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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ayyar and Ayyari: From Genealogy to Historical Background

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| ABSTRACT
The present study, entitled "Ayyar and Ayyari: From Genealogy to Historical Background," examines one of the most influential cultural–social movements in the history of Afghanistan. Rooted in the pre-Islamic tradition of futuwwa and chivalry, Ayyari gradually merged with Islamic teachings and Sufism, embodying values such as magnanimity, self-sacrifice, loyalty, generosity, courage, discretion, and independence. The primary aim of this research is to analyze the structure, principles, and linguistic as well as cultural features of the Ayyars, while its secondary objective is to explore the historical and geographical development of the Ayyari movement and its regional variations. The study employs a descriptive–analytical methodology based on an inductive approach, integrating data from library research, field observations, and interviews. Historical and geographical sources, along with previous scholarly studies, were first reviewed, followed by an analysis of literary texts to identify concrete evidence of the relationship between the rituals, customs, and social practices of the Ayyars. The findings reveal that the Ayyars maintained a coherent social organization under the leadership of a designated master or spiritual guide. Their distinctive attire—such as two-colored garments, shortened footwear, staffs, travel bags, and symbolic sashes—served as markers of identity and reflected their independence from formal political authorities. Ethical principles, including initiating greetings, fidelity to promises, and support for the disadvantaged, were directly evident in their social conduct and indirectly reflected in literary expression. Linguistically, specialized Ayyari terminology entered everyday speech and later became part of formal literature, contributing to the formation of a popular and oral layer within the literary tradition. In Afghanistan, Ayyari preserved its local characteristics over centuries and, during critical socio-political periods, functioned as a voice for the marginalized and a critique of power. The study concludes that Ayyari should be understood not merely as a historical phenomenon but as a living cultural heritage that continues to inspire contemporary literature, highlighting the need for further comparative, linguistic, and field-based research.

| KEYWORDS
Genealogy; Ayyars; Conceptual Analysis

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Prior to the manifestation of Islam in the Middle East, the school of futuwwa or chivalry cultivated a group of men known as javanmardan (young men of honor) or the people of futuwwa. This group was regarded as socially distinct from other strata of society, possessing its own customs, rituals, distinctive attire, and a specialized mode of expression. Chivalry encompassed values such as magnanimity, altruism, self-sacrifice, assistance to the oppressed and the helpless, compassion toward others, fidelity to promises, humility, generosity, and liberality, as well as the preservation of personal dignity and moral integrity, patience and endurance in the face of hardship, courage and bravery, friendship and companionship. These qualities later emerged in Sufism as the defining attributes of the perfect human being. In addition to these human virtues, the javanmardan were bound by

specific rituals and practices that served as markers of chivalry and the chivalrous way of life. The Ayyars were a group committed to chivalry, generosity, and the protection of the weak; however, at times they also engaged in banditry and the plundering of caravans. They operated within an organized social hierarchy and pursued their objectives through coordinated and systematic actions. Their primary aim was the realization of justice and the restoration of the rights of the oppressed from the hands of tyrants. Alongside these goals, they possessed distinctive moral and social characteristics. The practical principles that governed their lives included secrecy, truthfulness, aiding the destitute, chastity, self-sacrifice, self-reliance and independence, loyalty to friends and opposition to enemies, fearlessness and bravery, avoidance of self-aggrandizement, refraining from scrutinizing the faults of others, faithfulness to covenants, abstaining from oath-breaking, avoidance of tale-bearing, generosity, and open-handedness. Najm Daya, in Mirsad al-Ibad, regarded Ayyari as one of the stages of spiritual wayfaring, and poets such as Hafiz, Rumi, and Attar praised the virtues of the Ayyars. The period of the Saffarids marked the zenith of Ayyar activity. Although their influence did not cease after the Saffarids era, the land of Afghanistan—owing to its linguistic, religious, and cultural affinities—was never devoid of this movement. Rather, over time, the Ayyar movement gradually succeeded not only in asserting independence and leading cohesive and unified groups, but also in revitalizing the tradition of futuwwa and chivalry, becoming a resonant voice of truthfulness, integrity, magnanimity, and manliness. Nevertheless, since every land and nation possesses its own cultural traditions, and since the Ayyars emerged from within their respective societies, they naturally followed the customs and traditions of their local contexts. Consequently, even when certain principles and practices were shared, Ayyari in one region could differ from that of other territories.

The present research seeks to explicate Ayyar and Ayyari, as well as the qualities and virtues attributed to the Ayyars that have been reflected in the literature of this region, and to contribute to a clearer understanding of this movement. Undoubtedly, from the distant past to the present, numerous scholars and researchers have devoted valuable studies to the Ayyars and kakas of this land, all of which are worthy of appreciation. However, the reflection of the rituals, customs, modes of thought, and ethical logic of futuwwa and Ayyari in the literature of this region has not yet been examined comprehensively and systematically. Therefore, it has become necessary to undertake in-depth investigations to reassess and reintroduce this movement. If this research is complemented by statistical analyses, as well as extensive fieldwork and library-based studies, many new aspects of the principles of Ayyari will become apparent, and further dimensions of its culture, customs, and traditions—particularly its ethical foundations—will be revealed. Accordingly, this study aims to elucidate the rituals, principles, and practices through which the Ayyars maintained cohesion and organization within their group structures by analyzing and interpreting their linguistic, dialectal, intellectual, and cultural characteristics.

2. Review of Previous Studies

Undoubtedly, the discussion of the Ayyars, kakas, and their intellectual principles is not unfamiliar to scholars. However, regarding Ayyar and Ayyari—from genealogy to historical background—no comprehensive and independent study appears to have been conducted, at least to the extent that the present author has investigated. If such studies exist, they have largely been carried out in other geographical contexts.

Among the existing works, Boroumand (2020), in the article "Women Who Were among the Ayyars," examines the role of female Ayyars. Karimi-Pour (2018), in "An Examination of the Transformation of the Chivalric and Ayyari Tradition in Iran," focuses on Khorasan during the seventh and eighth centuries AH. Ebrahim Kanani and Naira Kanani (2017), in "An Analysis of the Manifestations of Qalandari and Ayyari Traditions in the Kelidar Novel," analyze the representation of these traditions in literary characters. Fazl Ahmad Aalami Harawi (2017), in his undergraduate thesis at Herat University entitled "The Conditions of Futuwwa and Ayyari from the Perspective of Islamic Thought," researched the subject. Akbari (2015) authored an article titled "An Examination of the Security and Policing Functions of the Ayyars in the Islamic Period." Arbabi (2012), in the book The Tradition of Pahlavani, Chivalry, and Ayyari, investigates the authenticity, antiquity, importance, and roots of the ancient chivalric tradition in Iran. Seddiqi et al. (2012), in "A Comparative Study of the Tradition of Chivalry in Persian and Arabic Literature," discuss the ethical and social themes associated with the Ayyars. Motamedi (2011) published an article entitled "An Examination of the Origins and Roots of Futuwwa in Iran" in the Journal of Islamic Studies of History and Culture. Khalilullah Khalili (1991), in his book Ayyari from Khorasan, addresses issues related to Amir Habibullah Khan, the well-known king of Afghanistan, and attributes Ayyar characteristics to him. However, he does not elaborate on the rituals and customs of the movement. Ghulam Haidar Yaqin (1986), in the Ayyars in the Historical Sphere, discusses the background of the Ayyari movement and introduces the Ayyars and kakas of Afghanistan, mentioning certain aspects of their rituals and customs. All of these books, articles, and theses constitute the major scholarly contributions on the Ayyars in Persian literature. Nevertheless, to the best of the author's knowledge, no study has specifically addressed Ayyar and Ayyari from genealogy to historical background, except for limited undergraduate-level works produced in some Dari literature departments.

3. Etymology and Conceptual Analysis of "Ayyar" and "Ayyari."

At first glance, the word Ayyar, beginning with the consonant ʿayn, may suggest an Arabic origin. However, a closer examination of its etymological and derivational aspects reveals a diversity of scholarly opinions regarding its naming and roots. Although the concept conveyed by the term—often equated with chivalry or javanmardi—has remained essentially the same across different regions of the world, it has manifested through various lexical forms. Among Arabs, a chivalrous person is referred to as fata, and chivalry itself as futuwwa. The author of Lisan al-Arab attributes the word Ayyar to Arabic and supports this claim with several examples, defining it as someone who frequently goes back and forth across the land, noting that even a lion may be called Ayyar due to its constant movement in search of prey (Ibn Manzur, vol. 4, 1408 AH: 623). In this sense, Ayyar denotes agility, vitality, and energy. Similarly, the Arabic–Persian dictionary al-Rahid defines Ayyar as a frequent wanderer, vagrant, drifter, wild lion, or unruly horse (Jibran, vol. 2, 2007: 1231). In al-Munjid, the term is likewise defined as a habitual wanderer, referring to someone who roams without fixed occupation (Mahluf, 2001: 756).

In Persian lexicography, Ḥasan Hamid defines Ayyar as one who frequently comes and goes, a wanderer, an idle drifter, as well as a swift, courageous, and clever man (Hamid, 1999: 921). Mustafa Khayamdel, in his interpretation of verse 61 of Surat al-Anbiya— "They said, 'We heard a young man (fata) speaking of them; he is called Abraham'"—defines fata as a young man and a complete human being (Khorramdel, 2009: 692). This attribute is associated with the Prophet Abraham, who shattered the idols of Nimrod; on this basis, some Sufis trace the origins of the Ayyari movement to him. The author of Munajid al-Ṭullab defines al-Ayyar as a wanderer, traveler, roamer, and vagrant (al-Bustani, 2010: 263). Similarly, the Shahsavari dictionary interprets Ayyar as a swift and agile person, using the Ayyari metaphor to denote agility and, at times, vagrancy (Ṭaleqani, n.d.: 286). Farhang-e Lughat va Kinayat-e Divan-e Massud Sahd defines Ayyar as a flyer, thief, skillful, agile, and clever individual, citing verses from Massud Sahd Salman as evidence (Mahyar, quoted in Anvari, 1998: 286). This poetic usage reflects the metaphorical association of the Ayyar with cunning and appropriation of the beloved's heart, as illustrated in the following verse: My body is exhausted by the arrows of grief caused by his love, and the blade of desire wounds my heart through separation. Like an Ayyar, my beloved has stolen my heart, for theft has ever been the defining act of the Ayyar. (translation by the author).

The author of Ghiyath al-Lughat addresses the etymology of the term Ayyar and offers the following explanation: "With the opening of the first vowel and the doubling of the second, it denotes a man who moves about extensively and is highly active; derived from Ayyara (with fatḥa), meaning the horse's roaming and galloping in all directions" (Ghiyath al-Din Muḥammad, 1224/1848, p. 496). While it is true that Ayyar conveys the sense of roaming and bears an etymological affinity with this meaning—and although nocturnal wandering was indeed among the characteristics of the Ayyars—this derivation alone cannot fully account for the entirety of their attributes.

Similarly, Dehkhoda, in his lexicographical entry on Ayyar, defines the term as referring to someone who moves frequently, is evasive, sharp-witted, intelligent, and constantly roaming in different directions (see Dehkhoda, 1377/1998, vol. 11, p. 16459). Considering that perpetual wandering (ṭawwafi) was one of the prominent traits of the Ayyars, he further interprets Ayyar as "a man of excessive roaming," deriving it from expressions such as faras-e ayir wa Ayyar. He also associates the term with an individual who restrains the ego, does not submit to personal desires, and refrains from acting according to base impulses (ibid.).

In Persian and Arabic lexicons, the word Ayyar encompasses notions of agility, bravery, and chivalry. Mehrdad Bahar maintains that the term Ayyar corresponds to the Persian I-yar and the Pahlavi adiyar (Bahar, 1345/1966, pp. 11–12). Some sources equate Ayyar with meanings such as thief, swift mover (ṭAyyar), or night wanderer; however, these labels were largely imposed by their adversaries. Likewise, certain references record meanings such as bloodthirsty, reckless, or licentious—designations that likewise stem from hostile perspectives (see Moshiri, 1371/1992, p. 732). Khaqani employs the term in this critical sense, stating:

Bloodshed and heedlessness befit the Ayyar;

Heart-stealing and flight better suit the trickster.

(Khaqani, 1381/2002, p. 191)

What is evident is that Ayyar constitutes an intensive (hyperbolic) form on the morphological pattern (faʿʿāl in Arabic grammer), signifying one who wanders extensively and engages in constant movement. This interpretation is corroborated in several Arabic lexicons, including Munajid al-Ṭullab, Larousse, and Farhang-e Bandar Rigi (Dehqan, 1394/2015, p. 22). In Bahar-e Ajam, the term Ayyar—with a doubled yāʾ—is defined as a person who carries distinctive clothing and weaponry in warfare and engages in covert operations, such as the legendary Amru Ayyar; figuratively, it is also used to denote a versatile and highly skilled individual (Chandbahar, vol. 3, 1380/2001, p. 1541).

Each of these meanings and synonyms attributed to the term Ayyar evokes a particular aspect of the historical Ayyars' character. Accordingly, it may be concluded that the designation Ayyar was aptly chosen for this group, as it encompasses the full range of attributes recorded in lexicographical and historical sources.

4. The Diachronic Development of the Terms "Ayyar" and "Ayyari" from Past to Present

Despite the fact that some scholars have apparently regarded the term Ayyar as Arabic—given its overall resemblance to an Arabized word—many writers do not consider it Arabic and have presented relatively similar views on this matter.

The author of Farhang-e Loghat-e Anand Raj (Anand Raj Dictionary), citing certain Arabic sources and Persian poetic evidence, argues that Ayyar, with a geminated y, originally referred to a person who carried special clothing and weapons in warfare and engaged in covert activities, such as Amr-e Ayyar. Later, the term was metaphorically used to denote a versatile and skillful individual (Shad, 1335: 1330). Based on this view, it is assumed that the origin of the word derives from the Pahlavi term eyar. In some texts, the word appears in the form iyar, which later evolved into eyar, and in Dari Persian the initial vowel was omitted, resulting in yar. When Arabs later encountered this social and ethical system, they Arabized the term by transforming eyar or eriyar into Ayyar. The author of Borhan-e Qateʿ similarly maintains that Ayyar is the Arabized form of eyar, meaning "young men" or "chivalrous individuals," while Arabs refer to chivalry as futuwwa and to a chivalrous man as fata (Ibn Khalaf, 1342: 2413). Some scholars argue that in Arabic lexicons, the term Ayyar lacks any root associated with fata or chivalry. They contend that meanings such as frequent movement, cleverness, restlessness, and agility bear no intrinsic connection to the ethical concept of futuwwa or chivalry. Nevertheless, various hypotheses exist regarding the origin of the word, suggesting that eyar is a Pahlavi term that gradually acquired the suffix -ī in Dari Persian. Over time, the two ys(ی) merged, and the initial open hamza was replaced by the letter ʿayn, resulting in its Arabized form with gemination. Thus, despite its Arabic appearance, Ayyar is in fact derived from Persian-Dari, with its original form being eyar. In some sources, the word also appears as adhivar or iyar. Ultimately, the term Ayyar has been regarded as synonymous with fata and "chivalrous man" (Yaqin, 1365: 1). Natel Khanlari, quoting Bahar, states that Ayyar is not an Arabic word but originates from adhivar, a historically grounded term. He notes that early Ayyars, much like modern political parties, possessed organized structures with defined social, ethical, and political goals. In major cities of Greater Khorasan, they maintained well-organized networks aimed at supporting the oppressed. The association of fatayan or the futuwwa movement represents a reformed version of these Ayyar organizations (Natel Khanlari citing Bahar, 1348: 173). Khanlari himself endorses Bahar's argument, asserting that since Ayyari is equated with chivalry in relevant texts, considering the word Arabic would render it semantically disconnected from the notion of chivalry. Therefore, the original term must be Persian and rooted in meanings associated with chivalry and Ayyari. Gholam-Reza Ensafpur also considers Ayyar an Arabized Pahlavi term, emphasizing its negative connotations. He argues that throughout history—whether in Iran or elsewhere—any man who rebelled for political, social, or economic reasons, particularly during times of crisis, and engaged in banditry with companions in mountains and plains or fought against foreign occupiers and domestic rulers, was labeled an Ayyar. These individuals adhered to a code known as futuwwa or chivalry. Accordingly, Ayyari has been defined as theft, banditry, night-roaming, constant movement, evasion, trickery, dexterity, and cleverness (Ensafpur, 1373: 728). In sum, all the attributes derived from the etymological examination of the term Ayyar correspond closely with the historical behaviors and lifestyles of this group. Considering their distinctive conduct and characteristics, the selection of the term—whether self-designated or assigned by others—appears both accurate and appropriate. The Ayyars were versatile, resourceful, and capable individuals who rarely found themselves helpless in the face of challenges. Their ingenuity, dexterity, cunning, roguishness, agility, banditry, and sharp intelligence became proverbial. Consequently, only a multifaceted and somewhat ambiguous term such as Ayyar could adequately represent this group (Dehqan, 1394: 23).

Based on the lexical definitions discussed above, Ayyari can be regarded as one of the ancient systems of moral training. It emerged in the late second century AH, and the Ayyars followed specific principles and methods in their lives, which gradually merged with Sufism and evolved into futuwwa. The term denotes a distinct social class—primarily among the common people—who possessed unique customs, rituals, and organizational structures, and who prominently displayed their presence during conflicts and wars. These groups often formed alliances, sometimes supporting rulers or their opponents, and fought as part of military forces.

The Ayyars were consistently opposed to despotic governments and sought to eradicate oppression and injustice. Consequently, they harbored deep hostility toward tyrants and oppressors, at times even killing them and redistributing their wealth among the poor. They also defended non-Muslim minorities (Qiyasiyan, 1389: 29). These individuals were chivalrous youth whose presence throughout history is clearly traceable, and whose place in the hearts of the impoverished and the powerless remains evident.

At the same time, there were those who, despite being aware of the virtuous character of historical Ayyars, opposed them—an indication that such opponents were either oppressors themselves or beneficiaries of oppressive systems. The Ayyars confronted them directly, curbing their power and defending the oppressed. Through night raids and the confiscation of the wealth of tyrannical and miserly figures, they sought to redress the injustices inflicted upon the vulnerable. Others, who concealed deceit

beneath a facade of honesty, manipulated naïve and trusting people; the Ayyars, fearless and resolute, exposed these deceptive figures and revealed their true nature.

In response, oppressive groups—armed with wealth and influence—collaborated with ruling authorities to discredit the Ayyars, inciting governments against them. As a result, Ayyars were often subjected to persecution, imprisonment, and even execution. One notable example is Tura, a famous kaka of Afghanistan, who was sentenced to death for his legitimate struggle. Consequently, Ayyars were labeled as thieves, tricksters, deceivers, and pickpockets to tarnish their public image. Many uninformed and simple-minded individuals accepted these accusations and joined in condemning them.

Due to such pressures, Ayyar organizations were often unable to operate freely or consistently under a single name. Only a few succeeded in securing political backing for their groups, such as Taher of Fushanj, founder of the Tahirid dynasty, and Yaqub ibn Layth al-Saffar, founder of the Saffarid dynasty.

The organizational structure of these groups was highly disciplined and hierarchical: every ten members were led by an ʿarīf; every ten ʿarīfs by a naqīb; every ten naqībs by a qāʾid (commander); and every ten commanders by an amīr. Members wore red or yellow cloths around their necks, carried lassos, and fought bravely in every confrontation.

5. The Historical Background of the Ayyar Movement

It is not possible to state with certainty the exact historical period in which the Ayyar movement first emerged. The history of this phenomenon may be examined on the basis of two broad types of narratives: religious narratives and mythological, heroic, and chivalric traditions. Religious narratives—rooted in sacred scriptures and the teachings of divine prophets—explicitly or implicitly trace the origins of this movement to prophets and religious figures. According to these narratives, the first individuals to embody all the positive attributes of Ayyari were the divine prophets themselves, from Adam to Muhammad. Subsequently, certain faithful followers of this path were also attributed qualities associated with futuwwa or Ayyari. Indeed, the lives of all prophets and their companions demonstrate actions and behaviors that surpass the capabilities of ordinary people. As Mawlana Husayn Waiz Kashifi states, "The science of futuwwa is a noble science and a branch of Sufism and monotheism" (Waiez Kashifi, 1350: 5). Accordingly, most futuwwat-namas (futuwwa manuals) were composed in light of such narratives and ideas.

Chivalry, which encompasses virtues such as humility, patience, forgiveness, and forbearance, reflects divine attributes that God has bestowed upon certain servants, particularly the prophets. As noted, "Before the creation of Adam and Eve, God Almighty created the highest paradise and various blessings for their offspring; this is a manifestation of divine generosity, grace, and magnanimity" (Riyaz, 1389: 20). The first human to attain the rank of futuwwa was Adam (peace be upon him), who has been referred to as Abu al-Fityan (ibid.: 21). According to Ibn al-Mihmar, "Futuwwa is one of the moral attributes of religion" (Riyaz, citing Ibn al-Mihmar, 1389: 22).

All prophets, from Adam to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), were considered fata—chivalrous men—though, as indicated by the Quranic verse "Those messengers—some of them We preferred over others" (Quran, al-Baqarah 2:253), certain prophets surpassed others even in this regard. Commentators have described Abraham (peace be upon him) as a fata due to his firmness, generosity, hospitality, and selflessness, drawing upon the verse "We heard a young man (fata) mention them; he is called Abraham" (Quran Anbia 21:60). One of the extraordinary signs of Abraham's futuwwa and self-sacrifice was his willingness to sacrifice his beloved son and his steadfastness in confronting tyrants and destroying idols—acts that culminated in his being cast into a blazing fire, during which he did not even seek assistance from the angel Gabriel (see Riyaz, 1389: 22).

Similarly, the Prophet Joseph exemplified futuwwa through divine trials and severe tribulations. He remained innocent and steadfast when confronted with temptation by the wife of the Egyptian nobleman and others, chose imprisonment over sin, and ultimately forgave the injustices committed against him by his brothers—conduct that only a truly chivalrous individual could demonstrate. The ultimate patience of Noah in the face of persistent opposition, and Jonah's being cast into the sea to save others and remaining confined within the belly of a fish, are further manifestations of the distinctive virtues of divine prophets, who were nurtured by God for the service of humanity.

From a mystical perspective, chivalry possesses a historical lineage that traces back to Abraham (peace be upon him). The origins of Sufism are often traced to Seth, the son of Adam, and futuwwa is regarded as a branch of Sufism and monotheism. Within the framework of futuwwa, the prophetic mission from the time of Abraham is likened to a form of sacred chivalric service, with Abraham serving as the archetype of the fata (see Dehqan, 1394: 31).

Some scholars have attributed the origins of this movement to the Companions of the Cave (Aṣḥāb al-Kahf), who rebelled against the disbelief and tyranny of Decius and sought refuge in a cave. God refers to them in the verse: "Indeed, they were youths (fitya) who believed in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance" (Qur'an 18:13). The Prophet Muhammad himself embodied all the virtues of chivalry to such an extent that further elaboration is unnecessary, and he has been honored with the

title Sayyid al-Fetyan (Riyaz, 1389: 21). Others, drawing upon the prophetic saying "There is no youth (fata) but Ali, and no sword but Dhū al-Faqār", have attributed the essence of futuwwa and chivalry to Imam ʿAli (peace be upon him), whom Bahrām Dehqān describes as "the perfect embodiment of chivalry" (see Dehqan, 1394: 31). Although other companions of the Prophet also possessed attributes of futuwwa and Ayyari—such as Abu Bakr al-Ṣiddiq, ʿOmar al-Fārūq, ʿOsman Dhū al-Nūrayn, and Khālid ibn al-Walīd—each was known by distinct honorific titles.

Sahid Nafisi dates the emergence of this movement to the period following the rise of Sufism, arguing that "futuwwa or chivalry, as a religious, Sufi, and social term, represents a distinct doctrine that, after Sufism, spread more widely than any other path in Islamic lands" (Nafisi, 1383: 134). However, Quranic commentators frequently point to the existence of chivalrous and Ayyar-like figures prior to Islam and earlier religious traditions.

In contrast, when Ayyari is viewed through mythological and heroic narratives—often derived from epic and legendary works such as the Iliad, Odyssey, Mahabharata, and various Shahnamas—the perspective on its historical origins shifts somewhat. Within this chivalric and heroic framework, the Ayyars do not consistently embody all the virtuous attributes associated with prophets and their followers. Practices such as hand-to-hand combat, theft, plundering, and unhealthy rivalries among different groups of Ayyars are frequently observed—features absent from prophetic narratives and incompatible with the exalted status of prophethood. Thus, a distinction can be drawn between religious futuwwa and mythological futuwwa.

Furthermore, equating fata with "knight" presents challenges, as knights were often regarded as agents of monarchs, willing to commit any act to realize their patrons' ambitions. In some cases, a knight might even commit crimes in pursuit of personal love interests. Therefore, futuwwa cannot be fully equated with medieval chivalry. If futuwwa, Ayyari, or chivalry is understood as an organized and institutionalized movement, its history must be examined separately within each nation and geographical context, as each society possesses distinct characteristics and a unique historical trajectory.

Persian heroic legends preserved in the language fall into two categories: mythological heroic tales, such as those found in the Avesta, Ferdowsi's Shāhnāma, and works like Gashtasp-nama; and narratives of chivalry and Ayyari, the oldest of which is the story of Samak-e Ayyar. These Ayyari narratives—particularly Samak-e Ayyar—share many features with traditional codes of chivalry and strongly suggest that Islamic-era chivalry and Ayyari stem from a common origin. Courage, piety, compassion, loyalty to one's word, patience, night vigilance, and the protection of people are shared traits of both chivalry and Ayyari. In many instances within Samak-e Ayyar, the hero and the Ayyar are treated as synonymous figures (Dehqan, 1394: 30).

Historical research indicates that the emergence of the fatayan occurred in the early fourth century AH (tenth century CE). At that time, they were known as Ayyars, vagabonds, or rebels. However, no clear connection between them and chivalric youth groups can be firmly established. The principles of chivalry appear to have crystallized in the fifth century AH, as reflected in works that link futuwwa and Sufism (see Dehqan, 1394: 31).

According to Āyīn-e Futuwwa va Javanmardi book, associations of fatayan emerged in many Islamic lands of the East, forming groups known as futuwwa. The term futuwwa is Arabic in origin and denotes youthfulness, the prime of life, and actions befitting youth. Derived from fata (young man), it occasionally also carried meanings such as servant or slave. Over time, futuwwa acquired additional meanings: it came to signify noble character, encompassing virtues such as magnanimity, generosity, and bravery, which were expected of a true fata. It also assumed a social meaning, referring to groups of young men who gathered together and considered the cultivation of these virtues their collective duty.

The historical roots of the Ayyars must be sought in the pre-Islamic period, although neither pre-Islamic nor post-Islamic historical sources devote sustained attention to them. Among the most important sources providing information about the Ayyars are Qabus-nama by Amir Hanṣor al-Mahali and Samak-e Ayyar by Faramarz ibn Khodadad ibn Abdullah al-Kateb al-Arjani. The Ayyars adhered strictly to their principles—those of chivalry—and anyone who violated these principles faced severe punishment. From the perspective of the Ayyars, the foundations of chivalry rested on three core principles: first, to act in accordance with one's words; second, never to depart from truthfulness; and third, to practice patience.

As stated in Farhang-e Sokhan, the Ayyars were a social class drawn from the general populace who emerged during the Abbasid period in Baghdad, Khorasan, Sistan, and other regions. They were courageous and chivalrous individuals who supported the poor and the oppressed (Dehqan, 1394: 25).

6. Geographical Background

There are numerous views regarding the place of origin and emergence of this movement. Some scholars have considered its geographical boundaries to be Khorasan, Iraq, and Transoxiana (Mā Warāʾ al-Nahr). In the Encyclopedia of Islamlica, under the entry Aḥdath, Iraq and Khorasan are mentioned as the geographical domains of this group (Dehqan, citing Encyclopedia of Islamica, 2015: 34). Some believe that the emergence of Ayyars and javanmards initially took place in Khorasan, while others

argue that the influence of this code of conduct had existed in Arab lands prior to Islam. At that time, javanmards were known by names such as Ayyars, wanderers, ṣahluks, and rebels (Afshari & Madayeni, 2009: 11).
Arab researchers maintain that this tradition originated from the lifestyle of pre-Islamic Arabs. Mustafa Kamil al-Shaybi believes that the institution of javanmardi emerged in the first Islamic century in Kufa and later spread to Baghdad. He argues that pre-Islamic Arabs, due to their desert way of life, adhered to a set of moral principles such as bravery, generosity, loyalty to promises, protection of the poor, and respect for companionship, which they referred to as futuwwa. Based on this view, the foundations of this tradition were first formed in Arab lands and later spread to neighboring regions, including Iran (al-Suqi, 1959: 21).
Khwandamir holds that the Ayyars appeared in Baghdad in the late second Islamic century, and that they played a significant role in inciting unrest between al-Amin and al-Mamun. When al-Amin was besieged in Baghdad and his troops were unable to defend the city, he resorted to the Ayyars and libertines. Taking advantage of the caliph's need, the Ayyars received financial support until, as Khwandamir reports, when the treasury was emptied of cash and soldiers, al-Amin ordered golden and silver instruments to be melted and minted into coins, and valuable goods and fabrics were sold at half price and distributed among the Ayyars and rogues so that they might resist the people of Khorasan (Khwandamir, 1983: 250).

In Dehkhoda's Dictionary, under the entry Ayyaran, regions such as Baghdad, Khorasan, Sistan, and Transoxiana are mentioned. Likewise, in Tarikh-e Sistan, edited by Malek-ol-Shoara Bahar, these regions—particularly Sistan—are identified as major centers of the Ayyar movement. Bastani Parizi, in The Code of Javānmardi, introduces all areas of Khorasan, especially Sistan, as the main geographical sphere and center of Ayyar activity.

There is also evidence of the presence of Ayyars in Transoxiana, including references to the Ayyars of Samarkand. Moreover, Dehkhoda's Dictionary notes that their concentration and power were greatest in cities such as Qohestan, Marv, Bast, Khuj, and Joveyn. Their presence in the Levant (Syria) is also mentioned in the Great Persian Encyclopedia under the entry javanmards (Dehqan, 2015, citing Dehkhoda, Parizi, and the Encyclopaedia of Islamica: 34–35).

Mir-Hossein Deldar-Bonab, drawing a comparison between Zoroastrianism and the Ayyar tradition, argues that this institution has roots in ancient Iranian beliefs. He states that historical evidence confirms the existence of Ayyari prior to Islam, and that some historians consider the influence of Mithraism on the Ayyar code to be historically undeniable. One of the meanings of Ayyar is "skilled horseman," and in ancient Iran, horsemanship was restricted to a particular social class; not everyone could belong to this group, and weapons such as the bow and arrow were among their essential tools (Deldar-Bonab, 2005: 24).

Mehrdad Bahar and Abdolhossein Navai likewise maintain that the tradition of Ayyari is either identical with, or at least a branch of, the ancient Mithraic cult that survived among a class known as the Ayyars (Bahar, 1996: 73). Additional evidence suggests that the roots of the Ayyar tradition lie in pre-Islamic times, and that its principal origin should be sought in ancient Iran (Aryānā-ye Kohan). Among such evidence are the customs, rituals, and moral virtues of ancient heroes and semi-mythical, semi-historical figures associated with Mithraic temples, whose shared qualities—such as bravery, piety, compassion, loyalty, patience, and endurance—reflect common ethical foundations.

Another argument presented by Seyyed Masoud Razavi, author of The History and Culture of Ayyari, is that many Manichaean ideas penetrated this tradition. In the mid-second Islamic century, particularly in Sistan and Khorasan, when resistance movements arose against the oppression and ethnic discrimination of the Umayyads and their agents, the leadership of these national and masculine movements was largely undertaken by javanmards (see Razavi, 2016: 25–26). Additionally, the rigid class distinctions of ancient Khorasan contributed to the emergence of such a movement, whose members sought to support those who were socially marginalized and consistently subjected to suppression by aristocratic systems (see Deldar-Bonab, 2005: 26).

Nevertheless, as discussed in the historical background of this movement, javanmardi is often defined interchangeably with futuwwa, sometimes rooted in religious thought and at other times reflected in chivalric and legendary traditions. From this perspective, an examination of the roots of the Ayyars reveals that, given their distinctive customs and practices, their homeland ultimately traces back to the vast territory of ancient Aryana.

7. Ayyar and Ayyari from the Perspective of Sociological Concepts and Social Classes

Naturally, in every human society, there exist differences in taste, culture, religion, and ideology. The Ayyars constitute a group belonging to specific social classes who, through a set of distinctive actions, behaviors, and discourses, managed to acquire a recognizable and differentiated identity, distinguishing themselves from other social strata. Although certain forms of imitation in behavior, practices, and beliefs may be observed among Ayyar movements in different regions, each movement primarily follows a path shaped by its own place of origin and emergence. For instance, clear signs of javanmardi (chivalric conduct) can be observed in Europe during the fifth century AH (eleventh century CE), where various Germanic tribes adopted this code

according to their own inclinations (Riyaz, 2010: 100). There is also the perception that "all these movements represent a series of internal reactions that generally began as resistance against rigid restrictions and imposed norms" (Zarrinkub, 2000: 379).

It appears that the emergence of a movement known as Ayyari cannot be regarded as a singular historical event, such as a war, but rather as a human phenomenon and social process rooted in human nature and disposition. Therefore, it is not possible to determine a precise point of origin for it. Parviz Natel Khanlari considers Ayyari to be one of the most significant social organizations in Iran over several centuries. He argues that although we lack precise information about the initial formation of this tradition, it can be stated with near certainty that its origins should be sought in pre-Islamic history. In most sources, the term Ayyari is used synonymously with javanmardi. If the word is assumed to be Arabic, its meanings bear no semantic proximity to the concept of javanmardi (see: Natel Khanlari, 1969: 3).

From a sociological perspective, it becomes evident that nations which have experienced deprivation and injustice more intensely than others tend to become hardened by time, develop greater boldness, and acquire stronger capacities to resist and assert their rights. Such societies are more likely to rise against adversaries and oppressive rulers and express opposition to their conduct. Conversely, in regions where governance is relatively fair and balanced, such uprisings are observed less frequently. For this reason, the roots of the Ayyar movement emerged among oppressed and underprivileged social classes, who sought retaliation against tyrannical rulers and unjust elites. Economic pressure, political opposition, and social repression were among the most influential factors contributing to their formation and organization.

The emergence of Ayyars in Sistan is likewise attributed to the Arab invasion, the spread of Islam, and the conduct of caliphal governors and agents in that region (see: Bastani Parizi, 1997: 160). The deteriorating economic conditions of eastern Islamic lands, caused by the heavy and crushing taxation imposed by the Abbasids, forced a large number of farmers to abandon their occupations. As a result, they were compelled either to beg in urban centers or to resort to banditry in rural areas. According to Sadeq Goharin, laborers and impoverished working classes, due to unemployment and lack of resources, were also driven to join these groups. In rural areas, oppression by caliphal officials, combined with drought and famine, had severely damaged livelihoods, while in cities, increasing taxation led to economic stagnation. Consequently, farmers and urban workers faced a stark choice: surrender to death or seek alternative means of survival.

Banditry was one such means adopted by these deprived groups. Those who later came to be known as Ayyars initially gathered in small numbers, found individuals similar to themselves, and engaged in banditry outside cities. Through this activity, they accumulated wealth and distributed it fairly among their companions—whose numbers steadily increased due to worsening economic conditions (Dehqan, 2015, citing Goharin: 35). Gradually, as their activities became more organized, the Ayyars came to be recognized as a legitimate and established social faction.

Henry Corbin maintains that the emergence of the fityan dates back to the early fourth century AH, and that prior to this period they were commonly known as Ayyars, wanderers, or rebels. From the references made by Unsur al-Mahali in chapter forty-four of Qabusnameh regarding Ayyari and the Ayyars, it can be inferred that by the fifth century AH, Ayyari had become a recognized and reputable social group with a distinct status and standing in society (Unsur al-Mahali, 1985: 244–264).

In the land of Afghanistan, conditions followed a similar pattern. The Ayyars mentioned in historical sources were predominantly drawn from the lower socio-economic classes, and they dedicated their lives to serving their communities. Among them was Ghani Naswari, one of the Ayyars and fityān of Kabul, who was also a poet. Describing his own life, he states:
Outwardly gold, inwardly copper am I;
I bear the name Ghani, yet I am destitute
(Yaqin, 1986: 105).

In Afghanistan, traces of Ayyari can be clearly observed not only in Persian (Dari) literature but also in Pashto literature, where it holds significant sociological importance. Examples include stories such as Momen Khan and Zafar Khan, Musa Khan and Gul Makai, Adam Khan and Durkhan, Dali and Shahi, Saif al-Muluk and Badri Jamal, Mah-Jabin, Gulfam, Shaha and Gulan, Iqbal Qamar-Jabin, Ranan wa Ziba, Shir Alam and Mamun, Mahjuba and Jallad, Momen Khan and Shirino, Nimbula and Timbula, Yusuf Khan and Shirbanu, Sakhi Sultan, Chamni Khan, Fath Khan Barihi, Jalat Khan and Shamail, Mulla Abbas and Gulbashra, Zarif Khan and Mabi, Khushkiyar and Shatrin, and Qutb Khan and Nazo (see: Yaqin, 1986: 86–87).

8. Conclusion

The term Ayyar has been defined in numerous Arabic and Persian lexicographical sources with a wide range of meanings, including a frequent traveler, agile, energetic, wanderer, someone who roams idly, vagrant, swift-moving, brave, clever, itinerant, world traveler, roamer, swift as flight, thief, dexterous, evasive, sharp-minded and intelligent man, night-walker, violent, reckless,

and indifferent. Some scholars derive the word from the Arabic root Ayyar, while others trace it to Persian or Pahlavi origins such as iyar or adhiwar. Terminologically, it refers to a group belonging to specific social classes that was formed to support the oppressed and assist the helpless. This group developed its own distinctive modes of dress, specialized verbal discourse, and unique customs and rituals, setting itself apart from other social strata. Although appearing under different names across various countries and regions, the Ayyars manifested themselves with a shared worldview and common ideological foundations.

Based on the accounts of historians and scholars, if the concept of Ayyar is considered independently of futuwwa and examined from its lexical and social roots, it can be argued that the original homeland of the Ayyars was Ariana and Greater Khorasan, particularly Sistan, which gave rise to prominent Ayyar figures such as Yaqub ibn Layth al-Saffar, Abu Muslim Khorasani, and others. One of the significant and less-explored findings of this study is the identification of a layer of specialized terminology and idiomatic expressions unique to the Ayyars. These expressions originated in internal group interactions, gradually entered popular language, and were later incorporated into formal literary discourse. Vocabulary related to clothing, travel equipment, and methods of combat often acquired metaphorical meanings and came to be used in poetry as symbols of patience, strength, and resistance.

Certain expressions originating in intra-group communication entered literary usage directly, imparting a colloquial and popular tone to written texts. Some proverbs and idioms have their roots in Ayyar discourse, such as "being a friend of one's friend" and "being an enemy of one's enemy," which in literature evolved into expressions of value-based ethics and moral boundary-setting. This linguistic influence demonstrates that the verbal culture of the Ayyars has contributed to shaping the linguistic identity of Afghanistan, and its study is therefore of considerable value for historical and social linguistics.

From the foregoing discussion, it may be concluded that the Ayyars and javanmards—whether in the land of Khorasan or elsewhere—were predominantly drawn from oppressed and marginalized segments of society. Under political pressure, economic hardship, and prevailing social repression, they adopted this path as a means of providing effective support to their communities, assisting their compatriots—most of whom belonged to lower or middle social classes—and alleviating the conditions of oppression dominating society. Given that Afghanistan is composed of diverse ethnic groups and communities, prominent figures of Ayyari can also be observed within local narratives of Pashto language and literature, as well as in historical accounts related to these communities.

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