power-holders to reach their aims and objectives” (Kiani, 2006, p.134).

So, it can be stated that gossips form a kind of political culture. In *‘The Lion and the Ox’* story *Shenzbeh* finds no opportunity to defend him. Any reader can understand that it is the power and tyranny of the King does not let him do so.

There is no such definition for law in the mentioned political structure, and the mentioned group of people has no say in such system. In other words, law is the King and his ruling groups’ will and intention that changes as per their wish. Lack of definite laws in choosing and controlling the relationship of the individuals in such circle lets the gossips and conspiracies scatter.

### **OPPORTUNISM**

There are no equal opportunities in traditional political culture and system, and the individuals are not able to create progress grounds for themselves by usual ways.

In ancient political culture, due to lack of supervision, anyone tried to make an opportunity for themselves. In *Kelileh wa Demneh* various references have been made to shrewdness. This shrewdness means being opportunistic because of which one needs to lie. Demneh is one of the best characters who enjoys all such virtues. He is the one who belongs to the rustic people’s stratum and wishes to approach the ruling group owing to his wisdom and shrewdness and introduce himself as one of the closest servants of the King. He thinks the best way to do so is to behave per King’s preferences. He, owing to his wisdom, comes to know that the King is in difficult situation and uses that opportunity to reach his goals. The main reason for such behavior is to approach the ruling pyramid and (Nasr, 2000, p: 103)

In the next stage he tries to maintain his position and his slogan is to behave according to any given situation (Monshi, 1993, p: 279).

### **SECRECY AND DISGUISE**

Maintaining others’ secrets is a good behavior, but too much emphasis to do so is not supposed to be a good behavior. In *Kelileh wa Demneh* power is accompanied by strength, there is no trust between political system and the people. From the other hand, the trust among the people is destroyed as well. Resultantly, secrecy and disguise becomes a significant principle and gives noticeable power to some individuals and accentuates their presence among the people. The

writers of the *Kelileh wa Demneh* regard secrecy and disguise a positive and necessary trait of the characters employed in their stories. Such mistrust is so prevalent in *Kelileh and Demneh* that it is stated that “do not trust your friends and companions” (Monshi, 1993, p.99).

Typically, in such conditions the political behavior and its unwelcome impacts increase.

### People’s Role

People are not so important and have no role. In the ancient writings the word *people* is used very less. If ever it was employed, it referred to human beings or the servants of the King. The word *servant* is used to mean people or in fact those who serve the King for he is the best.

It is the peoples’ obedience which connects them with the King. All the people are his servants for he knows their good better than themselves. It is better to say that the relationship between the King and the people is like that of the shepherd with his flock of sheep. The King protects the people not because of their importance, but because of the profit they provide him. So, the cultures, as seen in *Kelileh wa Demneh*, bring about behaviors:

**Table 1**

The Power and Political Culture in <i>Kelileh wa Demneh</i>		Results
1	Holiness of the King	Hypocrisy and Lie
2	Conspiracy	Gossip and Accusation
3	Opportunism	Deception
4	Secrecy	Lack of Trust
5	People’s Role	Serving and Obeying

## DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Since the political culture and the power are of the significant elements in giving shape to the thought and behavior of the people in any society, studying such elements of *Kelileh wa Demneh*, which has stemmed from the ancient Oriental countries including India, Iran as well as Arab communities, will reveal many facts about human beings and their relationships in such societies.

One of the characteristics of the Oriental societies is categorization of the people as such that reaching the power-holders’ category is not easy at all. In ‘*The Lion and the Ox*’, the most significant story of the *Kelileh wa Demneh*, *Demneh* is killed for he wanted to approach the power-holders’ category. *Shenzbeh* is also killed for the same reason. The history of India shows the same trend as well. It is seen that in Indian political culture there always dominated the system where different categories existed.

The caste-class system and the related political culture have immensely impacted the theme and stories of the *Kelileh wa Demneh*. Most of the stories revolve around the conspiracy, and, generally, the relationships and wishes of the higher-ranking castes of the society are always stated.

The writers of the *Kelileh wa Demneh* tried to educate political culture, but many of their stories were written based of conspiracy, trickery, opportunism, etc. Unlike the moral dialogues, such kind of culture has impacted the characters of the stories and it still survives among the Oriental (Indian, Iranian, and Arabian) people. Such behaviors

include: talking ironically, maintaining secrecy, complimenting, hypocrisy, lying, and lack of trust in others.

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