

# A study on the political marriages in pre-Islamic period of Iranian history

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## Abstract

Women have played an important role as spouses or mothers in Iranian society and the married women and the mothers with many children were respected in the past in Iran. Although, in some historical periods, desires and will of a woman in selection of her husband were honored but most of the marriages of convenience were done without considering desire of spouses and generally, a woman left her family and got married without her content. This article tries to investigate samples of such marriages in Iran in pre-Islamic period and in Persian literature in order to study the consequences of such attitude in the society by survey on the reasons for political marriages.

**Keywords:** political marriage, Persian literature, pre-Islamic Iran, victimized woman

## Introduction

In history, marriage of convenience was conducted based on the policies and preservation of the family. In these marriages, love and will of spouses are mainly ignored and the parents and heads of the tribes select spouses of their children or fiancée of the princess or aristocrats without consulting about this important subject matter. Woman is transacted like a slave and maid and she is inherited like properties by death of man.

During centuries, many women were used as scapegoats or addition of a land, city, river, house and cruelty since marriage was a common, convenient and reliable way for the political contracts.

Marriages of convenience were conducted in order to have relationship between two countries or tribes or nations or establishment of king ship or following special goals that sometimes were accompanied by plot and deceive in addition to deliver children.

These marriages were certainly done based on plans and special ceremonies and avoiding one of the parties led to war and fight. Sometimes, the woman who got married without her will for different reasons spent her life in harem with difficulties and hardship dominated on such societies and she was killed in order to prevent trapping in enemies' hand. When a woman got married she encountered with different problems and she had to bear so, she was vulnerable to physical, mental and social disorders.

## Literature review

### *Marriage in old Iran*

Married women and men were respected in ancient Iran. They believed in holiness of marriage and single men and women were blamed. In old Iran, the main goal of marriage was delivery of children especially boys in order to use their power, bravery, and physical and mental power and employs them in wars.

“In Herodotus opinion, having many children was honored by Iranians in addition to brevity in wars and the custom of several wives was common for these reasons. In Iranian societies, those parents were honored that they had brave and powerful sons and crowded family” (Briant, 2002)

Birth of a child was important for families and

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raising children was considered the main duty of a woman and the husband could divorce his wife in case of infertility in ancient Iran so, it was one of reasons for termination of marriage.

### *Political marriages*

According to the available documents, some kings arranged political marriages and the princesses and sisters of kings and rulers got married with neighbors' countries kings and princesses. In any case, the aim was establishing friendship among nations and preservation of governments' common boundaries and prevention of political crises among governors that it was common as political marriages.

#### **The goals of political marriages**

“Political goals for establishing relationship with other countries were the main reasons for marriage with daughters of the kings and rulers of other lands. So the women of the upper classes were scapegoats and they were transferred from one golden cage to other golden cage and they were not consulted about marriage and their interests and attitudes were ignored because of their wealth and social status and welfare (Hejazi, 2006).

Herodotus points to diplomatic marriages: “agreements are not powerful and long lasting without family bonds (Briant,2002)

Undoubtedly, being bride groom enhances the social status of a person. The bride grooms were empowered and they were owed to king because of promotion of their status and indeed marriage of daughters was one of the elements of king power.

“Being bridegroom of king was not considered an acquired right and it was kingship offering.” (ibid: 482).

Also, political marriage was one of the creative ways of establishing power in other nations. Alexander order to marriage of ten thousands Macedonians and Greeks with Iranian women and other nations was one of these conduct that emphasizes on the importance of these marriages.

#### **Forms of political marriages**

Seeking benefits and policy making of men in exploitation of girls and women was so that the special forms of marriage were common; it can be referred to followings:

1-inter group marriage

2-outer group marriage

Inter-group marriage

In this marriage, that it was considered as a tribe

privilege, only the king could marry with daughters' of the tribe head that it was changed to marriage with close relatives: “Cyrus got married with Kasandandaneh daughter of Pharnaspes and Kambojuyeh got married with Fadimye the daughter of Aetna (Dandemaev, 1973).

From other forms of intergroup political marriages, it can be referred to marriage of women with Iranian conquers. The women of the loser or killed kings got married with winner kings. “Atosa the daughter of Cyrus got married with his brother Kambojuyeh, liar Bardiya and Dariyush after death of his father. Maroeh the daughter of Cyrus was wife of Kambojuyeh and first Dariyush .Fadimeh was wife of Kambojuyeh, Priest Goemat (lair Bardiya) and first Dariuysh. Atosa the daughter of second Ardashir that she was wife of his father got married with his brother the third Ardashir” (Hejazi, 2006).

### *Outer group marriage*

From political marriage forms, it can be referred to outer group marriage by different reasons. The marriage of women with foreign conquers was one of these forms. According to Hassan Pirnya, proposition of peace by the third Dariyush to Alexander was one of the inferior proposition of marriage of convenience in old history.

“Darius proposed marriage of his daughter with Alexander with three thousands (thirty thousands) Talans and since Alexander rejected, Darius understood that there was no way except war”(Bahar, 1978).

There is a historical contradiction about Marriage of Roshanak, the daughter of Dara with Alexander in Nizami Sharaf nameh. Apparently, this marriage seems inauspicious since specified events do not happened but if we consider that “ in Macedonia, an Iranian king that dominates on Iranians by this plan and his successors rule out several years in this territory ,we could accept that this marriage deserves general rules”(Sarrami, 1998).

It can be pointed to marriage of Amnites the niece of the third Ardashir with Keratros.

“Amnites the niece of the third Ardashir got married with the third Ardashir by order of Alexander and since she was divorced after death of Alexander, she got married with Dionysus the ruler of Herat (Gotshmid, 1977).

### *Marriage as a reward of victory*

In order to encourage of the officers, they were sometimes given marriage promise and the girls

were determined as a reward of victory. This issue has been referred in memory of “Zairian Key Goshtasb” where some officers were encouraged to revenge of Zarir: “from your releasers, they are persons who have rancor of Zarir that person who I want give him my daughter as his wife that she is the prettiest woman. Do I give him ruling of Iran?”(Bahar *et al.*, 1996)

### *Number of wives among Medes*

Herodotus points “In every Median family, the father was powerful and a man had several wives”(Pirniya, 2010).

The Median men got married with several women and they were never single. Their women were considered their properties and they killed their wives in wartime to prevent to be taken captive.

### *Samples of political marriage among Medes*

1-Marriage of Astiyagh (Eshtovigu) in his father period (Hovakhshatreh) with daughter of Lidia king: Cameron writes about this marriage:“ six years after war between Hovakhshatreh and Alvaltes and after seeing eclipse of the sun in 585 B.C and dealing of Nabu-Naid the ruler of Babel and Syennesis the king of Cilicia they agreed that Halys river(recent Gizil Irmak) become the boundary between Medes and Lidia and for stability of this boundary, it was determined that Aryenis the daughter of Alvaltes get marry with Eshtovigu” (Cameron, 1986).

2-Marriage of princess of Babel, Nabuchodonosor with Amytis, the small daughter of Eshtovigu, the son of Hovakhshatreh: “According to Brass, the Biblical historian, from beginning and before attack on Assyrian, Nubopolser agreed with Kiyakasar and his son Nabuchodonosor got married with his daughter Amaitid (Dandemaev, 1972).

### *Political marriage in Ashkanian period*

In this period like other periods, the women were stabilizing agent for the political relations. It can be pointed to marriage of the forth Farhad with “Moza” the Italian maid for empowering and establishing of the kingship and achieving of nations content.

“Since Oketavius the Cesar of Rome did not believe in expansion of Rome, he avoided war ,so he became friend of forth Farhad and he sent Italian maid Moza to him for establishing the relations”(Gotshmid, 1977).

In addition to this marriage, the marriage with relatives as a political marriage was common as in-

tergroup marriage in this period. Diakonov writes: “in second year B.C, the fifth Farhad got married with his mother Moza” (Dandemaev, 1972).

### *Sassanid and samples of political marriages*

In this period like other previous periods, the kings and rulers established their kingship with political marriages. Because of following special goals, the conditions of marriage were uncommon in these marriages and beliefs and affairs of women were ignored.

“Anoshiravan got married with Christian woman and she was free in her religion. Khosro Parviz got married with two Christian women” (Hejazi, 2006).

The marriage of Parviz with Miriam, the daughter of Roman Cesar leading to being poisoned of Merriam by Shirin has been explained elegantly in Nizami Khosro Shirin:

Since Cesar saw fortune in his door  
He gave the throne and crown  
And he accepted Christian’s religion  
He gave his daughter Merriam to him  
Two kings offered many conditions in kingly marriage  
The story of the bride and bride groom was told  
Among Romans and this marriage was respond to Roman

“Marriage of Parviz with Christian Shirin leads to painful suicide of Shirin because of oppression of her son in law, Shiryoueh beside her dead husband” (Sarrami, 1998).

The king had a daughter called Merriam  
She was wise, pretty, powerful and experienced  
He gave her to Khosro according to his religion  
And consulted with God  
The daughter accepted the marriage  
According to kingship religion  
Then she brought furniture  
It was so many that the pillars of the palace were removed  
From kingly gold, jewels and sapphire and silk-clothes and Roman textile  
The country should be decorated by this marriage  
When it was done by Romans  
The evil enhanced to thousand thousands from three hundreds  
(Shahnameh, 1995)

In this Part of Shahnameh, Firdausi describes Miriam story skillfully and this is witness of political marriage for establishing of the relationships between Iran and Rome that leads to increase of Iranian king wealth.

The difference between marriages of this period and other periods is that none of Iranian women and girls got married with the men of other countries.

“The rules of a country preserve purity of blood of families and their intangible properties. About loyal family mentioned in Farsnameh originated from Sassanid period regulations ,it has been said that the kings of Fars got married with Chinese ,Roman and Indian girls and they never gave their girls to other nations, Iranian girls got married with Iranians”(Briant, 2002).

Although non marriage of Iranian girls with foreign men has been emphasized, but the conditions and reasons for marriage of convenience were sometimes breached so that it is said: “the sister of third Shapur got married with Armenia Christian king” (Mehrin, 1970).

Also, Christianson in his book of “Iran in Sassanid period” refers to Shahrbanu, the daughter of Yazgerd that got married with Emam Hussein; she was one of the luckiest girls of Sassanid dynasty.

## Conclusions

There are many references to the role of women in pre- Islamic and post Islamic periods in Persian literature. These works uncover the important role of them in social life of the men.

In this article by study the issue of “political marriages in Iran in pre-Islamic period” we comprehend that women were agents for establishing the political and tribal relations. They were sometimes used as gift for encouragement and motivation of the officers.

Seeking benefit by using women in that period was common so that issue of marriage was tied with “intergroup”, “outer group” and “reward of victory” concepts that they were applied by own justifications. But this tradition was respected in old Iran and being single was blamed .One of the main goals of marriage in pre Islam period was delivery of boys for employing them in wars that this subject is contradicted by humanity and exalted goals of marriage.

According to the documents, the rulers had been used women in order to establish the relationship among nations and preserve boundaries and prevent political crises but by increase of religiosity and mangemnt of the rulers, this trend has been reduced in human societies.

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