

Manifestation of Plant, Tree and Human in Asian Mythology

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Abstract. Sacred plants and trees play a crucial role in art and literature of different nations. Many of these plants are metamorphosed bodies of human beings and animals. In Asian mythology, too, the same thought pervades. In Iranian mythology, Kiomarth is reckoned as the first human being created, on whom The Satan inflicts a disease, for which he dies after a long suffering; after forty years there grows an intermingled two branched tree out of his corpse, which was maddening. The plant is transformed to a man and a woman, who are the parents of all human beings. In the cited tragedy Kiomarth (the hero) is murdered innocently. In Iranian culture tall trees which soar to sky, i.e., cypress, spruce, pine, sycamore, and nubk tree, are holy. In the Philippines, people believe the ghosts of the dead live on trees and in Islamic ritual palm tree is deemed to be the aunt of human race which is created by the leftover mud of human body. The current paper aims to survey the mythical archetypes of Asian nations and sects with respect to the relation between human beings and plants.

Keywords: Plant, Tree, Human, Myth, Archetype, Iran

1. Introduction

In Kiyoomars tragedy, he was killed innocently then, came back to the world in the shape of maddening plant to live. Iranian transfiguration sect believed "human's soil can convert to plant's or animal's body after death". Ancient tribes believed human ghost can penetrate into the bodies of plants or animals or even objects; they thus revered some plants or animals. As regards, the most famous story in Iranian literature to be cited is Siavoosh tragedy. The mentioned Iranian prince was killed innocently; when his blood splattered on the ground, at the very moment grew a plant which is named maidenhair.

Pillars in historical monuments of Iran symbolize tree, which bear religious connotation. Trees are sacred and the carvings of trees, such as cypress and nubk tree for ornamentation well attest to the fact. In one period of time, a particular tree gains significance and another tree in another era. Today plane tree is reckoned sacred in Iran; many shrines in Iran, wherein old plane or cypress trees soar to sky, are obvious testimonies.

There is another story on Egypt mythology about Bata tragedy that grew two great trees from his two blood drops on ground that was shed unjustly. In other story derived from Babylonian mythology the young king, the symbol of New Year, killed the old king, the symbol of old year, to rehabilitate the fertility of soil. We read again in another Babylonian story that grew red blackberries from the two lovers' blood_ their names Píram and Tisebe. Before their death, blackberry was in white color.

Water is the other element, whose existence as an object of worship, is lucidly traced on Elamite inscriptions remained from 2000 or 3000 B.C, up to Samanid and then Islamic period wherein water has not lost its holiness. To illustrate, we pour water behind the passengers when they are leaving for a journey.

In Chinese mythology Lee Ching is one of the military commanders. His son, Noocha, is one of the heroes of Chinese myth, who is sixty feet tall with tree heads, nine eyes and eight hands. Noocha is born not out of his parents' copulation but has a celestial seed. Such an archetype is also visible in Iranian and Christian mythology. The birth of Mehr (Mitra) is out of stone. The birth of Ooshidar , Ooshidarmah, and Sooshians are all the result of the departure of virgin girls to sea and Jesus Christ is born too, from the Virgin Mary.

The myth of Feng Poo (the god of wind) is in the form of an old man, with white beard and a yellow cloak from whose mouth wind blows. He is known as a dragon in the name of Fei Lien who has been a human firstly. He is also known as a goose whose head is that of a bird with two horns and a snake tail.

In matriarchal and agricultural societies, the husband of princess who was chosen among the youth, would be sacrificed each year for the fertility of nature. From 4000 B.C, the relationship between the mythology of western Asia and China was settled. In Indian mythology we read wherever Ram takes steps plants grow under his feet. In Chinese mythology, after the death of Pan- Goo, emerged world's materials from his body and grew plants from his hair. In Japanese Sosanso, the God of storm planted its beard hairs in Korean coasts, from which emerged a bushy jungle. The first literal reflection of the current motif in Persian poetry, is seen in Iraj story. His father, Freidoon, cried a lot when he saw his children beheaded, and grew a plant from his tears near him. In Islamic period our mosques are associated with water and tree. You may find shrines even in mountains and valleys, most of which are located beside rivers and covered by plane trees. This link between human and plants is visible in a quotation by Prophet Mohammad peace be upon him: 'Revere the aunt of human kind, as the tree is created by leftover of Adam's soil. Based on Islamic thought human is created by soil and divine spirit is blown within him. As a testimony to the link between human, animal and tree in Persian culture we can refer to the fact that the measure for counting humans, camel (the highest of animals in rank), and palm tree (the highest of trees in rank) is the same, Nafar. In Islam, palm tree and camel may be used as a mean to pay the blood money. Climbing palm tree symbolizes divine ascendance. Camel too is the main companion of human. Persian and Arabic poetic rhythms too, are imitations of horse's and camel's motions. Camels are sometimes more intelligent than humans and they are affected by the same feelings as human's. Camels for instance, at the loss of their kid, cry noisily. Female camels act coquettishly in the second month of spring and male ones perform a dance; that is why we read such in Masnavi of Mevlana Rumi:

هل رايتم من جبل رقص الجمل صار دكا منه و انشق الجبل

Surprisingly, camels are also an adroit smuggler. Camels are addicted in some parts of Iran. They are then sent to Afghanistan and are loaded with drugs. The camel is able to return to the place where he has been addicted, surprisingly with no guide. The branches of palm tree rise to sky twice a day, which is interpreted as a prayer to God. Palm tree is the symbol of chastity due to its low sexual propensity.

In Chinese mythology, Ien- Giau like siavoosh in Iranian mythology, was captured by his father's enemies, he was then buried up to his neck and a plough passed on his head and died, this caused fertility of plants. In Egypt mythology, Osiris was killed by his brother, Seth, and he is the god of fertility in Egypt. He is also born in spring and has many similarities with Persephone, Goddess of growth. Osiris was the symbol of corn, grape and trees too. In Babylonian mythology, Tammuz was the lord of fertility and plants. His death was in the summer and its resurrection was in the spring. The goddess is the symbol of spring's sun and when he goes for an underground trip, growing stops at his absence.

In mythology cypress is the god of plants. In Iran Mehr is roughly the symbol of plant's god. In Greece too, designs remained from the ritual of Mehr Worshiping, represent paintings of cypress. Pillars in western Asia are the symbol of tree and its generosity. In mythology it is quoted that Gergis, the prophet of God, was imprisoned in a house to die of hunger. The pillars of house grow date and by feeding himself by the dates he survives. The existence of pillars in the house symbolizes blessing. Iranian houses were built southward which embodies the relationship between sun and life. The pillars of Persepolis are designed in the shape of a cow. Cow in Iran is the symbol of animal life and it is entitled as the family doctor (Hakimeh). When cow is killed by The Demon, plants grow out of its body and out of its semen profitable animals are created. The pivot points in all Western Asian rituals are water, plant and animal. In Persian mythology plane tree is sacred and is usually accompanied by grapevine. Herodotus the Greek historian says: the last king of Mad dreams her daughter, the mother of Cyrus. Out of her stomach grew a vine which covered the whole Asia. Grape in Persian mythology is the symbol of blood and blood is the chief force of life. In other words, plane tree is the symbol of king himself and the vine a symbol of his wife from whose blood dynasty sustained. Iranian kings emphatically praised plane tree and in Iranian court there were a golden plane tree as well as a grapevine which were put in king's bedroom.

In ancient Iran six creations exist. Sky, joy, water, plant, cow and Kiomarth; therefore, six celebrations are held which are called Gahanbar, all of which are for five days. It is quoted that Mehr is born in a cave.

Cave plays a striking role in Mehr rituals thus. At its birth shepherds are present. Such a story is also narrated with respect to Jesus Christ PBUH. Followers of Mehr religion believe that the mother of Mehr was fertilized by Zarathustra's semen. The Zarathustran belief that world is egg-shaped has its roots in a very ancient Indian and European belief. At the very beginning, an egg was created and remained for one year. It was then split into two halves; a silver half which became the earth and a golden half which became the sky.

In the ancient Anatolie religion people ascended to the top of green and grassy mountains and held festivals. Cybele lived on top of Ida Mount. Old pine trees and almond trees were considered the sacred trees of Attis. Dionesus was the god of plants. Grassy mountains, pine and oak jungles and caves were its residence. It showed itself amid the jungle sounds and had a lavish life. People imitated it.

In Persian poems where Prophet Khezr was sited, grew herbs and became green. Based on a narration in Indian mythology, grows lotus flower from Vishnu's navel; then Brahma is born from that and recreates the world again. Carrying palm is one of the famous Iranian ceremonies which is performed to lament the death of Imam Hussein peace be upon him, the third Shiite's Imam. It takes place in many hot climate cities of Iran. The artificial palm is embellished with colorful clothes and is carried upon people's hands during the march. Its decoration with clothes attests to the holiness of tree and its room-like structure reminds us of Siavosh's coffin. We may also refer to this popular belief that Gods were created from tree..

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