

The Image of Woman among Mongols and Their Successors in Persian Context

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Abstract. The Current paper aims to survey the role and status of women among Mongols, the tribes which captured China and went on until North Africa. They soon penetrated into the heart of Europe. No doubt in such a long journey women constantly stood beside them as well, not only Mongolian women but also the foreigners, all of whom laid a particular influence on Mongols based on their culture and beliefs. The author, based upon reputable written resources of 7th and 8th A.H sets out to investigate the positive and negative role of women among Mongols and their successors. The characteristics enumerated may still be traced in

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1. Introduction

Seventh century and in particular the year 616 A.H will never pass into oblivion in the imagination of Iranian nation. It was the time when bloodthirsty barbarian tribes galloped towards Iran and put it under their thumb for more than a century. Though Chingiz Khan did not decide to attack Iran firstly, the stupidity of Iranian King and his fellows made them troop to Iran with a big army; they, confronting no serious defense, could soon capture cities and villages one after the other. They flowed from Northern Tibet and after passing through Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan reached their destination. Their arrival resulted in the pitiless slaughter of hundreds of thousands of innocent people and the devastation of various scientific and cultural centers. After the murder of Sultan Jalal-Al-din and the capture of various parts, a relative peace pervaded; they now found themselves in a region with which they had culturally and ideologically no identification. Under the influence of Iranians, they then set out to west and captured Baghdad and parts of Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt. Some of them also penetrated far into Europe.

They were merely equipped with rudimentary rituals, superstitions, and laws of Eastern Asia. Following a ruthless massacre, they did their best to make Iranians withdraw from their Islamic and Iranian beliefs and customs. Conversely, these are Mongols who must at last bow to the rich Iranian civilization and religion and they soon cut their ties with previous fanatic thoughts. In this painstaking process, we shall never dismiss great characters who sacrificed their lives as regards; greats such as Khajeh Nasir Al-din Toosi, Rashid Al-din Fazlollah and his sons. We will subsequently however, focus on the role and identity of women among these barbarian tribes; in addition, we point out to the negative role of women in the period of Mongol successors.

Women held a valuable position among Mongols and were enjoying the same freedom as men. Such a status is unique in the history of Iran after the appearance of Islam. Chingiz used to praise women as red, colorful and shining like fire and felt responsible to provide them with appropriate welfare (Rashid Al-din Fazlollah, 1374, p.479). Mongol women were generally modest and chaste and for them sexual abuse was reckoned as a deadly sin. They did not feel obliged to cover their hair and face because they believed it is men's responsibility to bridle their eyes. Markopoulos, the famous Italian explorer in his visit to Iran describes Mongol women as peerless with respect to their chastity, modesty and sense of duty toward their husbands (Markopoulos, 1350). According to Chingiz's decree women were responsible to provide their husbands with comfort and to check their armament (Atamalek Joveini, 1385, p.32). All princesses had a private tent and received certain budgets or enjoyed their private property's income. When Ghazan Khan was on the throne, a private treasury was allocated to women which was filled by the royal income. He, himself, has also used from the treasury once to incur the expense of war (Rashid Al-din Fazlollah, 1374, p.1091). Women had a share in spoils of war and in the time of peace they enjoyed financial gifts. Royal women,

especially the mothers of Khans, could interfere in political affairs and were reckoned as consultants. They could accompany their husbands in wars and were also able to issue the orders of attack and massacre. To illustrate, Changeihz's daughter after the murder of her husband, issued the order of slaughter in Nishapur; according to witnesses no living creature could survive the bloodshed (Mohammad Ebn Ali Shabankareh, 1363). They were so much independent that they could welcome the royals or accompany them. They were totally free to choose their religion and could opt for a religion different from their husband's. Khan's wife could temporarily sit on the throne after their husband's death so that they find a substitute (Atamalek Joveini, 1385, p.692).

Based upon the matrimonial laws, bride was purchased. They married too early. To suit, letters were exchanged between both families and the engagement period which sometimes prolonged to one year, was spent in bride's family house. After marriage she came to groom's house and letters of congratulation were exchanged. Engagement was also popular among children and if one of them died before marriage, wedding celebration was performed even after his or her death; by which two families were considered relatives. In this case the marital contract was burnt as well as the properties of the dead mate and the bride's dowry (Bertold Spuler, 1374, p.390). Before marriage, if one of the sides died, his or her family found a substitute for him or her. If the bride died, her sister or one of her relatives would substitute her. The same was true for the groom. The mentioned ritual persisted even after marriage (Rashid Al-din Fazlollah, 1374, p. 123). Marriages usually took place mutually so that families expected a daughter from the groom's family too (p. 422). Polygamy was customary and men, considering their wealth, were free to marry infinite number of girls; some of whom had fifty or one hundred wives. When Uktai sat on the throne, he was gifted with forty virgins (Bertold Spuler, 1374, p. 254). Since Khans were reckoned as divine messengers, they could handpick and take possession of the prettiest ones. This freedom of act should not however be taken into account as corruption or immorality to be reproached, since khan's privilege was completely normal under the law and also revered. Women after marriage were considered as members of their husband's family. In case her husband dies, she might marry to his husband's great son (not her son of course). Sometimes too, aggression might fire between brothers upon the possession of father's wife (Rashid Al-din Fazlollah, 1374, p. 108). We rarely face with single men and women and not surprisingly a son might make preparations for the marriage of his widow mother e.g. Changeihz and Abu Saied. Marriage with mother, sister and daughter was inhibited. Marriage with two sisters was allowed. In some cases, the subdued ruler would dedicate his daughter to the Mongol khan as a sign of obedience (Rashid Al-din Fazlollah, 1374, pp. 326/327). Mongol capturers used to take possession of the defeated ruler's wives. Changeihz, for example, owned more than 500 mistresses, all of whom were seized from different tribes. Marriages sometimes served to bring peace between two tribes or countries; one striking example is the marriage of Abagha and Maryam, the daughter of the emperor of Byzantine. In other cases, marriage was a means of extending territory since Mongols believed that marital bond causes the right of inheritance. Some women served the khan merely as mistresses to sleep with and accompanied them constantly in wars. Fornication and incest, though inhibited, were both rampant among them (Rashid Al-din Fazlollah, 1374, pp. 973/1113). As mentioned before, Mongol khans had total right to take possession of any woman even if she was married. In one famous example, Sheikh Hassan desperately divorced his wife to marry Sultan Abu Saied after the collapse of Baghdad (Mohammad Ebn Ali Shabankareh, 1363, p. 295). Khans used to employ wet nurses after the birth of their children. They had to be milky and strong and were not allowed to have sex with their husbands during this period because according to Mongol's belief pregnancy will cause disease for child. Divorce had no place among them until the kingdom of Ghazan Khan who affected by Islam, legalized it (Rashid Al-din Fazlollah, 1374, p. 843).

Shah Shoja had employed a loyal ruler in Kerman. His name was Pahlavan Asad Khorasani. Makhtoom Shah was Shah Shoja's mother. She later became Pahlavan Asad's foe. Makhtoom shah writes a letter to his son Shah Shoja and tells him that Pahlavan Asad plans to disgrace me. Shah Shoja becomes irate and troops toward Kerman wherein Pahlavan Asad was ruling. Kerman's fort was so high and reinforced so that, they decided to besiege it for a month. Finally shah Shoja decided to trick Pahlavans Asad's private doctor. He told him to give a message to Pahlavan Asad's wife that if she help shah Shoja to enter the fort, he will marry with her. Shah Shoja was so nice and handsome and all the women would fell in love with him when they saw him once. Thus, Pahlavans Asad's wife was tempted and decided to betray her husband. She (Beigi)

pretended that she had a bad malaria thus Pahlavans Asad' doctor (Mirza jalal Eslam) could enter her room and keep in touch with her to consult with each other. They first decided to feed Pahlavan with poison but they dreaded that their plot may be revealed and in this case Pahlavan would order to kill of his relatives so they changed their plan. They decided to make a hole toward the outside of the fort and to muffle the sound of the diggers, she ordered her servants to produce a lot of noise. They succeeded and at last Shah Shoja could enter the fort at night. He killed Pahlavan Asad and all his sons, cutting their head. Unluckily Beigi's fate is not mentioned in history after this accident. Shah Shoja then came to Lorestan and married with its ruler's daughter. Soon a plot was revealed against him, so to quell the violence, he tortured a lot of his followers and also made his own son (Soltan Shebli) blind and banished him. He cruelly gouged out his father's and his son's eyes. It is said that in his last years of life because of mental illness Shah Shoja used to always drink wine (Mohammad Ebn Khavandshah, 839 A.H, p.184). What is very famous about Shah Shoja is his beauty. His teacher Moeen al-din Joneidi says that he had never seen such a nice man. When he walked in the city all women and girls came out just to watch his charming face.

Khand Sultan, the beautiful daughter of Amir Keikhosro married to Mahmud, the brother of Shah Shoja. Shah Shoja, who was famous for his beauty, wrote to her that if you kill Mahmud, I will marry you. The plot was however revealed by the other court women. Mahmud facing with the bitter fact and despite his great ardor for his wife murdered her. Two brothers then decided to marry the daughter of Sultan Oveis. Mahmud won the completion. Depressed severely at the loss of his former beloved, he however became totally mad and died. Daughter of Sultan Oveis green with envy took Khand Sultan's body out of her grave and burnt it(Mohammad Ebn Khavand, 832 A.H, vol. 4, p.180).

2. Acknowledgments

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3. References

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