Sleep and Dream in Simin Behbahani’s poetry

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Abstract

Sleep is one of the mysterious categories of human life that has been considered initially. Sleep is the representation of unconscious contents of human mind. Sometimes it can ascertain his/her wishes and desires in a magic universe and also sometimes it is the reflection of what happening in his/her personal world or even social life.

Sleep and dream have special position in Persian contemporary poem; because they can show various and different representations of poets’ mind, such as romantic, erotic, symbolic, political, social and philosophical views. We can analyze them on the light of psychological and sociological approaches.

Since contemporary human has been left in a complex and immense world, he/she lives his/her concerns in dreams and with representation of them in poem; he/she gives life to them. Some of the issues related to sleep and dream that are argued in Persian poem consist of anxiety, freedom, attainment, erotic relationship, death and salvation in the works of Farrokhzad, Shamlou, Akhavan Sales, and especially in Simin Behbahani.

Because of limitations in personal and social life of Simin, poet supposes that sleep is the only thing which supports her and also the unlimited world of dreams is the best response to free thoughts and desires.

In this essay, sleep and dream will be argued from 2 perspectives: 1. the word of sleep itself and its symbolic meanings; 2. Having dream and its content and interpretation.

Keywords: Sleep, Dream, Persian contemporary poem, Symbol, Interpretation, Simin Behbahani.
Introduction

Simin Behbahani, whose real name was Simin Khalili), was the daughter of Abbās Khalili, poet, writer and Editor of the Eghdām (Action) newspaper, and Fakhr-e Ozmā Arghun, poet and teacher of the French language. Abbās Khalili (1893–1971) wrote poetry in both Persian and Arabic and translated some 1100 verses of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh into Arabic. Fakhr-e Ozmā Arghun (1898–1966) was one of the progressive women of her time and a member of Khānun-e Nespān-e Vatan'khā (Association of Patriotic Women) between 1925 and 1929. In addition to her membership of Hezb-e Democrāt (Democratic Party) and Kānun-e Zanān (Women's Association), she was for a time (1932) Editor of the Āyandeh-ye Iran (Future of Iran) newspaper. She taught French at the secondary schools Nāmus, Dār ol-Mo'allemāt and No'bāvegān in Tehran.

Simin Behbahani started writing poetry at twelve and published her first poem at the age of fourteen. She used the "Char Pareh" style of Nima Yooshij and subsequently turned to ghazal. Behbahani contributed to a historic development by adding theatrical subjects and daily events and conversations to poetry using the ghazal style of poetry. She has expanded the range of the traditional Persian verse forms and has produced some of the most significant works of the Persian literature in the 20th century.

She was President of The Iranian Writers' Association and was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1999 and 2002. Finally she died in Tehran in 2014 and her body buried in Behesht Zahra cemetery (Simin Behbahani, Wikipedia).

In this paper, we tried to survey the meanings of sleep and dream in the poetry of Simin.

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When we want to look for the meaning of the word of dream in dictionaries, it can find as follow:

1. Sequence of mental images during sleep: a sequence of images that appear involuntarily to the mind of somebody who is sleeping, often a mixture of real and imaginary characters, places, and events;
2. Daydream: a series of images, usually pleasant ones, that pass through the mind of somebody who is awake;
3. Something hoped for: something that somebody hopes, longs, or is ambitious for, usually something difficult to attain or far removed from present circumstances.

And also:

Series of thoughts, images, or emotions occurring during sleep, particularly sleep accompanied by rapid eye movement (REM sleep). Dream reports range from the very ordinary and realistic to the fantastic and surreal. Humans have always attached great
importance to dreams, which have been variously viewed as windows to the sacred, the past and the future, or the world of the dead. Dreams have provided creative solutions to intellectual and emotional problems and have offered ideas for artistic pursuits. A type of cognitive synthesis that facilitates conscious insight may occur subconsciously during dreaming. The most famous theory of the significance of dreams is the psychoanalytic model of Sigmund Freud; in Freud's view, desires that are ordinarily repressed (hidden from consciousness) because they represent forbidden impulses are given expression in dreams, though often in disguised (i.e., symbolic) form.

Many dreams are said to have produced, directly or indirectly, excellent stories, poetry, and music. Hennas is said to have had his Pastor dictated to him by a voice when he slept. It is claimed that Voltaire dreamed a whole canto of Henriade. Coleridge's Kubla Kahn is credited to a dream; his Ancient Mariner resembles a dream. Tartini, the composer, after striving in vain while awake to conclude a sonata is said to have gone to bed and to have dreamt that the devil offered to finish the sonata in exchange for the composer's soul. Tartini accepted, whereupon the devil played on a violin, with wonderful execution, the sought-for sonata. The composer awoke, and is said to have written down from memory what he had heard; to the composition the name The Devil's Sonata is given.

Robert Louis Stevenson, who was from childhood a very vivid dreamer, and who, like Dr. Thomas Reid, Lamb, and Bunyan suffered from night terrors, obtained many of the ideas of his Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and the plots for many other tales from his dreams; he tells of the debt he owes "the little people" in his very interesting Chapter on Dreams contained in Across the Plains. Bunyan, who is best defined as a constant dreamer - day and night - owes his Pilgrim's Progress to dreams; most of his other works seem to have been suggested in the same way. The writings of Poe and De Quincey were, in some cases at least, indebted to vivid dreams. Edward Lucas White describes the aid he received from dreams in the preface to his book of short stories entitled The Song of the Sirens. Dante, Goethe, Lamb, Chatterton, Blake and many others evidently owed some of their compositions to the world of dreams (Walsh, 2007: 20).

Sometimes dreams that are forgotten during the day recur, or come to mind on again falling asleep. Ribot1 says: "I have often observed how, on falling asleep, a dream of the preceding night till then forgotten comes back to memory in great detail and very distinctly. In travelling, when I leave one town to sleep in another, this recurrence of the previous night's dream sometimes takes place, but then the dream comes back piecemeal, disjointed, and hard to reconstruct." Many stories have been founded on these dreams; among the best known being Theophile Gautier's short story entitled La Morte Amoureuse.

Many of the productions credited to dreams must be discounted. For example, Tartini said, when" old, that on awaking from his dream he did not retain the memory of the dream music; he wrote, after vainly trying to recall the music of the dream, a composition which in his judgment was inferior to the dream performance. If the composer had not striven so hard to complete the sonata, and had given himself up to abstraction, it is probable that he would have completed his work without the aid of
a dream. Many composers find that their compositions come easier when they do not strive to produce them. For instance, Haydn, who was of a very religious nature, always resorted to his beads when he found difficulty in composing, and said he never knew this to fail, Tartini's idea of selling his soul to the devil was probably the awakening of an old day-dream (Walsh, 2007: 21).

As regards Kubla Kahn, it was written when its author was under the influence of opium taken to relieve an indisposition. Coleridge made no claim that the poem, as finally written, was entirely a dream production. As Ellis says: "It may be added that it is difficult to believe that Coleridge could have recalled the whole poem from either a normal or abnormal dream: as a rule, when we compose verses in sleep we can usually only recall the last two or at most four lines."

If we bear in mind that the memory of dreams is at best fleeting, we will see how impossible it is for a poem or work of any length to be remembered intact on awaking. And, as a rule, dream-compositions are very inferior when subjected to waking criticism. It is, of course, possible for a work to be written during somnambulism. In many cases in the waking state, the best productions, especially of poets, seem to have been written while the authors were in a state of mental dissociation, their compositions coming involuntarily, unconsciously. George Eliot considered that she did her best work when she was taken possession of by another personality; Goethe wrote his Weather and other compositions as if in a state of trance. However, while we may find instances of work being performed "as if in a dream" we will find few, if any, instances of work of merit being remembered after a night dream, or written in a state of nocturnal somnambulism.

What most literary men and others who make profitable use of the imagination obtain from dreams are suggestions. The suggestions they are able to employ usefully, just as they can make use of newspaper articles, scraps of conversation, incidents of one kind or another, etc., as bases for new productions. The idea is the essential feature; given the idea they can build a play, novel, or poem about it. When we consider how rich the world of dreams is in images, incidents, symbolisms, we can readily understand how it may prove a never ending source of inspiration to those who are competent to develop the suggestions therein received.

Comparatively modern studies show us that many myths, fables, and works of ancient origin were suggested by dreams. The Cedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles is presumably founded on a fairly common dream. Bergson1 suggests that the fable of Eudymion, the shepherd, lapped in perpetual slumber, for whom the goddess Selene, the moon, is smitten with love while he sleeps, may have originated from dreams instigated by the rays of the moon falling on a sleeper's eyes: the moon's rays falling on the eyes during sleep not infrequently instigate dreams in which virgins figure prominently. The tendency of dreams to make composite photographs of persons and things, the monsters that appear in nightmare, etc., will account for many stories of a mythical nature, as animals with human heads, witches with blue faces, monstrous or dwarfed men and animals, etc. (Friedman, 1990: 30-31)

Also, dreams are often the subject of novels; the key to a character's deeper promptings; the means by which an author sets a tone or creates a theme underlying his or her fiction, or expresses an intangible poetic concept. Take a peek at how
dreams appear in literature….and, if you know of other literary dreams. For example when Kafka wrote:

“When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin. He was lying on his back as hard as armor plate, and when he lifted his head a little, he saw his vaulted brown belly, sectioned by arch-shaped ribs, to whose dome the cover, about to slide off completely, and could barely cling. His many legs pitifully thin compared with the size of the rest of him, were waving helplessly before his eyes. "What’s happened to me?” he thought. IT WAS NO DREAM.” (Kafka, 1995: 323)

As all know contemporary human has been left in a complex and immense world, he/she lives his/her concerns in dreams and with representation of them in poem; he/she gives life to them. Some of the issues related to sleep and dream in Behbahani’s poetry are these subjects: anxiety, freedom, attainment, death and salvation which are argued bellow.

1. **Sleep as a neglect**
   Your exited bloom are dried too
   Oh poem! Oh wizard satin!
   Finally, my soul woke up
   From this painful sleep, it woke up (Behbahani, 2013: 102).

2. **Sleep as a pleasure**
   For example, Behbahani has composed:
   Again, a thirsty got enough water from my lips spring
   Again, a traveller got into sleep in my hugging bed (Behbahani, 2013: 32).

3. **Sleep as a forgetfulness**
   I was sitting in the bed tired
   And stared on eyes of dreams
   My thought boat, calmly
   Was passing from world's broads (Behbahani, 2013: 102).

   Oh sleep! Oh the key of green garden! I said,
   Carry me to pink land of forgetfulness fairies (Behbahani, 2013: 107).

4. **Sleep as a problem of children**
   It is an especial subject for women who have a child:
   Oh sleep! Open your backpack upon my child! (Behbahani, 2013: 107).

5. **Sleep as a fantasy world**
   Your eyes were like a color of water
   When I saw you in water
   In strange of that without any shape
   It is like that I saw you in dream (Behbahani, 2013: 114).

   You are singing for me
   Your word has secret charm
It seems I am slept and your song
Have a sign from another world (Behbahani, 2013: 141).

It is interesting when a poet is trying to show pour rea ty and emphasize on it,
say like this:
I have seen the dream of that red star
When I was not slept
I know
Somebody will come (Behbahani, 2013: 357).
And also:
Why father should only saw a dream in sleep?![Why not in wakefulness]
(Behbahani, 2013: 361).

We can compare these poems with this poem of Wordsworth:

To Sleep
A Flock of sheep that leisurely pass by
One after one; the sound of rain, and bees
Murmuring; the fall of rivers, winds and seas,
Smooth fields, white sheets of water, and pure sky—
I’ve thought of all by turns, and still I lie
Sleepless; and soon the small birds’ melodies
Must hear, first utter’d from my orchard trees,
And the first cuckoo’s melancholy cry.
Even thus last night, and two nights more I lay,
And could not win thee, Sleep, by any stealth:
So do not let me wear to-night away.
Without thee what is all the morning’s wealth?
Come, blessed barrier between day and day,
Dear mother of fresh thoughts and joyous health!
(Wordsworth, 2013)

6. Dream as a desire
Oh prince! Oh dreamy beloved!
I was dreaming midnights that you are coming (Behbahani, 2013:121).

I saw you in a dream and I am sprightly
Wow … it is not possible to see you unless in dream (Behbahani,2013:124).

And also is similar to this poetry:

“As I lay in my bed slepe full unmete
“Was unto me, but why that I ne might
“Rest I ne wist, for there n’as erthly wight
“[As I suppose] had more of hertis ese
“Then I, for I n’ad sicknesse nor disese.”
(CHAUCEL, 2015)
And also Farokhzad who is one of the greatest poets of contemporary poetry in Iran embodies sleep and dream in his poems. He composes a poem called "Nightly" in the "Fresh weather" book which had song by Farhad—a famous singer:

One moony night  
Moon is coming to sleep  
Will carry me by him  
Valley to valley  
Grape garden  
Berry garden  
Ravine to ravine  
Desert to desert  
Where that nights  
Beyond of woodlands  
One fairy will come afraid and shaking  
She puts her foot  
In the spring  
She combs  
Her disheveled hair … (farokhzad, 1372: 147)

So has mixed desire, dream and imagination and finally this topic joins to political subject.  
But this poet has romantic topics too:

Wow! What long nights which seems there is not any morning  
I  
Tired  
In the sleeplessness bed of mine  
Nock the door of your memories that has sign of you (Behbahani, 2013): 143).  
We can compare this with the followings:

**Not to sleep**  
*Robert Graves (1895-1985)*

Not to sleep all the night long, for pure joy,  
Counting no sheep and careless of chimes  
Welcoming the dawn confabulation  
Of birch, her children, who discuss idly  
Fanciful details of the promised coming -  
Will she be wearing red, or russet, or blue,  
Or pure white? - whatever she wears, glorious:  
Not to sleep all the night long, for pure joy,  
This is given to few but at last to me,  
So that when I laugh and stretch and leap from bed  
I shall glide downstairs, my feet brushing the carpet  
In courtesy to civilized progression,  
Though, did I wish, I could soar through the open window  
And perch on a branch above, acceptable ally  
Of the birds still alert, grumbling gently together.
A Sleepless Night
Philip Levine (1928- ), American Poet Laureate composes:

April, and the last of the plum blossoms
scatters on the black grass
before dawn. The sycamore, the lime,
the struck pine inhale
the first pale hints of sky.
An iron day,
I think, yet it will come
dazzling, the light
rise from the belly of leaves and pour
burning from the cups
of poppies.
The mockingbird squawks
from his perch, fidgets,
and settles back. The snail, awake
for good, trembles from his shell
and sets sail for China. My hand dances
in the memory of a million vanished stars.
A man has every place to lay his head.

Again composes as a romantic poetry:

You are here and the damning of night is affectless
In a barren sunset, my heart becomes fecund from your inspiration
I dream my life
I live my dreams
I live the truth (Levine, 2012: 209).

Dreams of nakedness, always linked to an erotic or exhibitionistic theme, are
universal, and accordingly should be considered “typical dreams,” as Freud proposed. Despite their commonality, however, they have not yet led to a specific theorization (Perron, 2005).

Conclusion
Sleep and dream have special position in Persian contemporary poem; because they
can show various and different representations of poets' mind, such as romantic,
erotic, symbolic, political, social and philosophical views. We can analyze them in the
light of psychological and sociological approaches.

We can classify the uses of dream and sleep in Iranian contemporary poems into
several classes. For first example, in Behbahani poetry, we face to this kind of
meaning: anxiety, freedom, attainment, death and salvation, romantic and social
topics. In Simin’s poetry also we face to symbolic, romantic, politic and emotional
interpretation.

References


