

# Moral Commitments in Firdausi's Shahnameh

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**Abstract:** Although social capital is not a new subject but it has not been considered significantly in Persian literature. Survey on this intangible and valuable capital in Persian literature could increase efficacy, productivity and efficiency of human relations in society. The aim of this research is to investigate moral commitment in Firdausi's Shahnameh as component of social capital. Although, Firdausi's Shahnameh is epic but it contains social, sociology, human relations and moral teaching issues and it reflects Iranian society characteristics in details. Firdausi's rhetoric of elocution and poetics in description, simplicity of speech and eloquence, validity and advantage add on the value of Persian literature. Accuracy and subtlety in description of details have led to consideration of Shahnameh as treasure of Iranian social traditions and customs. Firdausi has offered information on civilization, customs and culture of Iran in narration of tales and stories of Shahnameh in addition to referring to events. Firdausi's ideology has manifested in the form of eloquent literature besides his social perspectives. This article tries to investigate moral commitments and its components in the unique work of Persian literature and uncover broad meaning and moral commitments in Firdausi's Shahnameh in broad scope.

**Key words:** Moral Commitments, Social Capital, Persian Literature, Firdausi's Shahnameh, Didactic Literature.

## Introduction

Society is a general construct and its fate influences life of the members of the society. The concept of social capital has been considered in recent years in different scopes of sociology, economics and recently, in political sciences. Social capital involves social communications and networks that cause to collaboration and trust among the individuals. However, identification of the effective factors in empowerment and weakening of the social capital helps us in maximization of the social capital and as a consequence, social and economic function. This concept has sociologic aspect and offers a best context for productivity of the social and physical capital. The comparison of the viewpoints of Firdausi and sociologists on each these components uncovers differences and similarities and most importantly, perception of the importance of the social components plays a main role in human survival and establishing relationships among individuals and finally, it leads to prevailing of the moral concepts in personal and social life.

Today, social capital plays an important role in the society and establishing the relations. In general, social capital depicts the level of trust of the people to each other. However, identification of the effective factors has determinant role in empowering and weakening of the social capitals.

A healthy society benefits from high social capital; since the members of the society establish trustable relationships and the individuals are benefitted for each other.

Religion is effective component in improvement of the social relationships and in most cases, it leads to attachment and trust among people which strengthens the pillars of social life and its decline causes to collapse of the society foundation and social life. By commitment and responsibility taking among the believers, religion causes to peace, kindness and interest and establishes healthy social and person life.

This article tries to investigate different examples of moral commitments in different situations in Shahnameh by referring to some miracles and narratives and also uncover the value of the moral commitments from Firdausi's perspective by emphasis on different books and also Islamic teachings.

Firdausi was knowledgeable in ethics, philosophy and social issues and he has covered different dimensions of social capital. This article examines some examples mentioned in the Shahnameh:

Shahnameh begins with praising with God.

Wisdom is better than anything that God has created  
Praising the wisdom is flourished by justice (Firdausi, 1988).  
Wisdom is guide and it is solution of the problems (Firdausi, 1988).  
The happiness is from him and pain is from him  
Wisdom helps us in both worlds (Firdausi, 1988).

Thousands years ago before renaissance and birth of Descartes and Walter, Firdausi had praised wisdom. The Iranian poet has adorned wisdom so that the reader is attracted by it. In his great book, he teaches us about human and he narrates the moral story with eloquent speech and invites us to humility and obedience.

Undoubtedly, his belief in this fact that humans can live happily and with sympathy and avoid hostility and revenge introduces Firdausi as a great poet.

Shahnameh narrates many fights in the battlefields which depict the vitality of the disputes and fights. We know the end of the fights between Rostam and Sohrab and the fate of Alexander who wished to establish peace between Iranians and Greek and the death of Dara and wounding of Sohrab.

Firdausi refers to religious, racial and social disputes and he has no hostile attitude towards the neighbors and for this reason, the Arabs, Turks and Indians now him the Iranian national poet. From this perspective, it can be said that he is one of the pioneers of peace who believes in prevention of wars by temperance and liberty.

In Shahnameh, the championship events as an imagery history of a nation flow in the real contexts and involve characteristics of social, political life and the people beliefs in intellectual and religious affairs. Shahnameh offers an image of Iranian society that depicts the efforts for independence, civilization, ethics and religion and besides them pleasure and philosophical and religious discussion among the heroes.

Since, social attitudes in the social capital is attention to the mutual relationship among people, the aim of Firdausi was considering the humanistic affairs, but since he was not sociologist, he has not discussed on the subject matter from specialist perspective and he has explained these concepts from poetical perspective.

Promise is one of the main subjects in Shahnameh that plays an important role in the events, characters and their fate. This component has been recognized as a religious, moral and social principle in the Indo-European countries. The ancient Iranians were considered Iran as the country of promise (Hilinse, 1996).

Promise and loyalty were important in ancient Iran; so that the demon promises at the beginning of the creation and cannot breach it (Amuzgar, 2000).

The word of Mitral is meant promise as the goddesses of promise (Razi, 2002).

In Avesta, there is a Yashat called the god of sun that reminds his characters and traits and he has broad and wide fields (paragraph: 3, 4, 1 and 5). Who offers good life and family to the people (ibid). and he is generous and protector of the cattle (ibid).

However, among the characteristics of the god of sun, the faithfulness on promise is one of the main elements of the Mazdisna moral teachings that its great power, the holy magical force has been imagined (Amuzgar, 2009).

This god has two duties, he aids the people in the war and supervise on the promises; he aids who obeys him and punishes disobeyers (Doustkhah, 1964).

He is advocate of the country that does not breach the promises and destructs the country that breaches the promises (Mirfakhraei, 1988).

In the past, the heroes prized faithfulness in the promises more than the kings and champions and they were aware of the end of who breached the promises. We refer to some examples in this regard.

### ***The promise of Sam***

When Sindokht comes to Sam, he asks her to introduce herself and her intent and she demands him to be faithful to his promise and damages her:

At first I want you to be faithful

Till I am never to be weakened (Firdausi, 2010)

Promise to me neither you nor everybody not damage me (Firdausi, 2010)

I have splendor palace and court

That is with treasure and relatives (Firdausi, 2010)

When I am assured, say what you want to say (Firdausi, 2010)

And Sam promises her:

Samtook her hands and promised her (Firdausi, 2010)

When Sindokht heard his swear

Said the truth and established a relationship (Firdausi, 2010)

Kissed the earth and stood

Said her secrets honestly (Firdausi, 2010)

Then Sindokht introduces herself while she is assured and says that she is a relative of Zahhak and the wife of Mehrab and mother of Rudabeh:

Now, I have come, what is your purpose?

Who is your enemy and friend in Kabul?  
If we are sinner and evil  
We are deserved to this kingship (Firdausi, 2010)  
Now I am in trouble and powerless besides you  
Kill me, if you want to kill me and release me if you wish (Firdausi, 2010)  
Do not harm on the Kabul innocents  
Where a miserable man harms you  
Sam replies that if I lose my life I never breach my promise:  
He replied that I am faithful to my promise  
Even if I lose my life  
You and your relatives in Kabul are safe (Firdausi, 2010)

### ***The promise of Siavash***

Piran makes promise with Siavash and says him that he will be faithful and will not damage him and Siavash praises his promise:  
I also will be faithful  
I will try to not breach the promise  
I never let even a wind blows on you  
I never let to remove hair of you  
Siavash said him, o, the good man  
I do not see except goodness  
If you will be faithful on promise  
So, I will be faithful too (Firdausi, 2010)

### ***The promise of Siavash***

When Garsivz prevents Siavash to not go to Afrasyab advises him to write a letter to him; while he recommends him never trust him and promises to act according to his demand:  
Siavash accepts his speeches  
And heard his advices  
He said him I never breach my promise (Firdausi, 2010)

### ***The promise of Alexander***

It can be referred to Alexander who does not welcome the promise breaching king: I never breach my promise the king breaching his promise is not a good king (Firdausi, 2010).

### ***The promise of Rustam***

When Kaikhosrow is informed about the trouble of Bizhan in Turan asks Rustam to go Turn and recues Bizhan:  
Now find the solution for Bizhan  
Since he is trapped in Turan  
Gather the troops, horses and swords and treasures  
Take everything you need do let him to be in trouble  
Rustam emphasize his promise:  
My mother delivered me for you  
You have to be happy and calm  
I hear you order and never breach your promise  
I come to you eagerly  
I do what my king orders (Firdausi, 2010)  
In ancient religion, the person who breached his promise was punished heavily and some of these punishments are cited in the texts: I saw a man was punished by spear and axe and stone and I asked his sin and I was told it is the soul of the man who breached his promises (Afifi, 1963).

Faithfulness to promise is important an even in promise to the enemy, faithfulness is the main conditions and this is reflected in Shahnameh.

Rustam promises the son of the demon in the war of Mazindaran if he shows him the place of the white demon and the prison of Kaikavous he will offer the governance of Mazindaran:  
Said him if you will be honest

I never kill you (Firdausi, 2010).  
If you show the place of the white demon  
The prison of the Kiakaus.  
The demons said my body has your sings  
My neck is under your chain  
Promise me to not breach the rules (Firdausi, 2010)

Rustam replies that he is faithful and he will offer him the governance of Mazindaran (ibid). Even the negative characters emphasize on faithfulness to their promises. In the story of Zakhak, the Satan asks him to make promise to not uncover the secrets:

Asked him to make promise  
To not uncover the secrets  
He accepted and took an oath  
I never disclose since then what I hear from you (Firdausi, 2010)  
Then the Satan says him to kill his father and to become the king and he replies that it is not a correct way and he asks other solution (Firdausi, 2010).  
But Satan remind him his promise and the end of the breaching of promise (Firdausi, 2010)  
And he accepts his offer.

As it was referred the god of sun aids the people in war and being faithful to promises and punishes who breach their promises (Dustkhah, 1965).

In the story of the China emperor, when Rustam and Poladvand begin to wrestling they make promise to not demand aid from troops:

They began to wrestling  
Two warriors and champions  
They promised to not invite aids from their troops (Firdausi, 2010).  
When Shideh sees Rustam says to the father:  
That powerful man said to his father  
Call him Rustam the fighter with demon  
Our troops have no solution except run  
Do not fight with the powerful man  
But Afrasyab says to Shideh:  
That my mind is restless since then  
Go and see that Pooladvand  
Fights with him and catches his hand (Firdausi, 2010)  
Shideh replies that breaching promise is the reason for lose and misname:  
Shideh said that the promise of the king  
Was not this with the army (Firdausi, 2010)  
When you break your promise  
It will be your fault and you will be disloyal (Firdausi, 2010).

Such belief can be found in the story of kingship of Yazdgerd. Pirouz who breaches the promise of the former kings, fights with TuranKhoshnavaz and is killed and Khoshnavaz says:

The life got misfortune to Pirouz  
Your king was killed by my act  
When he breached the promise of the kings  
He never was happy in his life  
The lord did not like his conduct  
Though he took his life (Firdausi, 2010)  
Everybody who breaches the promise  
He is declined by honesty and righteous  
Sometimes the kings and heroes in the Shahnameh pay the heavy cost on faithfulness to promises. It can be referred to Ahriman, the brother of Afrasyab.  
Once we promised to each other  
If from Iran comes the champion  
We will fight with them  
The honored Ahriman  
Dispatched the army from Amol to Rei (Firdausi, 2010)  
And then due to promise he is killed by Afrasyab:  
The commander got angry like a fierce elephant  
He took the sword to reply (Firdausi, 2010)  
He cut his brother to half  
He was so cruel and unconscious (Firdausi, 2010)

Siavash is another person who is killed due to faithfulness to his promise. For avoiding fighting he says to Garsivz to inform Afrasyab that if he wants peace he returns those who say the name of Rustam:

When he want to be faithful to his promise

He asked the name of Rustam.

He demand them to be faithful to his promise

And also return the cities occupied there:

Then he demanded the lands of Iran

To return them to Iran

There is nothing except in this battle

I never fight to take avenge (Firdausi, 2010)

Afrasyab dispatches one hundred captives with many gifts to Siavash (Firdausi, 2010).

When those who said the name of Rustam

He sent hundreds of them

He sent them to the king of Iran

With many gifts and garments

But when Kaikavus hears he gets angry and asks Rustam to breach his promise and fight with Afrasyab but Rustam blames breach of promise (Firdausi, 2010).

He advises Kiakavus to not demand Siavash to promise since this is not good for a king:

Do not ask your son to breach his promise

Do not do mischief (Firdausi, 2010).

At the end, Kavous replies that there is no way and he should breach his promise (ibid).

Kavous writes a letter to force Siavash to fight and calls interest in Afrasyab and fear on war as the reason for promise (Firdausi, 2010).

But Siavash mentions fears on God and the end of breach of promise as the reasons for loyalty:

He orders me to fight

I fear on breach of promise

I took an oath to the lord

And promised him to not fight

If I breach my promise

I will suffer trouble in anyway (ibid).

Since he knows breach of promise as disobedience of God and it is demonic act that causes to punishment in both worlds (Firdausi, 2010)

In Iranian ancient religious texts, breach of promise is unforgivable sin and the sinner should be punished. In some texts, shortening of life, extinction of the generations has been mentioned as the end of breach of promise (Hundreds prose in Bundhenshn, 1909).

Also, in the "Heaven of paradise", breach of promise is compared as equal as killing a holy man, damage on the Baharam fire, idol worshipping and witchcraft (Hilinse, 1995).

Breach of promise is punished by killing sentence (Razi, 1997).

The person who breaches his promise suffers from trouble in both worlds and this punishment has been mentioned in ancient religious books. In the story of Rustam and Esfandiyar, it is referred to the punishment of breach of promise in both worlds:

They promised each other

That no one help them in the battlefield ((Firdausi, 2010)).

In spite of this promise, when Nushazar and Mehrnush, the sons of Esfandiyar are killed by Zavareh and Faramarz. When Esfandiyar is informed on death of his sons says to Rustam:

Said to Rustam, o, the mean

This is the promise of the tyrant ((Firdausi, 2010)).

You said I never bring my army to the battlefield

You never arrange the troops and army

You are not ashamed and you are not afraid of the end

You do not know that who breaching his promise

Is not welcomed and praised in any champion ((Firdausi, 2010)).

Therefore, in the Shahnameh heroes' opinions, breach of promise leads to misname and who breach the promise is sinner and he will be punished in the resurrection day. In most of the stories of Shahnameh, the end of breach of promise is depicted including death of the heroes, innocent people and destruction of the counties (Mirfakhraei, 1988).

In the story of Siavash, the Iranians attack on Turan and in this war, Verazad and Sorkheh are killed and when Afrasyab is informed that his son was killed he fights with Iranians and in this war, many soldiers are killed (Firdausi, 2010).

Many were killed from both parties

Rustam destructs Turan and kills the people:

He plundered and killed many and destructed everywhere  
Everywhere was ruined and there was no developed place  
They beheaded the old and young, the woman and the child  
By this way a far country was destructed (Firdausi, 2010)

One of the blessings of the God to the old men is offering child. In some parts of the ancient religious texts, it has been referred to this point. In the paragraph three, the righteous people are given glad tiding of having offspring (Avesta, Yasht 10).

The 65<sup>th</sup> paragraph of Yashat refers to blessings of the God who offers a son for his servants" (ibid). In this regard, it can be referred to Goshtasb and Afrasyab that their kingship necessities them to follow the gods orders and punish who breach the promises but they breach the promises and the gods punish their sons. Esfandiyar dies after preach of promises by Goshtasb and suffers from troubles and every time that Esfandiyar asks help he promises to rescue the Iranians, in the first chance offers him the throne and crown but he preaches his promises.

In the last moments of his life, Esfandiyar introduces Goshtasb as the reason for his death (Shahnameh, 2010). The words of Esfandiyar can be meant that his father breaches have caused to his death when he was young. Before death he says to Rustam that he is not his killer but his father is condemned:

You were an agent but my father was the reason

Neither Rustam nor Simorgh, spear and arrow (Firdausi, 2010)

Afrasyab causes to death of his son by breaching of the promises. The Iranians attack on Turan and catch his son and brings him to battlefield (ibid).

When Rustam sees Sorkheh says to Tus:

Ordered to take him to the field

With dagger and watchman (ibid).

Beheaded like Siavash and the vultures ate his bodies (Firdausi, 2010)

But Sorkheh says to Tus:

O, the dear king

Why you shed the blood of innocent

Siavash was my friend and peer

My soul suffers from his pain

Tus demands Rustam to forgive him but Rustam replies:

I always wish the heart and body of Afrasyab to painful and crying (Firdausi, 2010)

Zavareh writes:

Zavareh took that basin and dagger

And gave him to the watchmen

He beheaded him and cut his body (Firdausi, 2010)

## Conclusion

Promise is one of the main subjects in Shahnameh that plays an important role in the events, characters and their fate. This component has been recognized as a religious, moral and social principle in the Indio-European countries. The ancient Iranians were considered Iran as the country of promise.

Promise and loyalty were important in ancient Iran; so that the demon promises at the beginning of the creation and cannot breach it.

Even the negative characters emphasize on faithfulness to their promises. In the story of Zahhak, the Satan asks him to make promise to not uncover the secrets. Sometimes the kings and heroes in the Shahnameh pay the heavy cost on faithfulness to promises that it might be losing of life. It can be referred to Agris, the brother of Afrasyab who was killed as a result of faithfulness to his promise and as the name of Siavash can be mentioned.

In Iranian ancient religious texts, breach of promise is unforgivable sin and the sinner should be punished. In some texts, shortening of life, extinction of the generations has been mentioned as the end of breach of promise. In the story of Rustam and Esfandiyar, it has been referred to punishment of the persons who breach the promises. They promised to each other to not let somebody to interfere to their fight. In spite of this promise, when Nushazar and Mehrnush, the sons of Esfandiyar are killed by Zavareh and Faramarz. When Esfandiyar is informed on death of his sons says to Rustam that breach of promise causes to mischief and the person who breaches the promise is sinner. In most of the stories of Shahnameh, the end of breaching promise is obvious that leads to death of the heroes and innocent people and destruction of the countries.

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