

Roles and positions of slaves and eunuchs in the political system of the Safavid government

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ABSTRACT

The most significant group of the servants of Safavid era was a group known as the Royal Servants who were divided into two groups. A group of them was trained for services in the harem and they were called eunuch. Harem was a suitable place for the conspiracy and political collusion of the court ladies and the servants and eunuchs were used as a means for orchestration of these plots and political conspiracies. Other group consisted of servants who were trained for military services. This group served as the King's arm before the Qizilbash who were called Shahsevan. Despite their non-Iranian origin, both groups managed to reach major governmental and military positions due to their emotional and close relationships with the Shah and the heram. The triangular composition of heram, servants and eunuchs gradually created a network of coalition inside the Safavid government that paved the ground for the gradual entrance of servants and eunuchs into the power equations and they played a major role in the decline, weakness and finally the fall of Safavids. The current essay seeks to assay the place and role of servants and eunuchs in Safavid government through analytical, descriptive and historical study of the data.

Key Words: Safavids, Servants, Eunuchs, Heram.

Introduction

Although Safavid era is of special importance in the history of Iran one of the key issues that has not been appropriately considered by the scholars in this regard is the role of servants and eunuchs in the political system of Safavid era and the fall of this dynasty.

The servants who were serving the Safavid regime were from various races and nationalities. Then they were divided into different groups and classes. Some of them were trained for services in the heram while some others served as servants in the court or royal army.

Both groups, i.e. eunuchs and military servants, due to their close relationships with the heram, Shah and the court and thanks to their services, managed to earn high ranked governmental and military positions and have influence in the politics of the Safavid era.

After the death of Shah Abbas II in late Safavid era the eunuchs found the opportunity to meddle in governmental and administrative affairs due to the weak command of Shah Sultan Hussein insofar as they had no more any fear of disobeying the orders of Shah Sultan Hussein and acted as they liked.

The present study seeks to assay the role of servants and eunuchs in the political system of Safavid era and present them as one of the key factors in the decline of Safavid dynasty.

Research Background

Safavid era (1501–1736) is of a special importance in the history of Iran. This era due to the concentration of political power, extended relations with European countries and the domination of Shia Islam as the official religion needs to be studied in details because there are numerous exceptional domestic and foreign works on this historical era. Some of these works date back to the time of Safavid era.

A huge number of researches have been conducted on the vicissitudes politics of Safavid era and in most of these studies various reasons have been proposed of the ups and downs of the Safavid government. For example, such reasons as inattention to army and weakness of military organization, moral corruption of governors and the court, public dissatisfaction, economic factors, and so on and so forth, are considered to have been involved in the fall of Isfahan and after it the final elimination of Safavids from the political power scene in the history of Iran.

But the most striking point in this regard is that relying on each one of the proposed reasons as the main factor involved in the fall of Safavid government can be challenging and cause the results of the research to appear insignificant and illogical.

Moreover, it will not be logical to argue that the fall of the Safavid political system and Iranian society during the reign of Shah Suleiman and Shah Sultan Hussein was caused by the events of this era. It is far too clear that political decline of every government is essentially gradual and has premises and backgrounds. Then one needs not only reflect on the proposed reasons rather he should also seek after another important factor that has not been considered sufficiently as much as the other highlighted factors and thus a minor role is attribute to it among the other factors of the decline and it is indeed the role of servants and eunuchs. Professor Minorwsky in his introduction to the book of *Tazkara al-Muluk* suggests that the influence and provocations of the Queen Mother and eunuchs and dynasty are the influential factors that were involved in the elimination of Safavid dynasty as a whole (*Tazkara al-Muluk*, Introduction). Heram was the place where the political seeds were conceived and the eunuchs who were indeed the castrated servants served as the vehicle of the implementation of these conspiracies.

This class of the Safavid society managed to get an influence for themselves in the political issues thanks to their close relations with the Shah and their information of the secrets of royal privacy and private issues and managed to reach sensitive positions inside the court and by the Shah and thus they could influence the vital decisions of Shah and even change Shah's views.

The main question of the current research is that: what role did servants and eunuchs of the heram have in the political system of Safavid era?

Before turning to the role of the group at issue inside the Safavid political system it is better to debate the lexical meaning of the terms: Ghulam (servant) and Khaje (eunch).

Ghulam: slave, servant bought by gold, slavery [1]; slave, servant, bondman [2].

Slavery means absolute domination of a man over another man that date back to the very dawn of human history after the end of the early common life. Slavery was born in fact following the development of

agriculture and herding and the possibility of additional production and exploitation. The free work of slaves opened the path for the exploitation of an individual by other human individuals and gave rise to the emergence of the class society. Whether in pre-Islamic era or after the rise of Islam the slave owners did various kinds of injustices and oppressions to the slaves[3].

Khaje: the man who is castrated as a servant in attendance of the heram and lacks sexual ability[4].

Chardin writes: "Iranians call eunuchs in the heram Khaje that lexically means old and ageing; i.e. they work as old men to solve the internal affairs and problems and also do not have sexual functionality and cannot have any relation with the women"[5].

The eunuchs of the heram were some servants castrated for serving the heram. Castration operation that was painful and hard was usually done on the 7-10-year-old boys. Nothing is found in the sources of the details of this operation. Of course sometimes castration was done as a penalty of an action insofar as in some cases of rebellion of the rulers of states their sons who were kept in the court as the hostages were castrated and sent to the heram as eunuch [6].

Since eunuchs had lost their sexual ability they were dispatched to the attendance of the most precious properties of Shah, i.e. wives and relatives. The black eunuchs were specifically chosen for heram services due to their appearance [7].

Court Servants

In several wars fought during the reign of Shah Esmaeil I with Georgians, Circassians and Armenians and continued by Shah Tahmasb I numerous young boys from those regions particularly from Georgiawere caught as hostages. Shah Tahmasb I in his fourth attack to Georgia in 1554 besides killing several Georgians took more than thirty thousand Georgians including several women and pretty boys and girls and they all were considered as the property of Shah Tahmasb in return of the Khums. Shah Abbas ruthlessly killed enormous numbers of Georgians and took captive many of them [8].

The other factor that brought Georgian servants and maids to Iran and Safavid court was the culture, traditions and oppressive laws of social life of people of that land. Religious authorities who dominated the region could sell any number of them to Turks and Iranians. Priests ended a marriage whenever they liked and immediately married a woman to any man they wanted and would sell the one whom they found guilty of the parties [9].

Tazkara al-Muluk alludes to two types of young servants in Safavid era one of whom were the eunuchs of the heram and the other were the simple servant who were castrated. The ordinary servants consisted of the voluntary servants of Sultan or the chosen ones who were trained for the attendance of the Shah [10].

The aforementioned servants are indeed the prisoners and slaves of Safavids who were often from Georgians, Circassians and Armenians; these were taken captive either in wars as trophies or given to the court as gifts or as alms or bought from the markets. In Seventeenth century Safavids used the sexual and tribal marginal groups for supervision. These servants had in return access to the most precious properties of Shah, i.e. Harem [7]. History demonstrates that the most important factor in the emergence of this group in the court was the heram and the need for trustable individuals to take care of the affairs, services and inhabitants of these places.

Safavid Heram

Harem, lexically speaking, refers to a place where the women and favorite mistresses [11]. Heram was a place in the palace where the wives and maids of Shah or Sultan lived. During post-Islamic era heram remained not restricted to the high ranked dignitaries and even some ordinary people married to several women in permanent or temporary form. This tradition reached its apex in Safavid era [6].

Heram in the context of the current essay refers to the heram of Shah where the royal women, maids and mistresses lived. Penetration into the heram was very difficult and no stranger had the right to enter it. The penalty of a stranger who would break the law and enter the heram was death and only physicians, eunuchs, servants and princess could attend the heram. In special cases the sellers of jewelry, drapers, teachers, actors, instrument players, and repairers were allowed to enter the heram under certain circumstances and supervision of the eunuchs and these people were those who could bring some information out of heram[9].

Ivan Grass the author of *Adventures and Itinerary of French Delegation to the Court of Safavid Shah Sultan Hussein* quotes one of the globtrotters who had the opportunity to visit Ottoman heram to have said: “heram is a secret and inaccessible place for royal orgy and for this reason it is a mysterious place. The hatred and hostility of women towards each other were so strong that the personal rooms have no access to each other. Those women who were no longer the favorite ones of their owners or could not bring any child for them would live the rest of their lives in a room. Every sedition with a romantic or political motive was immediately halted in the heram. Becoming the unique wife of the Sultan was a very difficult work. The building of the special rooms of every wives of the Sultan was located in the center of a garden around which numerous colorful flowers were planted. The women could only leave their rooms at night” [12].

Undoubtedly, due to the religious and cultural similarities the function and nature of Safavid herms were quite similar to Ottoman herams and of course the events were almost the same.

In Safavid heram, the heram dwellers were forced to follow an exact hierarchy that governed the heram. The first rank was for the Queen Mother after her the other ranks belonged to the wives of Shah and his favorite mistresses. Some of these women changed their real names and used such names as Roshanak, Sepideh, Setare, Zinat and Gol-e Harem. The number of eunuchs who were in the attendance of these ladies depended on the place of the woman by Shah [5].

In Safavid herams there were a number of groups of women who had been arranged in the following hierarchy:

1- Royal Women: these women included the family and close relatives of Shah (like Mother, Grand Mother, Aunt and so on and so forth) and the daughters of Shah and at the end of their name the word Begum was added [6].

2- Main Wives of the Shah: according to Islamic jurisprudential principles and in certain conditions Muslim man can have four permanent wives. Accordingly, Safavid Shah who sought to add to the number of the mistress in his heram under every pretext had four permanent wives who were called the Shah's Women and even in those cases where Shah was young other people would choose these women. One of these women could be the mother of the son of Shah.

The women who gave birth to a child remained in the heram forever, and the mother and the child had a separate place for themselves in the harem. The woman who could give birth to the first son of the Shah had exceptional privileges because she was the mother of the future Shah [14].

3- Temporary Wives: these women contrary to the main wives of Shah were infinite in number and entered the heram from various ways. Sometimes the regional rulers offered beautiful girls from their close relatives to Shah as a gift [6]. These women lived in the heram as the temporary wives of the Shah.

4- Maids and Mistresses: Safavids' several attacks to Georgia under various pretexts caused numerous beautiful Georgian women to be taken captive by Safavid army and be brought to Isfahan and other Iranian cities. These captives were traded in the market for huge prices. Many of rich people bought them for childbirth and of course chose the best ones and sent them to their heram.

In Safavid heram a number of permanent wives of the Shah and maids had to spend their lifetime in intense mental pain because besides competition and jealousy that existed between them they also suffered from sexual deprivation [15].

Heram was like a big complex the management and guarding of which required a considerable number of special trusted individuals.

Kempfer writes: “heram affairs are managed by almost five hundred black eunuchs and this is the number that they themselves announce; but not all of them are always ready for service. Some of them serve the Shah as the special courier and inspector of Shah across the country and are always moving; some others are out of service or work in the construction plans proposed by Shah as public projects like Caravanserai, bath or bridges and other similar ones. I did not succeed to get information of the number the women who live in the harem through the eunuchs. As soon as I asked such a question they would burst into a rage regardless of the friendly chat that we had few seconds earlier” [13].

All women of the heram [specifically the Shah's wives] accepted to serve Shah not willingly rather with force and even in some cases they were abducted and transported to the heram. The number of these women was so high that the Shah did not have time to meet all of them [for this reason they felt hugely insulted

and humiliated] and experienced various mental disorders that would end up in crime and conspiracies. The women in the heram experienced this in most cases and for this very reason heram was the center of unending conspiracies and this conspiracy sometimes paved the path for destructive rebellions and sometimes even they played a major role in the decline and fall of a dynasty [9].

The channel of the implementation of the conspiracies of the women in heram was the men who were available including servants and eunuchs who worked in the heram.

Ghafariard the scholar of Safavid era writes: "it is very surprising that Iranian and even European historians have missed this vital point or have not paid the necessary attention to it and did not study the role of this important factor in the fall of dynasties (including Safavid dynasty)"[9].

Heram Positions

Heram was both sizable and full of various women and had special importance for Shah and for this reason it consisted a major part of the court and it was natural that a hierarchy of positions to be defined for it.

1- Heram Sheriff: black eunuchs took care of the rooms of women and heram inhabitants based on their degrees and position. They were allowed to search all single corner of the heram and monitor the actions taken by the heram inhabitants. Thus they regarded monitoring the affairs of all people in the heram their task [13].

Every part of the heram was under the supervision of a eunuch and all eunuchs were monitored by an old experienced eunuch who was called the sheriff [5].

2- Eshik Aqasi Başı (Courtier) of Heram: in Safavid era eshik aqasi was the one who served as the court minister and manager of court ceremonies and supervised the royal meetings [1].

One of the other positions of the heram was eshik aqasi that assigned to one of the eunuchs.

Eshik Aqasi was the head of allceremony officers and doorkeepers and arranged the royal meetings [16].

Della Valle states: "the servant who worked as the Eshik Aqasi was respected in all parts of the court because he represented the one who was in charge of the management of the internal needs of the heram and in fact served as the mediator between the heram women and the outside world and for this reason he was superior to all other servants. He had the right to enter the rooms of women and announce the entrance of the guests and overall he had certain tasks that were impossible to be done by others due to the ban of entering certain places. Thus, such a person was chosen from among the experienced eunuchs"[17].

3- Doorkeepers: doorkeepers were the guards on the gates of heram and they had a head who managed the affairs of these doorkeepers. The white eunuchs guarded the outside gates while black eunuchs guarded the gates inside the heram [6].

4- Religious tutors: some of the eunuchs in heram served as the teacher of religious sciences and trained the Safavid princes. Chardin writes:

"Eunuchs in the houses of the rich people also serve as the teacher and tutor of the children. They taught the children reading and writing, principles of religion and basics of sciences first, and when the children needed skillful teachers the eunuchs were hired and took care of the children. The sons of Shah didn't leave the women's palace unless when they succeed the king as Monarch. They had no other tutor but these eunuchs. I have seen many eunuchs and there are seemingly some eunuchs in the heram who are so dexterous in various technical fields [5].

The one who took care of the princes was a eunuch in the heram. The tutors and teachers of the princes were chosen from among the eunuchs in heram [18].

The study of the positions of heram shows that the only task of servants and eunuchs at Safavid court was not merely offering certain services rather they were also involved in such significant affairs as order, security and court ceremonies and training the princes as the future kings.

Promotion of the Eunuchs of Heram

There are little information of the life conditions of the eunuchs in court. Since they lived in the heram they should have remained hidden from the eyes due to their position; this was the case with both the white and black eunuchs. At least until the later Seventeenth century, the eunuchs did not have the right to sit by

the Shah even in public ceremonies. Persian sources hardly mention their names and whatever we know about them is thanks to the foreign tourists who did not have a direct access to the heram and earned their required information from the internal affiliations. According to these reports, the eunuchs were not famous and were even notorious. As if there was a severe hostility between the eunuchs and nomadic musketeers. We know that the number of eunuchs started to grow from the early days of Safavid era onwards. Yudash Tadeush Krosinski writes that the number of Iranian eunuchs has gradually grown later (Matthee, 2014: 75). Since Safavid kings were willing to use every competent person in their system and kept themselves away from bigotries and biases, they used Armenians of Jolfa for trade and used their farmers for farming causes. Thus they allowed these farmers to farm on parts of the best portions of land and the discussion of the details of this action needs an independent research [19]. Likewise the competence of intelligent and skillful eunuchs after a while was recognized by their owners.

During the reign of Shah Abbas I more than one hundred Georgian eunuch entered the scene although their influence was not so considerable. In 1620s Shah Abbas expelled many of the incompetent eunuchs to a palace in Isfahan. Thirty years later Shah Abbas II got informed that some of them are still alive and ordered the younger ones to be killed and thus in 1667 only fifteen or sixteen of them remained alive. However, it is clear that some of them had turned so influential during final days of the reign of Shah Abbas I. One of them was Haji Yusif Agha the Eshik Aqasi Bashi of heram and Mir Shekar Bashi of court who had the utmost influence inside the royal palace. The eunuchs did also earn sensitive positions during the reign of Shah Safi I. The most significant figure among them was the treasurer Khaje Mohabat who was the elder of heram and represented the head of all black eunuchs. Since Khaje Mohabat was fired by Mirza Mohammad Saru Taqi for financial corruption allegations, one can easily infer that eunuchs did not have absolute power in these years. This state of affairs changed in the final years of the reign of Shah Abbas II and eunuchs turned to a heavy counterbalance before the Prime Minister. It is said that in 1670s almost 3000 pf eunuchs including 500 black eunuchs were Shah's attendants (Matthee, 2014: 75-76).

The King was unconditional authority over all governmental affairs and could assign them to anyone who wanted and usually he did this without paying attention to the place of birth. Nevertheless, Shah observed still the rules of his ancestors and the covenants sealed by other countries regarding the ban of the use of the individuals who have been rejected from those countries [5]. Accordingly, when intelligent and experienced eunuchs showed their competency after a while their masters promoted them to higher ranks. The promotion of the servants and eunuchs went forward so far that they could show their disagreement with the higher officials of the government on some issues.

Since the time of Shah Abbas II the conflicts between eunuchs and other governmental authorities began to exacerbate. According to Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, every decision that was taken by Etemad al-Saltane at night could be cancelled by eunuchs in the morning (Matthee, 2014: 77).

The Positions of Eunuchs of Heram

Before introducing the most important positions of the eunuchs of heram we need to mention a number of vital points in this regard:

Firstly, during the reign of early Safavid Shahs the eunuchs of heram were not white rather the black eunuchs of heram were managed by an intelligent and skillful eunuch as the elder of all eunuchs of the Noble Heram [20].

Secondly, the eunuchs of heram were so powerful that they could interfere in important affairs of the country. Sanson writes: "in royal cabinet various national issues were discussed but on none of them no decision was made rather only different ways through which these affairs can be handled are outlined. The implementation of the outlined solutions was assigned to a special council composed of important and renowned eunuchs of heram in which the final decisions were taken regarding the country. The head of ministers, ministers and other high ranked officials and authorities of the country did not have any information of the proceedings of this council. The eunuchs of heram were so intelligent that Shah had put all his trust in them"[18].

Thirdly, before Shah Abbas I and in some cases even in this era the governmental offices were under the control of Qizilbashan and eunuchs did only have the authority on the internal affairs of the heram; but during the reign of the successors of Shah Abbas I due to the increase of the influence and power of the eunuchs these positions were gradually taken from the Qizilbashan and assigned to the eunuchs. Insofar as such positions as the tutorship of the princes that was specifically handled by the Qizilbashan and supervision of the Great Mosque of Holy Mashahd that was under the control of clerics both were assigned to the eunuchs of heram [6].

Fourthly, most of the positions that were assigned to the eunuchs of heram had the utmost compatibility with their physical, mental and moral conditions. And this compatibility was mostly influenced by their sexual deprivation. Generally speaking, those people who suffer from a disability use other parts of their body more effectively in order to cover their physical defects. Then it is not so surprising that a disabled man like a eunuch earns an outstanding achievement in his work even if in an individual form.

Eunuchs did not even have any friendly relations with each other and because of their life style they had neither the time for finding friends nor a place for doing that. As if they were servants who had been brought from another world insofar as their whole life was devoted to the affairs and desires of their masters. Accordingly, they were all the most conning, trustworthy, self-possessed, avenging, ruthless, and hypocrites [14]. And these qualities contributed to their political success.

As to the ruthlessness of the eunuchs Grass writes: "sometimes one of the women in the heram tried to attract one of these gaurds. But this is was futile because they were inflexible and imbricable. They were all loyal to their masters. Their continuous supervision of these self-imposed detainees left no wish of freedom in their hearts. They did gradually become informed of all hidden aspects of the heram including the tricks and traps that were used by the women in heram for earning the heart of Sultan. There were numerous secrets inside the heram that could be detected and revealed by the eunuchs. The dream of domination over the Sultan's heart surged inside the heram but the eunuchs interrupted this dream with the fear" [12]. It was due to this issue that such affairs as blinding the princes, strangling the male infants inside the heram and destroying the ones who have caused the royal anger were all assigned to the eunuchs.

Blinding and strangling the male infants inside the heram were so violently done that the royal consorts themselves preferred to invite the eunuchs to strangle their male infants in order to save themselves from the death [18]. Now we turn to the significant positions, roles and places that were assigned to the eunuchs in the political system of Safavid era:

1- Royal Treasury Officer: treasurerhood was one of the offices that gave its holder the utmost power. No significant financial affair could be handled without the information of the treasurer. The prime minister and royal secretary every month presented the list of receipts and expenses of the government to the treasurer. This very task was also done by the supervisor on the expenditures of the royal family (Mata, 2014: 76).

In the national council of the financial affairs nothing would be done without the participation of the eunuch in charge of the protection of the royal treasury [18]. It is interesting to note that the royal treasurer was not only in charge of the protection of the money and precious objects that were delivered to the treasury rather he did take some measures to collect the debts on their times [10].

2- The Head of Rakibkhane: The other office that could give its owner the utmost power was the head of Rakibkhane. The most important tasks of the head was guarding the Shah. The head of Rakibkhane would stand close to Shah in the ceremonies; he would tie a small bage to his waist in which he had some handkerchiefs, a watch, a ring stamp, opium, and other spices. He was in charge of taking care of Shah; taste the royal meal; prepare the table for Shah; prepare his bed and keep his cloths. Many people had dreams of this position because this job could give one the opportunity to be continuous attendant of Shah. Thus the owner of such position could reach many things that are almost impossible to have the access to. Head of Rakibkhane was usually a white eunuch who could be in Shah's company when he entered the heram without getting emotional [13].

3- Supervisor of the Royal Houses: royal houses were factories and shops in which the required objects of the court and the army of Safavid government were prepared or services were provided [6]. Supervisor of the royal houses controlled the royals workshops [16].

Supervisor was the head of court staff. Royal workshops, houses, and technical works of the court, food and cloths for the court staff all were supervised by him. Since besides these tasks the Supervisor was also in charge of royal ceremonies then he had heavy administrative tasks; but these very tasks did also give him the opportunity to live in the best conditions like a real “Iranian”. The income of the supervisor and other influential figures of the court cannot be discerned very clearly because they did not have a determinate income rather besides their normal income they had also some illegal incomes too the amount of which depended on the greed of staff and the importance of the issues that should have been solved⁴¹.

Although the royal treasury was supervised by the Supervisor of the Houses but even he did not have the right to enter the treasury where the money and jewelry were kept [10].

One of the tasks of the supervisor was determining the administrator and artisan for the royal workshops, and paying their salaries and increasing and decreasing these salaries; however, any modification in salaries depended on the final decision of the Shah. But since all court positions and jobs were one-year and everyone was doubtful of his future it is not surprising that at the end of year the staff would come with fists full of gold to the supervisor in order to make sure that they will continue their job with higher salaries. Moreover, the supervisor had an illegal share of the salaries of the staff beforehand [13].

4- Special Centurion of the Servants: Centurion of the Servants was one of the eunuchs of the heram who was in charge of a hundred ones of the white and black eunuchs. Shah Abbas I was the first one who assigned a black eunuch as the head of a hundred of the white eunuchs. The most important tasks of the centurion was protection of the heram and participation in wars. Centurion had a great influence in Safavid court. The animosity of Ahmad Aqa the centurion of white eunuchs of heram and his successor Muhammad Aqa with Fatali Khan Daghestani and their complaints of him by the Shah was one of the key factors of the dismissal of Sultan Hussein the competent prime minister of Shah. The centurions could hold other positions beside their position. Various sources from different eras have referred to Ahmad Agha Yuezbashi of the white eunuchs of heram as Mir Shekar Bashi, Sherrif of Isfahan, Nayeb and Qullar Aqasi (head of the servants) (Shoja, 2005: 88).

5- Mir Shekar Bashi: Mir Shekar Bashi supervised the hounds and Qushkhane (hawk house). The hawks were not just trained for the birds rather they were also used for stopping other preys too. For both types of hunting more than a thousand of hawk carers were required because every hawk needs a man for special care (and it should be mentioned that now there are eight hundred hawks) (Kempfer, 1984: 103).

6- Tutorship of the Princes: tutorship was one of the unofficial offices of the Safavid government. In Safavid era the tutor was an individual who was in charge of training the crown prince and other princes. The tutor taught politics, governance, military training and even music and the like to the prince. Accordingly, the tutor had an enormous influence on the prince. This influence could even rise when the crown prince became the Shah. In most cases the tutor was chosen as the closest company of the Shah in the court (Darabzade, 2013: 3).

The transition of capital to Isfahan was followed by a major change in the management style of the Safavids. While before it the Safavid princes were trained by the Qizilbash rulers of the states after then this task was assigned to the eunuchs who were the loyal servants of the royal family. This decision had a major impact on the independence and power of the Qizilbash rulers who could make the princes their plaything and put pressure on the Shah (Babaei et al., 2014: 10-11).

7- Mantle Keeper: Mantle is a long and broad cloth that is worn over other cloths (Amid, 2002: 495). The mantle keeper was in charge of the cloths of the Shah.

The mantle keeper was also chosen from among the eunuchs of heram (Minorowsky, 1945: 126). The mantle keeper was the head of “mantle house” where the guns, warfare and cloths were kept (Amid, 2002: 494). Thus the other name of this person was “gun keeper”. This position was assigned to the eunuchs since the time of Shah Suleiman (Shoja, 2005: 90).

Army Servants: Christian young boys who were taken as captives or were dispatched for Shah by the local rulers all were circumcised and converted to Islam and were brought up by Iranian traditions and religious rituals. Shah Abbas established an army composed of the most strong and committed newly converted Christian youth like Cricassians. They were the servants of Shah but during the reign of Shah Abbas they had a distinguished place. Shah Abbas liked his servants very much and loved them to the extent

that he even chose some of them for higher military and administrative positions and the servanthood of Shah was everyone's honor (Parsadoost, 2009: 455).

Shah Abbas did courageous actions for the promotion of the competent servants to higher military positions that were exclusively held by the head of Qizilbashan. Before this action the head of military forces were almost all Qizilbash. Shah Abbas took this privilege away from them. He chose his own servants as the leaders and commanders of the army (Parsadoost, 2009: 456). Allahverdi Khan was an Armenian from Georgia who was sold as a servant in his youth and he was chosen by Shah Abbas as the Head of Royal Servants (Falsafi, 1958, vol. 2: 91-92). In 1596 he was chosen as the governor of Fars and the Commander in Chief of all military forces of Iran (Parsadoost, 2009: 456).

Sepahsalar of Iranian Army was the highest military position that was established by Shah Abbas to bring about balance between the Qizilbashan and Servants (Matthee, 2014: 122). The title "Sepahsalar" which is a word of Iranian origin is one of the military ranks of ancient Iran. Although the majority of military titles were in Turkish Shah Abbas revived this Sasanid military term once again in Iranian army.

The appointment of the Sepahsalar from among the servants not only is an evidence endorsing the competency of Georgian Allahverdi Khan rather it is also a sign of prudence in governance. Shah Abbas did not choose one of Qizilbash Turks as the Sepahsalar. He wanted to weaken the Qizilbash and sought to limit their access to power centers. Moreover, Shah struggled to empower Iranians before the Qizilbash Turks and also by choosing the servants he also wanted to bring about a new rival besides Iranians for the Qizilbash and in this way keep the balance between these three major forces inside the country (Parsadoost, 2009, 456-457). The eunuchs of Safavid Era were chosen from among the servants. The servants were from various races and nationalities. Then they were divided into different groups and classes. The most important group of these servants were the royal servants who were divided into two groups.

From the aforementioned group a class were trained for heram services who were called "eunuchs of heram". The other class hosted the servants who were not castrated and were trained for military purposes. The latter class of servants constituted a major part of Safavid army and played a significant role in the vicissitudes of Safavids. The difference was that the first group had political power and decision authority while the second group played more colorful role in the executive military power of Safavids.

The first group, i.e. eunuchs, after learning their new role and becoming the new members of the kingdom earned an enormous influence. In the sex segregation culture that dominated the Isfahan court the eunuchs served as the vehicles through whom the women in the heram meddled in the administrative affairs of the society. The eunuchs who were assigned to the training of the uncastrated slaves prepared their sons-in-law for the military and administrative jobs. The tutorship relation with military servants allowed the eunuchs to expand their influence from court to the battleground. This triangular composition of eunuchs of heram, the mistresses and military servants created a network of alliance the core of which was founded in Isfahan (Babaei et al., 2014: 26).

In his itinerary Sanson writes: "the administration of the country is in the hands of the eunuchs in heram. It is this eunuch who will choose the crown prince from among the princes and prepare him for the kingdom and it is again this eunuch who prepares everything after the death of the king to introduce the new prince as the Shah. All affairs of the heram are managed by the eunuchs. The royal treasury is also assigned to a eunuch in heram. Also a eunuch is in charge of the management of the royal cashier where the precious objects that are presented to Shah are kept. These eunuchs are trustable from every aspect because they are bought from India while they are in their early childhood and they know neither their father nor their mother or their nationality. They are also castrated and can be trusted on sexual matters and they have also no interest in the treasury. For these reasons the most profiting positions of the government are assigned to the eunuchs. Moreover, the Shah is their inheritor in the sense that if one of the eunuchs dies his properties will be inherited by Shah. In the higher council of national financial affairs no decision is made without the supervision of the eunuch who is in charge of protection of the royal treasury" (Sanson, 1957: 177-178).

Although the comprehensive influence of the eunuchs of heram in governmental affairs was begun in later years of the reign of Shah Suleiman and with the formation of the heram council, the eunuchs were anyway dealing with a ruthless and cruel Shah who easily killed his relatives with a minor excuse and this has caused an atmosphere of fear to dominate the heram. However, this intimidation did not exist during

the reign of Shah Sultan Hussein who was so tenderhearted that he would get upset even with the wrongslaughter of a chicken. Due to these characteristics the eunuchs dared not to obey the Shah's orders (Shoja, 2005: 179).

Shah Sultan Hussein spent his childhood, adolescence and youth times in the royal heram. The whole life of crown prince passed in the heram rooms and even he did not have the right to leave the heram for seeing the sun light. The companions of the crown prince were the black eunuchs who had been bought from the southern regions and meanwhile some of the legal wives and mistresses of the Shah played the role of the consultants of the crown prince. His training was assigned to his mother and grandmother and some of the old women who were respected due to their age. The tutor of the crown prince was a castrated servant who was chosen upon the proposal of the women.

Thus, Iranian crown prince was brought up in this environment with ignorant and incapable people and he was away from the hard tasks that were expecting him as the future Shah. Anyway, Hussein Mirza spent his time among the white and black eunuchs in the heram and since he grew in the heram he was isolated for a long time and had no command of the techniques of governance. He was tender and did not have the required competency for kingdom and he remained under the influence of the eunuchs even after he became the Shah (Rabii, 2005: 7-8).

Due to their domination over the financial affairs the eunuchs in the heram embezzled huge amounts of money and were bribed. Of course these bribes and embezzlements did not quench their thirst for wealth and yet sought for new ways for earning illegal money including through cornering the grains.

The key policy of the eunuchs in the heram in this era was preventing competent individuals from entering the court in order to thwart the possible future encounters and instead they supported incompetent and incapable figures so that they can keep their dominance over the affairs. The governor of Kerman was one of these figures who was appointed by the mediation of the eunuchs in the heram (Shoja, 2005: 179). Moshizi writes in this regard as follows: "the aforementioned person did not have a good command of the affairs and also he did not have the required qualifications. He just could write a little bit and had a partial knowledge in journalism and sciences. However, his generosity was so high that all of his personal flaws would be covered by it" (Moshizi, 1990: 342).

Shah Sultan Hussein not only got addicted to wine due to the encouragement of the eunuchs rather he even got addicted to women thanks to these eunuchs too and like Shah Suleiman he ordered all beautiful girls and women to be transferred to the heram. The number of these women was so high that the treasury could not afford their costs. In other cases the king was tenderhearted and hated bloodshed and never allowed the wrongdoers to be punished instead they were fined. The eunuchs in the heram were proponents of such a rule because a considerable amount of money filled their pockets this way (Lakhardt, 2001: 34).

Then after the coronation of Shah Sultan Hussein the eunuchs were so happy due to the crowning of such a tenderhearted and incapable person who did not have the necessary command of affairs. However, the eunuchs did not restrict their whims to this and struggled to lead Shah Sultan Hussein towards debauchery (Dosarsu, 2012: 105-106). It is clear that to overcome such a government there was no longer any need to numerous army of the Macedonian Alexander or blood thirsty Gengiz Khan rather the small army of Mahmud Afghan was enough for such an affair (Shoja, 2005: 193).

Conclusion

The following conclusions can be drawn from this study:

In the final days of the reign of Shah Abbas II the power of eunuchs grew in tangible scale due to the unprecedented increase of their number to the extent that they turned to a balance weight before the highest power after Shah, i.e. Prime Minister.

Safavid Shah had unconditional control over the government affairs and assigned them to anyone whom he found competent. Accordingly, the working intelligent eunuchs were chosen by the Shah to hold the significant vital administrative positions.

The life style of the servants and eunuchs and their mental characteristics including trustability, self-possessedness, ruthlessness, having no friendly relations, as well as their physical features in sexual affairs

that are time consuming and troublesome accelerated their growth within the political system of the Safavids.

The servants and eunuchs in the haram not only were the properties of the Shah rather they were in charge of protection of the family and property of the Monarch. The positions that were assigned to them were key vital positions and Shah intended to make sure that his kingdom will be protected by these loyal servants. Undertaking important administrative and military positions caused the eunuchs to near themselves to the Shah and strengthen their domain of influence.

Safavid Shah did not suffice just to the collaboration of the eunuchs in his politics and in military area he asked some of the servants to build a new army.

Shah Abbas chose competent and strong youth from among the servant children who had been taken as captives or were brought to the haram as gifts from the rulers of the regions and formed an army from them in order to serve the kingdom before the rebellious Qizilbash. The passionate tie of Shah Abbas with this group of servants that caused many of them to be appointed as military and administrative dignitaries served as an example for everyone and showed that being a servant of the Shah is indeed an honor for everyone and this encouraged many to volunteer for joining this army.

During the reign of Shah Sultan Suleiman the power and influence of eunuchs in the haram was more than ever because upon the encouragement of the King's Mother eunuchs were asked to comment on various issues. Eunuchs also jealously protected their influence with the collaboration of the Queen Mother and did not allow anyone to give consult to Shah. In the final days of the kingdom of Shah Suleiman when he was mortally ill the eunuchs were his mere links with the governmental elements. Thus the Queen Mother and the black eunuchs in Safavid Court were the hidden power behind the curtain.

In late Safavid era due to the inattention of Shah Sultan Hussein to governmental affairs and his close relations with eunuchs the latter found much influence inside the system and this caused heavy losses and damaged to the financial resources of the country. They could easily embezzle and be bribed and by this work they casted serious doubts of the legitimacy of the Safavid regime. Moreover, the eunuchs in the haram struggled not to allow any competent person to be appointed to any office in order to preserve their influence.

The triangular composition of the haram, servants and eunuchs gradually formed a network of allies inside the Safavid government that ranged from harem of the court to the battleground and finally during the reign of Shah Sultan Hussein they injected their poison into the body of Safavid government and prepared the ground for the fall of this regime following the attacks of the foreign forces.

Financial and administrative corruption of the eunuchs in the haram against the competent statesmen caused serious damages to the body of Safavid government and led to the emergence of a giant gap inside the government. It is far too clear that there is no need for numerous army forces to overcome such a weakened government and someone like Mahmoud Afghan could also handle it.

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