

MAHSATI GANJAVI'S ROMANTIC LOVE PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

The article studies the literary works of the poetess-philosopher Mahsati Ganjavi, one of the outstanding female representatives of the medieval culture of the Muslim East. The author focuses the attention to the multi-aspect implication of Mahsati's views on love, opens their philosophical essence. According to the author, Mahsati Ganjavi's views on the problem of gender equality, women's freedom, the content of love as a sensory-corporal and celestial-moral feeling, her views on divine love, were of great importance in their time for their philosophy, liberalism and originality.

Key words: Islam, love, love philosophy, freedom, woman, gender equality, marriage

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The outstanding representative of the medieval culture of the Muslim East Mahsati Ganjavi (1089-1160) had a profound education in her own time. When getting acquainted with her poetic legacy, it turns out that she had some knowledge in mathematics, astronomy, philosophy and a number of humanities. It should be noted that in the Medieval context, in the period when women's rights were restricted, the maturation of a talented poetess like Mahsati Ganjavi acquired a special significance and appeared as one of the symptoms of the general cultural level, of the novelty formed in the views, and of free-thinking.

I. LOVE AS A WORLDVIEW CATEGORY IN MAHSATI'S LITERARY WORKS

In Mahsati Ganjavi's worldview the notion "love" is complex and multi-aspect. Her views on love do not confine themselves to the boundaries of the norms of Islam and national traditions. In Mahsati's view, love is the essence of life, the inspiration source of creativity. The philosopher-poetess perceived the world through the category of love which acted as a universal creative force. According to Mahsati's love philosophy, the creation of life is associated with divine love. One can see and feel divine love in the depth of the developmental harmony of the reality. Divine love is manifested in the individuals' personal sentiments as terminable. In other words, the love and union of the divine and cosmic beginning manifest themselves in the sentiment of an individual. The union of the lover with his/her beloved, his/her attempt to get united, the creator's love of the created, its manifestation and establishment in it happen to acquire an analogy. The warm attitude and sentiments of a human being to another human being result in the "Heaven's" love of the Earth, substantiate Tengri's mercy on and pardon of the human being. The mutual love turns into an understandable interaction, kind relations, positive thinking and friendship. The sentiments to the terminable lead to the love of the eternal. From this perspective, the relations of the personal sentiment act as an element of the absolute love. An individual actualizes his/her potentials in his/her personal sentiment, meanwhile a divine illumination takes place in the depth of the lover's heart.

In Mahsati's love philosophy the world is artistic in its essence and the human soul is full of unconscious love. That is why, the praise of love and the expression of intimate feelings are as natural as the understanding of the essence of the reality. In Mahsati's literary works the conception "the world" is mostly built on the basis of an idea of love acting as

a great transcendental force. In her view, the real love is ontologically associated with the idea of infinity and union. The idea about the union of the world is formed following the individualization of divine love in the personal sentiment which, in its turn, acquires special importance in the background of views about endless love. In Mahsati's love philosophy the idea of the unity of the reality embraces the relativity of the notions of time and space. The time and space of the people loving each other get identical, and when at a long distance the lovers perceive each other and mutually sense each other's joy and pain, there appears a single internal time and space. The physical separation of the lovers cannot sever their unity, because they are bound through the eternal love and the unity of souls.

In separate bodies we are a single soul.

I know your worth, my unique pearl! [2., p. 110]¹

In Mahsati's love philosophy there is a majestic union of love and religion. Through love there appears a world harmony invisible to the eye of the believers:

Idolatry is welcome, if you are an idol,

Fuddle is welcome, if you serve wine in your bowl.

I so disappeared in your love that

This non-existence is better than being existent. [2., p. 47]

In Mahsati's philosophy love becomes cosmic and even in some sense holy. Physical love and moral love are united at the level of cosmic energy in Mahsati's love philosophy. Understanding a human being as the unique genuine phenomenon of life allows Mahsati to understand the world at a new philosophical level in infinity. The world conception based on Mahsati's love philosophy implies the understanding of natural harmony, divine fate in certain form:

The precious stone of love is from a different mine,

A different place the lovers have chosen. [2., p. 98]

¹ Mahsati Ganjavi's poetic pieces cited in this article are literal translations from the original. Numbers refer to the list number in the references.

The integrated attitude towards the world and its phenomena excludes an unequivocal attitude to the surrounding reality. The memories about the boundless unity and the feelings about the endless wholeness are united through love in Mahsati's philosophy. In Mahsati the conception "love" implies the gradual dissolution of the personalities and individuals in each other, because the supreme goal of love is overall *wahdat* and unification in harmony. According to the poetess-philosopher, *wahdat* implies the removal of all the conflicts, separations with the help of love. Mahsati expresses confidence in the mystic essence of the corporal love manifested in human soul. The contradictions of those subjective and objective are repelled in the sense of love, and it rises to the peak of endlessness.

II. THE SENSORY-CORPORAL AND CELESTIAL-MORAL IMPLICATION OF LOVE IN MAHSATI'S LEGACY

Mahsati's philosophy addresses not only an ideal and supreme love but also its sensory side. For the poetess-philosopher the real vital beginning and the joy of sensory existence are one of the leading motives of love philosophy. In Mahsati's philosophy the sensory love turns into an indivisible part of human life. The celestial, moral and sensory-corporal love constitutes a part of the morality of a personality striving to attain the Universum. On the other hand, the individual-emotional love in Mahsati's love philosophy is deprived of rational supports, it is beyond the social essence. Mahsati's love philosophy establishes an ideal of a harmonious union based on the moral and physical unity of the lovers, partners.

Bestow upon me a kiss from your sugar lips,
Not a kiss, but two, three, four, five, please... [2., p.110]

For the lovers the difference between I and You disappears. The poetess-philosopher's works unite the intimate love and spiritual love and restores the harmony in the relations. The harmony in the individual relations serves the divine unity.

In Mahsati's literary works the feeling of love is as much immaterial, invisible as much as it is physical. It takes the entire control over the human being and violates his/her moral balance; however, love also reflects the eternal brightness of the truth and hallows the human being. In Mahsati's literary works the lover acquires an implication both unreal and abstract as

well as concrete and individual. In a word, in her literary works the restoration of corporal love takes place, love switches from its anonymity to concreteness. Her *rubais* create the images of real lovers, the authoress begins to get interested not only in the feeling of love and personal impressions but also the lovers themselves. Mahsati considers love not as a metaphysical category, but as a form of the mutual relations of human beings.

On the other hand, Mahsati's notion of love expresses the very corporal love, but the one which has become tender and exalted to the infinity. Mahsati has brought moral exaltation and tenderness to the corporal thrill. According to the poetess, love is the energy of feelings, it is the feeling of perceptions which cannot be defined. The synthesis of wits and feelings takes place corporally, physically. The outcome of this love is the creation of fine feelings and relations at all levels, which is manifested in a loving person in connection with the love he/she experiences towards his/her beloved one.

In Mahsati's literary works the corporal love has been exalted to its natural level. The poetess-philosopher's love philosophy continues the line of consolidation of the right to express one's own feelings including the intimate feelings based on the natural thrills of human nature. Besides, Mahsati's love philosophy discovers the idea of the lovers' completing each other.

One night I happened to encounter that beloved,
From her honey lips hundreds of kisses I derived. [2., p. 97]

It should be noted that the precisely drawn images of women in Mahsati's work have definite resemblance to the courtesan poetry, where too much description adds special importance to the subject.

Thus, for Mahsati, love is the most natural feeling, alongside with being abstract and impersonal. Mahsati's statements giving preference to natural urges, personal sympathies over moral obligations and favouring corporal motives were met with criticism, and she was appraised as "an unethical poetess", "a dancer", "a lover".

1. Mahsati's Idea of Gender Equality

In Mahsati's love philosophy the problem of equality in mutual relations of genders is one of the most important problems. For Mahsati, in love the difference between women and men is removed, both of them are reviewed as full members, subject of love relations.

If a piece of fire even as little as a needle falls out of your love,
It will burn a woman on one side and a man on the other. [2., p. 71]

According to Mahsati, love should, above all, be based on mutual understanding and equal rights. In the poetess-philosopher's opinion, norms cannot be eternal and unchangeable, they should be adapted to the relations among the members of society. According to Mahsati, for the loving woman love stands above the religious, national identity, mental traditions. Love is above the social reproaches and prohibitions. Mahsati's philosophy is characterized by the address, above all, to the notions "masculinity" and "femininity", not simply the notions "man" and "woman". When thinking about the manifestation of the categories "mankind" and "woman kind" in human nature Mahsati comes to a conclusion that the main indicators for the male character are hegemony and dignity.

Shun the one with defects in carriage and shoulders,
Women are better than a man of mean birth. [2., p. 101]

Whereas, the female character is mainly restricted to the limited circle of household and family values. This situation is consolidated by the existing customs and traditions, the dictate of religious and social rules. Mahsati was attempting to break the stereotypes about these categories and guide them towards the new current. For Mahsati's literary works the category "humanity" is the priority which unites both femininity and masculinity. According to her, the notion "a human being" reflects the harmonious wholeness in itself.

Almost in all her rubais Mahsati condemned the fact that women were not free and remained under the impact of social bans. The woman, who is repressed and targeted at by the social censure, is poeticized.

I encountered *dargha*² on my way yesterday
Bitterly, with a stick in his hand
He was beating a woman furiously
And all passers-by were watching the scene. [2., p. 137]

Mahsati's philosophy accepts a woman as the peak of divine creation; in comparison with

the man, she is more perfect and developed. According to Mahsati, only in love the woman is completely discovered, and by the birth of a child the great intention of Nature and the wonder of the cosmic feature become a realized ontological work.

Mahsati was one of the active proponents of women's freedom and considered that the detection and approval of the worthiness of a personality, his/her improvement will finally lead to the consolidation of high social and civil ideals. Mahsati's world-outlook rather outnumbered its period, in comparison with her contemporaries' views, it was more liberal and tolerant. Her view on the problem of women's freedom resulted in not unambiguous attitude in social opinion. The philosopher-poetess went against already-shaped stereotypes and view about the place and role of a woman in society. Mahsati's views on love and women were an innovative idea for their period.

2. The Problem of Marriage in Mahsati's Literary Works

As for the issue of marriage, it should be noted that in Mahsati's philosophy marriage acts as a transcendental phenomenon. She reviews the issue of the mutual relations of the opposite genders from the point of view of natural-legal traditions on the basis of which she develops the idea of the equal rights of genders. In inter-gender relations such concrete-vital manifestations expressed in marriage have, no doubt, some subjective and objective reasons, and these reasons find their reflection in some views.

*Kabin*³ binds a woman with a man,
This way is accepted by shari'a and religion.
And my *kabin* is a rhubai,
Will it be accepted by any religious doctrine? [1., p. 89]

According to Mahsati, a free will cannot force a woman to obey a man voluntarily. The subordination is against the harmony in the inter-gender relations.

Judging by Mahsati's literary works, it can be noted that "the change of mind" or the desire for separation by any of the two partners bound by the holy marriage contract will result in the family concern. This concern will irrationally or intentionally penetrate the surrounding world, the mood of dissatisfaction from one another will turn into energetic negatives which will keep the household and children under its influence. The woman, who

2 A village elder.

3 A marriage contract in Islam.

cannot escape the social censure and the family “yokes”, is confined to her given situation. She sacrifices her own happiness for the sake of her family, children.

Whereas, love implies accomplishing the beloved half's whole. When someone finds his/her other half, the world joins its own wholeness. The joy felt together embraces the gratitude of the spirit to the body as well as that of the body to the spirit. And when finds its manifestation in a legal marriage, then it also preconditions the spiritual and physical impeccability, the fate of the children born out of the joy of the real love.

It is known that prior to Plato's conception of Eros, the Greeks imagined a woman as a creature alien to man but powerful and whole. Whereas, Plato raised the problem of marriage to the level of the state policy, and the marital relations were reviewed by him not from the point of view of love and sensory passion but from the perspective of statehood and improvement of human material. According to Plato, every individual should establish a marriage beneficial for the state not just pleasing for oneself [3., p. 224], those reluctant to marry had to pay a monetary fine, as for respect, those who were junior to that individual would insult him whenever possible [3., p. 225]. Marriage is sacred, its chastity is protected by the state. The Greeks confined the woman to the frames defined by nature for her. The modern idea about two kinds of women – a woman-mother and a woman-courtesan was accepted by them back in the earliest times of the ancient Greek civilization.

In the philosophical conception of law Hegel suggested such an idea that marriage bears the obligation of raising the relationship between the opposing genders to the moral level of “self-realizing love”. The philosopher considered the moral nature of the family relations absolute. According to Hegel, a man represents a strong and active foundation, while a woman acts as a passive and subjective basis. Thus, he explained the different places of genders in the family and society.

For Fichte, the synthesis of “an active” man and “industrious” woman is also important. According to his conception, “a physical individual, as a moral human being, is not a man or a woman, but both of them” [8, p. 332]. Fichte suggested a statement about the moral necessity of establishing marital bonds, because for him “the person out of marriage – is just a half human being” [8., p. 332]. Whereas, Schlegel, in his turn, suggested an idea of joining the souls and bodies in one union on the basis of a harmonious union to attain Universum. According to Kant, it is in marriage that a woman gets free, while a man loses his freedom. In Kant's doctrine the gender equality is derived from “the equality of goals”, that is, from the equal rights for both husband and wife. However, Kant associated the idea of freedom with the

woman's subordinate state in the family and society, as according to the philosopher, the wife's obedience to her husband is the result of her free will.

In Mahsati's love philosophy the subject seeks in love his/her own approval and immortality, which is not associated with an official marriage. Given that the object of love is worth of the subject of love for his/her internal strength and potentials and in this sense is equal to it, love acquires the force of life and acts as the manifestation of life itself. In Mahsati's view, the real love is possible only in relation to “the equal”.

III. MAHSATI'S PHILOSOPHY OF HEDONISM

Mahsati's literary works develop two tendencies of understanding the relationship between personality and society: on the one hand, the loneliness derived from the lack of power of the personality before the social environment, the motive of shunning the reality and hopelessness, on the other hand, the expression of joy and optimism associated with the personality's skill to realize the world anew, the ability of enjoying life. In her creative works the philosopher-poetess acts rather as the proponent of the philosophy of hedonism. In her rubais enjoyment is set against asceticism. The main goal of Mahsati's heroes is enjoying the goods of the real world they live in.

Mahsati wrote:

Let there always be festivity for the arrival of the care-free in the ruins
Let the ascetics have the share of the fire of refusing the world. [1., p. 126].

Mahsati called the people not to deprive themselves from the joy of the reality but live a life rich in content. The poetess-philosopher was criticizing asceticism. She wrote:

Come here and let's play *jangi*⁴
Let's disgrace our name again drinking wine.
Let us sell the prayer rug for a wine-cup,
Let us break this fake glass by striking it against the rock. [1., p. 125]

4 A piece of music played prior to the battle.

Wine, gatherings of poetry, dance and music are characterized as the main categories of hedonism in Mahsati. In one of her rubais she wrote, "I won't exchange two thousand sons of preachers for a song" [1, p.105]. In Mahsati the physical joys of life are felt in love as the corporal feeling.

Mahsati well understood also that wine and piety do not go together and by calling people to enjoy their time in pleasure and drinking wine, she went consciously against religion. She openly stated in her rubais, "It is more pleasant to spend time with a wine glass in the hand rather than the night prayers", "We are wine-drinkers, not the people who perform prayers" [1, p.14]. These or other statements by Mahsati were openly of anti-canonical nature (see: 1, p.47, 55, 73). Mahsati saw no difference among religions: she treated Christianity, Judaism and Islam identically.

We come to a conclusion that in the poetess-philosopher's literary works the category "love" has, on the one hand, a religious tone, and on the other, a liberal and romantic content. Religiousness manifests, first of all, the mystic belief in superstitions beyond the shari'a restrictions not in the spirit of an official faith, and is understood by Mahsati as the strife for Universum. She criticized those who understood faith only as prohibitions and dogmas. The belief in the divine cannot be expressed only by religions. Although religions were the outcomes of beliefs, Mahsati was not satisfied with the indoctrination of the acts making faith obligatory. When religion turned into the human ideology rather than the manifestation of human psychology, sincerity retreats to the background, falsifications take place.

The Koran in one hand, and the cup full of wine in another,
We are sometimes with those who are *halal*⁵ and sometimes with those who are
*haram*⁶,
Thus, we live without choosing our way beneath this dome,
We are neither completely faithless nor quite Muslim. [1., p. 20]

Mahsati did not consider belief to be an obstacle in enjoying the pleasures of life. In many of her rubais she sharply mocked at some believers' externalism and simplicity [see: 1. p.38, 47, 62].

⁵ In Islam: religiously acceptable; meeting the norms of Islam.

⁶ The opposite of *halal*.

IV. THE PROBLEM OF FREEDOM IN MAHSATI'S LITERARY WORKS

Mahsati's ideal is a woman free in her choice in society, not burdened with the false ethics of society. The attempts to escape from the outdated social norms, the individual's protest against society, the rebellious challenge against the previous dependence on the one hand, and the acceptance of the social nature of a human being on the other, encourage Mahsati to seek for the rational balance in which a personality has not lost his\her inner freedom and has not severed the deep relations in society. Real love is boundless and expresses the willingness to the Absolute freedom. Love, which is a universal philosophical category, realizes the transition to the positive freedom, Universum as the manifestation of divine union. It is appraised as the provider of the harmony in mutual relations and impact between the entirety and part, the whole and part, general and special.

It is known that in personal love relations the two persons are obliged to partly give up their freedoms. As it is stated in a proverb, "Love is blind". The success of love over arrogance and pride is necessary. However, according to Mahsati, love stimulates the attempt to freedom. Since, the relations based on the mutual understanding and sympathy among the people are possible in the atmosphere of common freedom. The moral intimacy of a person, who is not free and whose dignity and honour are in "crisis", not only with the others, but with himself\herself, shatters.

Neither the force of an arrow can hold us,
Nor the four inert walls of the room full of sadness.
The one whose hair is the chain around her neck -
How can she be bound at home with chain? [2., p. 110]

From Mahsati's perspective, a human being is also a creature fearing her/his freedom. He\she has created religion, law, state, family, customs and traditions out of this fear. And then he\she attempts to go beyond the boundaries of these institutions, violates the norms, and restores his\her freedom and natural rights. Freedom bothers his\her comfort and social bans are against his\her happiness. If there were no social norms of ethics, the human beings would not try to violate them. When there is social control, the inner control happens to freeze its function. Whereas, the self-control of the human being is more ethical and fair. The person,

who perceives the control, tries to violate the imperative bans unconsciously.

I am a lonely dervish in the quarters of ruins,
 Serve me wine from that clay water pitch,
 I am a child in Sufism but inclined in heresy,
 I am neither the master nor the slave of anyone. [1., p. 66]

Mahsati's philosophy is characterized by understanding the individual in dialectic relation with his\her surroundings. Her ideal is a free personality. In Mahsati's love philosophy the notion "freedom" is understood as an individual, subjective will. The individual's will of making an independent decision is the guarantee of his\her freedom. The real expression of freedom is reflected outside the collective, in isolation. In that case not only the freedom of feelings but also that of behavior, actions is realized.

In Mahsati's philosophy there is freedom of bare expression of feelings, corporeality and passion. It should be noted that in romantic philosopher Friedrich Schlegel's opinion, "love is a free individual's pleasure, and human being constitutes only its subject matter" [4., p. 66]. Like in Mahsati, in romantic philosophy as well, love is the pleasure of free nature, it's complete and whole, and has by itself an endless source.

The spirit of freedom in Mahsati's nature and literary works has been pointed out by the researchers of her legacy. In the Foreword of Mahsati's "Diwan" the Iranian scholar Tahibi Shahaab wrote, "Mahsati... was free by nature. She was free in her words as well as her actions" [1., p. 5]. The Indian literary scholar Majid called her "*the nightingale that loved freedom*" [7., p. 73]. The Austrian scholar in Oriental studies Fritz Meier also pointed out Mahsati's courage and spirit of criticism. He wrote, "some of her rubais are targeted at the inner immorality and outside artificial piety, ... she also has some rubais against religion" [6., p.117].

Conclusion

To sum up, it should be noted that the radical changes in relation to women, took place also some time later following Mahsati Ganjavi. The idea of equality between the genders is brought forth also by such romantic women as Carolina Schlegel (1763-1809), Germaine de Stael (1766-1817), Bettina von Arnim (1785-1859). It should be mentioned that alongside with

Mahsati Ganjavi, such poetesses as Heyran Khanum (1790-1848), Khurshudbanu Natavan (1832-1897) advocated and acknowledged women as the equal members of society in their literary works. This fact allows us to say that despite the stern rules of Islam and the national mental bans in the East, there were democratic thoughts and the ideas of freedom and equality in the relations between genders in artistic works and philosophical views.

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