Persian Proverbs: Definitions and Characteristics
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ABSTRACT

An important factor in the recognition of Persian proverbs and realization of their differences with other nations' proverbs is giving a bright and all-embracing definition of Persian proverbs. The existing definitions are not expansive enough. Focusing on the existing definitions, and upon extensive study of the proverbs, the present article attempts to offer a scientific and all-embracing definition referring to the Persian proverbs' every property. In this article, we first deal with lexical meaning and roots of proverbs, then in the idiomatic definition section, analyzing 38 definitions from Arab, Persian and Western scholars and the definitions relying on the existing proverbs, reach the following full-scale definition.

Keywords: Persian Proverb, Conciseness and brevity, Reliance on experience, Metaphor, Simile, irony.

1. Introduction

A proverb is a short sentence, which is well-known and at times including advice, sage themes and ethnic experiences, comprising simile, metaphor or irony which is well-known among people for its fluent wording, clarity of expression, simplicity, expansiveness and generality and is used either with or without change.

The above definition includes sixteen keywords of proverbs' important characteristics and is the result of field study in the existing proverbs and definitions. Given this definition and by extension, sixteen characteristics of proverbs are stated, which are stated and discussed in the following parts. Moreover, important yet often disregarded properties of proverbs are rhythm and meter, which will be dealt with here. The corpus of the study is one thousand proverbs taken from the five main sources of Persian proverbs.

2. Research Methodology and Background

Among the Arabic sources, Meydani (1937) is the first one who puts forth several definitions of proverbs along with his own. Among the Persian Proverbologists, Bahmanyar (1384-2005) first merely states six definitions given by proverbologists and then his own, which is known to be the most expansive

The present article adopting a scientific method and studying 38 definitions of proverbs extracts the most important key terms and upon compilation of those arrives at 16 important characteristics which are given in a table along with their frequencies. The corpus of the study is one thousand proverbs taken from the five main sources of Persian proverbs.

3. The Definition of Proverb (Mathal)
3.1 Lexical Meaning

"Mathal" is an Arabic word and is a derivative of "Mothoul" carrying the meaning of likeness, it also means standing erect on the feet. The Sami root of this word is "Mathal" in Arabic, "Mathalan" in Arami, "Mesel" in Ethiopian all of which having the meaning of likeness. (Zolheim, 2002). In English the word "proverb" is used in the same sense.

The following definitions for the term proverb appear in Persian and Arabic Dictionaries:

a. Like, Resembling
b. Reason and Argument
c. Saying, Statement
d. Advice, Lesson
e. Sign, Symbol
f. Adjective
g. Story, Anecdote
h. Idiom (Proverb)
i. Fable
j. Role model
k. Biography
l. Stories bearing morals

In Moein Dictionary (1964: Under "Mathal"), the following definitions are given for "Mathal".

Like corresponding story and anecdote, famous fable, lesson and Advice. In Persian the terms "Daastan" or "Dastan" are used in this special sense and Bahmanyar (Bahmanyari, 2002) called his proverbs' collection: "Bahmanyari story collection". The Persian term "Daastan" is often used to refer to Mythes and Anecdotes. There are tens of verses in Shahnameh and other literary works in which "Daastan" and "dastan zadan" mean using proverbs; among them are:

"Yeki Daastan zad bar in shahryar, Ke doshman madar ar che khord ast khar (Shahnameh, Joul Moul 1116/1123)"

"Bedin daastan zad yeki rahnemoun, ke mehri fozon nist az mehre khoun (Shahnameh, Joul Moul 601/12)"

In the translation of Tabari's exegesis the term "Daastan" is often used in correspondence with "Mathal" (proverb)
"Chon Daastan Daane'I ast ke beruyad haft khushe andar har khushe sad daane (Tabari 134/1:1339).

Also in the book "The beauty of the word"(Neshaat, 1342) Neshaat has pointed out that at old times the word "Niyoushe" meant proverb. In Persian the word has had equivalents such as "goon", "saan", "haal", "sefat", as they are used by Meybodi, in his "Kashf-ol-Asraar" to mean "proverb". (Pournamdariyan 1989).

According to the research done by Ali Asghar Hekmat (1982) the term has been used eighty times in the holy Qur'an having five meanings: Fable, historical stories, point of contemplation and taking lessons, resemblance, adjective, perfect example.

The author of "Lesan-ol-Arab" (Ebn-e-Manzour 1929) has used "Matal" and "Mesl" in the same lexical sense meaning "Shebh" and "Shabah". The only difference is that "Matal" indicates logical similarity between ideas and "Mesl" indicates sensory similarity between people and ideas (Ibn-el-Jouzi 1987).

According to "Taghva" the reason for stories and anecdotes' being called "Mathal" is the similarity between the condition and action of the author and that of the audience and the persuasive aspects of this, he writes: "When an anecdote has such an effect as to show similarity between the form and characters of a story and the state of the audience and at the same time be counted as a guide and a role model, it functions as "Tamsil" or "Mathal". (1376).

Some (Hekmat 1982) differentiate between "Mathal" and " Dharb-Al-Mathal". Hekmat writes: "The term "Dharb-Al-Mathal" is made up from the two words "Zarb" meaning to hit, to state, to say, and "Mathal" meaning Proverb. The word "Dharb" here means stating a proverb and the reason for its use here is the mental effect and the movement and excitement they cause in the receiver. It is slamming the idea into the receiver's ear. So as to let it penetrate deep into the heart and soul of the receiver".

Generally the terms "Mathal" and " Dharb-Al-Mathal " are regarded as equivalents, however "Mathal" is a more general term encompassing the senses of " Dharb-Al-Mathal "; " Dharb-Al-Mathal " is the use and statement of "Mathal"; rather " Dharb-Al-Mathal " is the people's usage of "Mathal" in special settings.

3.2 Technical Definitions

To give an all-embracing definition for "Mathal", we had better first study examples of numerous examples of "Mathal" and then upon compilation of their shared ideas reach a complete and realistic definition.

3.2.1 Definitions Offered by Arab Scholars

1. Mobarred, the syntician and lexicographer :"Mathal" is a famous statement by which the second state is likened to the first; meaning the present state is likened to a similar past state. The present or second state is the tenor and the first or the past state is the vehicle.

2. Ibn-e-sekkit, the lexicographer :"Mathal" is a sentence used in cases of the same sense and different forms.
3. Ibrahim Nazzam, the second century poet and "Rhetorician" (death: 200 Hijri): A "Mathal" has four simultaneous advantages over the other forms of expression which can't have them all together, they are: Lexical Conciseness, Clarity of Meaning, Use of Simile and Tinges of Irony, this is the utmost degree of Rhetorics, no greater degree of which can be conceived in other ways. (Bahmanyari, 2002: 18).

4. Ibn-e-Moghafa': the advantage of "Mathal" over the other forms of expression is that a "Mathal" has a clearer meaning and a deeper effect on the mind of the receiver and a more extensive usage.

5. Abu-Obayd Ghasem-ibne-Salam the author of Al-Amsal. Arabic proverbs made up a branch of Arabic philosophy and rhetorics in the time of "Jahiliyyat" and Islam; they were used in speech and comprised three things: Conciseness of Expression, Correctness of meaning, Use of Simile.

6. Raghib-e-Isfahani (Death: 502 Hijri): A proverb is a statement about something similar; in other words it is to state something with the intention of implying another. (Parsa, 6: 2005).

7. Abulfazl Meydani, the author of Majma’-ol-Amsal : A Proverb is something like something else; it means that things are likened to it. (Meydani, 1973).

8. Georgi Zeydan the contemporary Egyptian writer: Proverbs are wise advices conceived by sound minds upon years of experience.

3.2.2 Iranian Scholars

1. Mohammad-Ibn-e-Abdolkhalegh Mihani the author of "Dastoor-e-Dabiri" (compiled between 576 and 585 Hijri Ghamari): A proverb is a short and favorable statement said about an event once upon a time and used today in similar cases, as instead of saying: "I am involved in the catastrophe and you just watch things." They say: «هرا دل هی سْزد ّ تْ را داهي» (Meaning that I suffer mentally and physically while you just experience minor damages.

2. Shams-e-Gheys-e-Razi the author of "Almo'jam-o-Ma'aiir-e Ash'ar-el-Ajam) He treats "Tamsil" and "Mathal" as equivalents and defines them as follows: It is also a kind of Metaphor, but in the form of a simile; as the poet wants to imply a special intention, he adopts words referring to another meaning and uses this as the example of his own intention. This figure of speech is much finer than abstract metaphors; as there is كرا خرماس نسماد خاز سارد مبتز نسماد دار سارد (Shams-e-Gheys-e-Razi 1981).

3. Hossein Shah, the author of "Khazinat-ol-Amsal" (Compiled in 1215 Hijri): A proverb is the state of the past; it introduces its author and time of emergence. A proverb is the statement of an event which has taken place and talked about long ago. (Hossein Shah, 5:2000).

4. Ali Akbar Dehkhuda (1906-1955) Dehkhuda as cited by Mo'ein, was too careful and meticulous to write a Preface for his "Amsal-o-Hekam"(Dehkhuda, 1966, the Preface of the Dictionary). He had found seventeen definitions for Proverbs in French, to him none of which were of help in the correct verification of proverbs, he couldn't get a convincing answer even in his correspondence with the French Academy (of Literature), however two definitions can be seen among his scattered writings: "Proverb is the likening of a concept or an abstract or a sense to another by use of a short and fairly fluent statement with the purpose of clarification or overstatement of the concept, like all non-advisory proverbs." (Dehkhuda, 1987) "Proverbs are generally in the form of imperative or negative-imperative sentences, Fluency and rhetorics are not the only factors that make proverbs out of them. Some times the reason is their frequency of usage; like the poems of "Ta'ziyah"(passion-play).
5. Ahmad Bahmanyar: A proverb is a concise sentence comprising a simile or sage concept which has become famous among the people for its fluency of expression, clarity of meaning and delicacy of composition, and is used with or without minor changes in daily conversations. (Bahmanyar: 2002).

6. Ali Asghar Hekmat: A proverb is a concise sentence in verse or prose. It is an ethical rule or order used by people from all walks of life, for its fluency of expression, simplicity and conciseness. (Hekmat, 1982).

7. Allameh Jalaleddin Homa’ii: A proverb is a favorable statement rich in meaning which has become famous, it deserves being famous and accepted by people from all walks of life; it might be based on a story or not, have a special usage or not. (Homa’ii, 1374).

8. Seyyed Yahya Borgha’i: A short sentence in verse or prose at times comprising a major moral and social advice which is short and simple but deeply influences the receiver and creates such a sensation and excitement in the receiver that s/he transfers the message from his ear well in to his/her heart. (Borgha’I, 1985).

9. Dr. Taghi Pournamdariyan: A proverb is a short but meaningful folkloric statement which belongs to the ethnic history as the folk ballads and lyrical stories do, and are in fact a part of the colloquial language. (Pournamdariyan, 1989).

3.2.3 Western philosophers

1. Cincious Aristotle, one of the Greek philosophers and literati: A proverb is a remainder of the demolished edifice of Ancient Philosophy which stands among the massive debris and is not destroyed for its conciseness of expression, clarity of meaning and ease of usage. (Bahmanyari, 1381).

2. Cervantes the famous Spanish poet: Proverbs are short sentences which are conceived by long term experiences.

3. Lord Russell, The English writer: A proverb is the child of the folk memory and the unique individual utterances.

4. Obe de saint Pierre, the French writer (1743): A proverb is a voice resonated from experience.

5. Wolfgang Mieder: A proverb is a folk statement, saying, sentence or expression comprising wisdom, truth, ethical principles, experience, lessons and advices about life which is transferred generation to generation. (Parsa, 2005).

6. Ottiki: A proverb is a sentence, advise, truth or concept being stated generally and concisely in ways of the folk which is the way of no author.

7. Rudef Zolheim, the author of the Ancient Arabic Proverbs: A proverb is a statement based on an independent, main idea which wins public acceptance and becomes famous; and as a result parts with its original case and gets adopted in all possible cases of usage without any deviation in form. A proverb is used in cases similar to that suggested in its outward form, which is why it is used by people even if they know nothing of its author and the reasons behind its creation. (Zolheim, 2002).

8. Larros, the French dictionary: A proverb is a short sentence based on the folk advisory speechways or some logical fact or tried experience well accepted by the people.

9. Encyclopedia Britannica: A proverb is a succinct and pithy saying in general use, expressing commonly held ideas and beliefs. Proverbs are part of every spoken language
and are related to such other forms of folk literature as riddles and fables that have originated in oral tradition.

10. The Dictionary of Literary Terms: A proverb expresses a general truth which is sometimes stated ironically. (Naghavi, 1997).

In Persian and Arabic proverbs there are some proverbs or semi proverbs about the usage and benefit of proverbs. There is no attribution of characters in a proverb (Dehkhuda, YEAR)

We extracted 16 characteristics from among the 38 given to offer a more exact definition for proverb. In order to observe the scientific aspects and be more precise, we first extracted the key terms of each definition and put them in order of frequency in the following table to find the emphasis on each characteristic in each of the given definitions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>The number of the definitions</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Conciseness and brevity</td>
<td>3A-5A-1B-4B-13-14-16-17-18-19-20-23-25-26 Please modify the table according to the new numbering</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fame and spread of application among people</td>
<td>1-12-13-15-17-18-22-23-24-25-26</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Advisory aspects</td>
<td>5-8-13-14-16-18-22-23-24</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Clarity and correctness of meaning</td>
<td>3-4-5-13-15-18-26</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Use of Simile</td>
<td>1-3-5-6-7-12-13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Effectiveness and attraction</td>
<td>4-12-16-27-33-37-38</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Sentence form</td>
<td>2-13-14-16-19-22-25</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Reliance on experience</td>
<td>8-11-19-21-22-25</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Expansiveness and generality</td>
<td>12-23-24-27-28</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ironical aspects</td>
<td>3-5-9-27</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Reflecting ways of life and thinking</td>
<td>8-22-26</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Simplicity and fluency of expression</td>
<td>13-14-16</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Extensive usage</td>
<td>4-14</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Metaphorical aspects</td>
<td>2-10</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Change of form</td>
<td>13-14</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Anonymity of the author</td>
<td>24-23</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

We will discuss in detail about the benefits, attributes and usages of proverbs, but first offer the following all-embracing definition including all the view points of the scholars of the past, which also takes the real life proverbs into consideration:

“A proverb is a short sentence, which is well-known and at times rhythmic, including advice, sage themes and ethnic experiences, comprising simile, metaphor or irony which is well-known among people for its fluent wording, clarity of expression, simplicity, expansiveness and generality and is used either with or without change.”
4. Proverb properties

4.1 Conciseness, brevity and shortness

Conciseness is the most important attribute among those given for proverbs in the definitions, and it is stressed in half of them. The brevity of proverbs is the result of their abrasion throughout history. This abrasion takes place both in the central thought and idea of the proverb, and in its language and form of expression, however some deeply rooted, distinguished proverbs never change as they age and are used in the same way as they were before.

The remaining proverb can replace the boring verbosities and adorn the speaker with the art of terseness; therefore the use of proverbs itself is tendency to be terse in language.

According to Ebrahim Nazzam, conciseness of expression in proverbs is the utmost degree of rhetorics of speech. (Bahmanyari: 2002).

Originally: A green leaf [is good enough] from the poor, a wolf's head [is good enough] from the cunning. 

Alexander Vosse Loski Believes that "To be satisfactorily persuasive one must transfer the most possible amount of information through the least possible number of words." (Shafi'I, 24: 1980).

As proverbs come from anecdotal, historical, social, superstitious or religious backgrounds, their reader or hearer knows the story, and fully grasps the meaning; therefore when we have no idea about the background of a story or a proverb, understanding becomes difficult. Proverbs such as: "آستین نو بخور پلو"، "میرم به اخیه" و "اسمش رو نبر خودش رو بیار".

And the like are based on stories and encompass lots of ideas and are thereupon considered to be terse. (Zolfaghari, 2005)

4.2 Fame and spread of application among people

The main property a sentence must have to be considered a proverb is its fame and spread of application, which in turn is connected to the other factors discussed in this section. Bahmanyar defines fame as follows: "Fame is that the proverb is generally used in one form and no change is seen in its words and composition, and when there are changes they are only minor ones, not disturbing the whole and not distorting the meaning." (Bahmanyar, 2002).

According to Allameh Dehkhuda rhetorics are not the only factors that make proverbs and make them famous. "The statements' spread of usage makes proverbs out of them, like the poems of Ta'ziyeh" (passion-play).

It goes without saying that this is not the only condition; proverbs must have other attributes such as advisory aspects, generality, metaphorical aspects, reliance on experience, simplicity, etc. Otherwise many of the famous sentences we hear every day like the jargon of the guilds, swear words, curse words, spells, songs and language clichés can be proverbs. Unfortunately in some books these also are categorized as proverbs.

Therefore many statements which are labeled as proverbs in dictionaries are not proverbs. In Dehkhuda's Amsal-o-Hekam thousands of famous poems, statements and ironies are labeled as proverbs, when they are not; that's because he doesn't believe in famousness in its primary sense and writes: "The spread of usage which is among the defining factors of proverbs, is not a determining factor, it happens a lot that someone hears a proverb for the first time, even out of context and in isolation, and his taste says that: This is a proverb, and sometimes in a foreign language one hears a statement for the first time and immediately says that this is a proverb; in neither case the person is aware of the frequency of application,
also when a statement is said for the first time and is not abandoned thereafter, and has even become widespread, something inexpressible must have been there. Therefore when they say widespread, they mean possessing the conditions of becoming widespread; meaning it possesses that delicate sense of proverbs which has made it widespread.” (Dabirsiyaghi, 1991).

Today proverbs are among the most important categories in folk literary and cultural studies. That's why simple colloquial words appear in them more than any other Persian forms of prose.

4.3 Advisory aspects

One of the prominent factors in defining proverbs which also appears in dictionaries is their containing moral lessons and advices. This is the reason why people use them as guides for doing or not doing things. This attribute of proverbs makes them the society's moral mediator. Bahmanyar calls proverbs the silver tongued preachers and the kind advisors which call people into learning the good manners and quitting the bad habits and deeds. Mediating and clearing their thoughts and manners in the best possible way. He continues to write that: "The preacher and orator might bore some of his hearers, no matter how sweet he talks, but proverbs don't have that shortcoming. Every ear enjoys hearing them and nobody gets bored in reading them." (Bahmanyar, 1948).

According to Parsa (2005) the high frequency of advisory proverbs means two things: First is the rule of the moral criticism over the society which might have religious backgrounds; second is the need of the society; meaning that the high frequency of advices in the society is an indicator of deviations from norms, corruption and immorality in the society. The moral aspects of human life and the need for silent but influential preachers such as proverbs are the chief reasons for the creation of proverbs. In the definitions given for proverbs, this attribute is expressed through terms such as "definite advises", "sage concepts", "moral advises" and "lessons for life"

4.4 Clarity and correctness of meaning

It means transparency of meaning and staying away from tautology, out-of-place repetitions, complexity and ambiguity; in other words all the points at work in rhetoric and by extension in the science of meanings. Rhetoric or clarity and richness of words is that the word is right, clear and appropriate for the situation; As "each word has its own place". Rhetoric comprises the transparency of the word and that of the speaker. It is the words' being away from two faults:

a. The use of unfamiliar, complicated words, which are farfetched and difficult to pronounce.

b. The use of words which are not formed according to the word formation processes introduced in Persian grammar like: حسب الخواهش، بارسان

The rhetorics of language is the sentences' being away from 5 faults:

a. The sentence is not made in accordance with the grammatical rules of the language, like verb omission not complying with the rules of ellipses, the use of plural pronouns for inanimate entities;

b. The use of word chains which are difficult to utter in order;

c. The use of a complicated sentence which difficult to understand; This complexity might be the outcome of a change in the position of words or an omission or the sentence's unclarity of meaning due to the use of farfetched metaphors and ironies.

d. The excessive use of long noun groups.

e. The undesirable repetition of an extra word in the sentence;
Transparency and clarity of language involves using fluent sentences, appropriate for the intention and situation. Original proverbs being widely used in Persian are in full agreement with the rules of rhetorics. From among a thousand proverbs we found no examples faulty in this respect. (See table.2)

4.5 The use of Simile

Most Arab literati have stressed this property as the pivotal idea of their definitions. This is also the case in the oldest definitions.

Meydani (1960) defines proverbs with emphasis on simile: "A proverb is something which some other thing is likened to it;"

Parsa (2002) sees this definition and those of the Arab literati faulty in four ways:
   a. Disregarding the brevity, spread of application and transparency of the proverbs;
   b. As the situation is omitted from the proverbs, they are metaphors and not similes;
   c. This definition encompasses all sorts of similes, when in deep structural proverbs, only mixed similes can be observed;
   d. This definition includes simple similes as well: Like a mountain

4.6 Effectiveness and attraction

Proverbs leave lasting impressions on their hearers due to their simplicity, fluency of expression, rhetorical aspects, reliance on experience, and other attributes; in a way that sometimes one single proverb is more effective than tens of hours of speech.

Ibn-e-Moghafa’ (Bahmanyar, 2002) believes that proverbs are grander than other forms of expression as they are clearer in meaning and leave a more lasting effect in their hearers. Borghai’i (1985) writes about the effects of proverbs: "A proverb carries the hearer into deep thought, the sentence moves from the ear to the depth of heart and influences and excites the soul."

What is important in the effectiveness of a proverb is its being used in the proper time and place; otherwise the best proverbs cannot have their desired effect when used out of place.

The closer a proverb is to the life, thoughts, needs and culture of the people, the more effective it becomes. A proverb must be the projection of folk memory and ethnic experiences.

4.7 Sentence form

This has been emphasized in seven of the definitions. In some cases the proverb has been called a "sentence" and in some a "statement", in others no special term is used. Therefore most of the definitions hold that proverbs are sentences; therefore the widespread pet phrases like: دست مریزد، دست خوش. And ironies such as: پا درهایی، پاچه ورمالیده. And colloquial phrases such as: پاچه ورمالیده. Are not counted as proverbs. These are among our dictionary entities.

4.8 Reliance on experience

Proverbs are sage concepts acting as people's experimental advisors and have the same role in the language of the folks as that of philosophy in distinguished minds. The sage concepts are the same as philosophy but without its generalities and abstractions, they are minor and more tangible and persuade their audience and win over their contradic tors easily through changing the sensible into the tangible; this
point has been emphasized in the proverbs themselves: "Proverbs are best of words", "Proverbs to hearts are like mirrors to eyes.", "Proverbs are unquestionable.", "There is no attribution of characters in a proverb." (Aminpour, 2001).

Georgi Zeydan points to these properties of proverbs in his definitions, he says that proverbs are fruits of long term experiences and are conceived by noble minds; therefore their rising ground is the people's folk experiences. The author of KhazinatolAmsal (Hossein Shah, 2000) believes that "a proverb is an event expressed in the words of our ancestors." An event, an experience handed down. As we saw Cervantes also regards proverbs as the results of long term experiences, the French writer, Obe de Saint Pierre has a delicate analogy; to him proverbs are experiences resonated.

A simple event or accident in our daily lives, which might happen to everybody, lays the foundations for a sage statement.

Upon studying the proverbs' diction, we find that they deal with peoples' every need and activity, including food, clothes, shelter, trade, tools, animals, plants, social strata and character types.

In this way proverbs reflect the peoples' lives. On the one hand life can be totally depicted in the proverbs in a lively and exciting manner, and on the other hand all social, religious and moral rules and regulations are narrated through proverbs in a simple manner, digestible for everyone. These rules are doled out in proverbs and get mixed with peoples' tangible experiences that are the reason they are so persuasive and acceptable. The tangibility of proverbs' most key terms is the result of their reliance on experience. Many of these experiences are certain matters; about water, for instance we have: Water rots when kept still, Water makes its way, Passed water doesn't return to the creek, Water flows as long as it is in the creek, Water doesn't stay in one creek only.

4.9 Expansiveness and generality

Proverbs are general and expansive no matter how minute a matter they talk about, the reason is their metaphorical key terms. For instance when we say: «نَهْ بَيْل زَدِم نُهُ پَایَه، اْگْر خْرِدم تَ سَایَه» "I didn't shovel; I just rested in the shade and had grapes." We mean something general, which is "not undergoing any sort of efforts and at the same time expecting benefits". "Shoveling", "grapes" and "shade" are three key metaphorical concepts which are not used only in the special sense of cultivating grapes; they have this capability to be used in other cases as well.

That's why Dehkhuda believes that proverbs are often in the form of general imperative or negative-imperative sentences. (1987) and Ottiki holds that proverbs are advisory sentences which are "either true or state a hypothesis in a general way." (Parsa, 2005).

Zolheim (2002) bases his definition on this property: "A proverb is a statement derived from an independent main idea which wins public acceptance and becomes famous; and as a result frees itself from its original subject and is used with no lexical change, in all similar prospective cases of application, that's why a proverb is used even without the least amount of information about its author and background".

This definition having generality and expansiveness as its pivotal concept depicts the proverb formation processes and that one reason for the proverbs' fame and spread of application is their generality. From this point of view proverbs are like great words, masterpieces and works of art which become famous because of their internationality.

That can also be the case between two or three cultures, as we can see same exact proverbs or proverbial ideas in different countries. The dictionary of literary terms also has defined proverbs as the
tellers of general facts. The famous proverb: "There is no attribution of characters in a proverb" also emphasizes the same point.

4.10 The ironical aspects

According to Ebrahim Nazzam one of the advantages of proverbs is their delicacy of irony (Bahmanyari, 2002), Abu Obayd Ghasem ibn-e-Salam believes that transference of ideas through irony is one of the conditions for a statements being a proverb. Sometimes this causes some mistakes and mixings between simple ironies and proverbs; while they are very much different, in their structure, usage, part of speech and meaning:

a. The deep structure of an irony is based on a metonymy, while that of a proverb is based on a simile or a metaphor;

b. Proverbs are often allegorical metaphors, each key word of which is a metaphor for something;

c. Proverbs often give advice, reason or warning, while ironies give only a meaning;

d. Most proverbs have inner and outer musicality and clarity, while this is not the case with ironies;

e. Proverbs have roots, backgrounds and cases of usage while ironies do not;

f. Ironies are dictionary entities which can be used as a part of a sentence predicate needing a subject, while proverbs are independent sentences;

g. Sometimes in the structure of a proverb one of the keywords is an irony; For instance: Is an irony for a nuisance which is used in the following Proverb, meaning "Who allowed this nuisance into the garden"

h. An irony is an infinitive which can become a sentence some elements added the opposite is the case with a proverb.

To distinguish between proverbs and ironies we can ask ourselves these questions:

a. Can we find a background and a case of usage for the word group in question which might be a proverb or a mere irony? (Background is a story, a root, or a cause and a case of usage is the situation in which the proverb can be used, if we can find these two, the statement in question is a proverb.

b. Can the word group be a dictionary entry; if it can, it is an irony.

c. Is the word group in question a full sentence or only a predicate in need of a subject? If it is a full sentence, it's a proverb, if not it's an irony.

d. Is the word group in question giving an advice or is merely a verb? In the second case it's an irony and not a proverb.

e. The key words are metonymies or metaphors. If they are metaphors, then we are dealing with a proverb.

4.11 Reflecting ways of life and thinking

Studying the proverbs of each nation can well reveal their manners, good and bad habits, thoughts, sensitivities and likes and dislikes. Proverbs show the good and bad behaviors and values of the society which are accepted or rejected by the people; from this point of view proverbs better depict social thoughts a lot better than poems and written works of literature, as these works of literature have definite authors, while proverbs emerge from the heart of the society and are handed down to us from generation to generation. Proverbs do not have definite authors and are abased by people throughout history and are therefore panoramic depicters of a society and its history.
Mahammad Tabib Osman (1992) writes about the social functions of proverbs: "Proverbs like the norms of the society state the social values and accepted behavior in the society. Still they are not counted as social rules, and are mere depicters; therefore proverbs can sometimes neutralize each other according to the meaning they carry. Practically a society's proverbs show its norms and ideologies." Proverbs are peoples' role models teaching them correct ways of living. They teach us what our duty is in the society and how we should put up with our difficulties, how we should deal with bad people, and how to stay away from bad deeds, how we can do good, and where we should open our eyes not to get into trouble, where we should adopt a wise policy in order not to regret what we do. We can learn what is bad and what can lead to happiness.” (Shakourzadeh, 2003).

Many proverbs tell us facts about our culture and shed light on what we don’t know about our history. Facts we can found nowhere, not even in books of history. For example upon contemplation over the story behind the following proverb: (Zolfaghari, 2002).

«ایی اهاهسادٍ ای است کَ تا ُن ساختَ این.»

We get to know how the charlatans abused the simple peoples' faith to their own benefit.

4.12 Simplicity and fluency of expression

The language of a proverb is simple, unsophisticated, and friendly. It’s the normal language of the people, with all its delicacy, simplicity and sweetness. Upon studying the one thousand proverbs as discussed in table no.2, we learn that the use of Arabic words is 20% less than standard language; that is in proverbs the use of Arabic words is only 14.4%, while the average usage of Arabic words in the prose of today is 35%.

The language of proverbs which is derives from the transparent and clear language of people has remained pure and free from the influences of Arabic words and structures. On syntactic level also proverbs do not have complicated grammatical structures and 88% of the sentences have the normal word order of Persian sentences, most having two or three parts.

Bahmanyar (2002) and Hekmat believe this simplicity and fluency of expression to be the reasons for proverbs fame and extensive application.

4.13 Different applications

Proverbs are used in different conditions and situations, each having its own meaning, usage and case of application. The same proverb might find a different usage in another area or situation. Sometimes the controversy seen in the meanings of some proverbs is the outcome of this double or multiple applications. Each proverb contains a sage concept which has an advantage, and is applied depending on the advantage it might have in a given situation. Therefore each proverb has its own special usage; for example:

«درد تَ خرّار هی آیذ ّ تَ هثقال هی رّد.»

"Pain comes in heaps and leaves in bits." The above proverb is used when we want to sympathize with a patient as its subject is the difficulties of pain and illness. A proverb might have multiple usages; this is natural because proverbs are general statements. The proverb:

«سر تاضذ، ساهاى فراّاى است.»

"The head must be healthy, homes are many." Have two usages:

a. A mother who has received a negative answer to his son's marriage proposal;
b. Someone who has lost his property or house in an accident or a disaster.
In speech also proverbs are concepts which are readymade, delicate, sweet, acceptable and familiar to the memory of the hearer, and are used for different events, subjects and mental concepts to make the words more influential. Sometimes some ideas are unspeakable or for some reasons must be stated indirectly or it is difficult for us to give explanations about them; in such cases we make use of proverbs and get the point across with ease.

One of the other conventional usages of proverbs is reasoning to prove or refute a subject or discuss a matter with an interlocutor. "Proverbs are devices for the weak, with which they can communicate with the outside world; they are also their defense against the oppressors. Proverbs are the telltale hearts of societies." (Rashed Mohassell, 1997) Application of proverbs is "a kind of affidavit that heals the speaker's mind and makes him seem right; as is the case with poems." (Hayyem, 1955).

A proverb is a mediator in conflicts. Emil Badi' Yaghub quotes Marron Abud as saying in his Arab Proverbs in Detail: "They are villagers' law books, not requiring to resort to courts of law to deliver verdicts." (Badi' Yaghub, 1995).

4.14 Metaphorical aspects

According to the definitions offered for proverbs, metaphorical aspects are among the prominent factors stated, which is specially underlined by western authors.

Watinik (1932) believes proverbs to be metaphorical and rhyming sentences; Barley (1972: 741) regards proverbs as constant metaphorical models. Zolheim (2002) also bases his definition on the metaphorical aspects of proverbs.

According to Shafi'I Kadkani, (1967) most proverbs are compound metaphors or allegories: "Each allegorical or compound metaphor that wins fame, turns into a sort of proverb"; therefore we can say that most proverbs are allegorical metaphors, but the opposite is not always true. In the proverb "Stones twist the legs that limp"

Stone" is an irony for trouble and "limping leg" is an irony for a troubled person. When the whole proverb is used for a situation or an event, the existing situation is the tenor and the proverb is the vehicle, the situation is omitted and instead the proverb states the case as the simile is of mixed type and the original case is omitted, this is an allegorical sort of metaphor.

Often the keywords in proverbs are metaphorical. The proverb: "Take the rod and the stealing cats will behave." has two key terms "Rod" and "the stealing cats" which are both metaphors. This metaphorical aspect of proverbs makes them applicable to different situations.

Of course not all proverbs comprise metaphors. We shouldn't take those not comprising metaphors as mere advices, sage concepts or pet phrases; however to Parsa (Parisa, 1995: 16) proverbs are only those comprising allegorical metaphors.

4.15 Formal changes

Another attribute of proverbs is their multiplicity of narrations and formal changes, contrary to the Arabic proverbs in which change is not allowed. This is one of the differences between Persian and Arabic proverbs. The famous proverb "If you want to die go to Gilan" have the following variations in different parts of "Iran: If you want to die go to Behabad. (Kermani), If you want to die go to Ghondoz (Afghani), If you want to die go to Hekun. (Jahromi), If you want to die go to Gerowaz. (Gilani), If you want to die go to Tehran, if you want fleas go to Gilan. (Mazandarani), If you want to die go to Gilan, if
you have faith go to the court. (Alashti), If you want to die go to Gilan, if you want fabrics go to Abarghu. (Zarghani).

The above proverb takes different forms according to the intention and the place of usage. The last three have an added part, contributing to their musicality and balance and richness of meaning.

4.16 Anonymity of the author

Can we really say when and by whom the proverbs were created? Clearly proverbs are handed down to us from the previous centuries and do not belong to special people. These proverbs have been circulated among different nations and ethnic groups throughout centuries, and took new forms depending on the region, ethnicity, culture, language, tradition, religion and political system they entered.

Allameh Dehkhuda believes that proverbs are the sage concepts of the masses, in the production of which everyone has joined hands, he writes: "The part the messes play in the production of proverbs is much greater than that of the literati, poets and writers, therefore the number of a nation's proverbs is an indicator of their understanding." (Dehkhuda, 1987). Bahmanyar also says that: "Proverbs have been created in old times by sensitive people of good taste and sense of humor that were meticulous and interested in guiding people." (Bahmanyar: 2002). Therefore proverbs are born among the people and from their lives, they are closely connected, their past is nothing other than that. Aryanpour writes: "these short and beautiful sentences are fruits of the thought and knowledge of the folks and a heritage of the spiritual richness of the previous generations which is handed down to us and from our tongues to the following generations, familiarizing them with the wishes, aspirations, griefes, joys, loves, hates, faith and sincerity and illusions and superstitions of their forefathers." (Aryanpour: 2002)

Therefore sources for the creation of proverbs are he following:

a. The peoples need for reflecting their experiences, beliefs and visions;
b. Imitation and the replacement of old proverbs with new ones;
c. Daily events, and experiences;
d. Translations of foreign and religious texts;
e. Condensing historical events and famous stories.

5. Conclusion

In spite of the extensiveness of Persian proverbs, no full-scale definitions have yet been offered for them. One reason may be their innumerability and variety, as Allameh Dehkhuda gave up writing a preface and giving a definition for proverbs in his great book "Amsal-o-Hekam". The existing definitions for proverbs whether by Persian, Arab or Western scholars’ only focus on some limited aspects of Persian proverbs.

Arab scholars underline the existence of simile, whereas Western scholars emphasize the usage of metaphor. To Persian scholars, brevity and conciseness has been of prime importance; however upon studying the proverbs themselves at least 16 properties where discovered in proverbs making up their structure and content. Splitting hairs in these 16 attributes helps us in getting a better and more exact recognition of proverbs. The sixteen properties extracted from the 38 definitions of proverbs are as follows:

a. Conciseness and brevity
b. Fame and spread of application among people
c. Advisory aspects
d. Clarity and correctness of meaning
e. Use of Simile
f. Effectiveness and attraction
g. Sentence form
h. Reliance on experience
i. Expansiveness and generality
j. Ironical aspects
k. Reflecting ways of life and thinking
l. Simplicity and fluency of expression
m. Extensive usage
n. Metaphorical aspects
o. Change of form
p. Anonymity of the author

According to these properties, the following all-out definition for proverbs is offered: “A proverb is a short sentence, which is well-known and at times rhythmic, including advice, sage themes and ethnic experiences, comprising simile, metaphor or irony which is well-known among people for its fluent wording, clarity of expression, simplicity, expansiveness and generality and is used either with or without change”.

One of the conclusions of this article is that, by extracting the important keywords of the previous definitions given for proverbs we get to know that no definition dealt with the 48% of the proverbs' musicality, rhythm and rhyme; therefore I included this factor in my definition, which I think can be regarded as a comprehensive and all-embracing definition taking into consideration the Persian proverbs' every attribute.

References

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