

A Case Study of Jobs in Iranian Legends

Farzaneh Sajadpour¹ and Ebrahim Jamali

¹Department of Tourism, Islamic Azad University, Khoramabad Branch ,Khoramabad,Iran

²Department of Tourism, Islamic Azad University, Khoramabad Branch ,Khoramabad,Iran

Abstract: Legends are the haven wherein people live their real lives, even if they are called imaginary and are full of fairies. Beneath the magic layers of legends the life of ordinary people, their wishes and values throb on. Therefore, it is no surprise that working in order to earn a living is a staple of legends. In this article we have studied Iran's legends from the viewpoint of jobs in legends. The jobs mentioned in 90 legends were analyzed and ranked according to their frequency and percentage. In a separate section, the social prestige of jobs and the gender of their practitioners were studied. The result of this study shows that kingship is considered a job, or more importantly, a high social rank. Because of its importance in Iran's legends, a part of this article is dedicated to its analysis.

Keywords: Legends, Myths, Jobs, Social prestige, King

1. Introduction

Legends are a full-length mirror for every society wherein the happiness, sorrow, love, moral and religious values, etc. are reflected in a real and tangible way. In fact, a legend is a sample world wherein the hero in a battle between the two poles of Ahura and Ahriman emerges victorious. Although each fairytale and magic legend is a "story occurring in an unreal world, without a definite place and realistic characters and replete with incredible and wonderful events" [1]. Whatever happens in it finds a manifestation in the real world, even if it is expressed cryptically. Therefore, as far as life routine is concerned, whatever is true of people in the real world is also true of the characters in a story. They have jobs which indicate their social standing. The hero of the story in order to earn a living and achieve his long-held wish embarks on a journey and finds his dream realized in the king's castle, where he joins his beloved, who is an angelic princess of noble birth. At a cursory glance, one might think legends are the products of people's imagination. But at a closer look, one can easily trace the visible manifestations of people's life in them: real scenes of social interactions, such as social relationships, commerce, social intercourse between individuals and groups, etc. On the other hand, there is a meaningful relationship between the job of characters in legends and their social standing. In other words, when a character is introduced at the beginning of a legend as having a certain job, his social standing is being revealed to the listeners so they can identify with the whole legend. It seems that the characters in a legend are deliberately and meaningfully created and it is no accident that someone is a wood-gatherer, another shepherd or king. The main goal of this study is to discover the link between characters and the social prestige of their jobs. Therefore, the jobs mentioned in Iranian legends are investigated and apart from introducing the legends with the central theme of "encouraging to work," the jobs mentioned in other legends are introduced.

2. The Jobs Introduced in Legends

Just as in real world, different characters of a story have different jobs. Of the 150 legends that had been compiled only 90 were studied. The number of legends was reduced to 90 because there were repetitive legends or legends with similar themes or legends about animals (fables,) which were essentially irrelevant to this study. To make a list of the introduced jobs in legends, the search criterion was "word" or the job title, whether current or obsolete. About 18 kinds of job with the total frequency of 239 were recorded which are presented in the table below.

Regarding "kingship," despite ambiguity as to its being a job, character type or social status, the first was selected. Because in some legends, this character has, apart from his social prestige, a kind of power and ability resulting from the title of "king" he bears. The same holds true about witch-doctors and wizardry which are generally believed to be jobs by which people earn a living. In analyzing the words, whenever a

¹Corresponding author- Tel.: +989127049306
f_sajadpour@yahoo.com

synonym was found, both of them were considered as one. For instance, the words businessman and merchant are used to refer to the same job. Or about thief and robber, despite the difference in meaning, because of the similarity of their work in breaking the law and their appearances, both were classified as one. The title “reeve” because of its similarity to king was not considered a separate job. As a result, the following table was designed from which information regarding jobs can be extracted:

Percentage	Frequency	Job Title
26.4%	63	King
12%	28	Wood gatherer-Wood-cutter
12%	28	Wizard ‘witch-doctor and ...
8.8%	21	Vizier
8%	19	Shepherd - Ranchman - Herdsman
6.2%	15	Hunter
5.1%	12	Physician
4.6%	11	Soldier and Sentry
3.5%	9	Thief and Robber
3.3%	8	Farmer
2.5%	6	Businessman and Merchant
2.1%	5	Worker
1.3%	3	Gardner
1.3%	3	Executioner
1.3%	3	Fisherman
1	2	Captain
1	2	Baker and related jobs
0.5%	1	Butcher
100	239	Total

“In Iranian magic legends, heroes have two different social origins: A) he is of the aristocrat families, i.e., the rich ruling families. B) he is of the lower class families, and in most cases, is of the poorest people. In the latter case, the hero appears as a wood-gatherer, shepherd, fisherman, water-drawer, and generally a poor person.”[2].

As evident in the table above, the highest frequency belongs to “king,” and the lowest to “butcher.” With regards to the fact that city jobs were less common in legends, it seems that Iranian legends have a special origin related to life dependent on agriculture and animal husbandry [3]. Another interesting point evident in the above-mentioned legends is the frequency of jobs such as wood-cutting and wood-gathering, which comprise 28 percent of the total frequency. As understood from the legends, all people holding such jobs were moneyless and led a difficult life. Therefore, if we add other jobs like “worker” and, in some cases, “poor farmer”, to the previous two jobs, their frequency equals to that of the most prestigious job mentioned in Iranian legends. In legends, kingship is not always a job. Sometimes it is only a social rank equal to an influential person or a reeve. In some legends, it is said, for instance, that “there was a king who had three sons”, but thereafter there the king is no more mentioned and his sons set out on a journey like ordinary people. In legends, therefore, the heroes are trying to achieve an archetype, not kingship.

We can therefore assume that the statistics regarding “king” does not correspond to the existing social realities of the society. However, mentioning low-paid jobs can be taken to reveal unsatisfactory social conditions. Of course, it should be remembered that sometimes the reeve of a village or the rich person give their places to a king in legends, in which case class difference could also be relevant.

2.1. Classifying Jobs According to Gender

In Iranian legends, jobs are considered to be reserved for men. In the legends studied, only once a king, once a fisherperson and three times a maid from the lower class were introduced as female. It seems to point a finger to the social conditions of the society, wherein women were discouraged to be active in the society or that essentially women’s jobs were regarded as part of their duties. In the legends studied, spinning, straw-plaiting and carpet-weaving, for instance, are done by girls. However, it does not mean that they have a job or earn money. Rather, they were parts of their duties.

Wizardry, palmistry and fortune-telling have more woman practitioners than man ones. Of course, in the legends studied, the numbers of men and women were almost equal: 16 women and 14 men. Occasionally there are women in legends who play the role of a lure. They are generally in the pay of the

king and are amply remunerated for luring the woman with whom the king or his son has fallen in love. However, it cannot be taken as a job and therefore is not considered as such in this study. Another job is mentioned in Iranian legends which go by the name of “dervish”. Dervishes and mystics stand generally in polar opposition to wizards and witch-doctors and are respectfully mentioned in legends. They solve people’s problems without receiving any reward.

3. The Social Prestige of Jobs in Legends

In every society, each job has a social prestige particular to itself. It would be safe to say that the most prestigious job in legends is kingship, which is discussed in detail below. In legends, however, merely having a prestigious job does not imply a high social standing as well, and the person may well be a villain in the story. For instance, in the legend “Six Brothers,” despite the fact that one of the brothers is a prosperous merchant, he does not have a good social prestige, because he accumulates wealth through deceit and fraud. Or in the legend “The Small Monkey,” the miserly farmer who neither lets others nor use his products nor himself uses them, is depicted as an evil character that is attacked by thieves, and the narrator avers confidently that this is the fate awaiting a miser. Even in some legends, poor people have a high social prestige. For instance, the “Bald,” as a character who is often a wood-gatherer or shepherd, is admired for his perspicacity and intelligence, as a result of which he gains a high social status, i.e., winning the hand of the princess.

In the society at large, people may respect the rich. But within folk culture this reality manifests itself differently. In other words, whenever social considerations impede the expression of the reality, the legends express it loud and clear to the audience. That is why sometimes a rich merchant is less respected than an ordinary farmer. In Iranian legends, Vizier, with the frequency of 20, is considered a bad character, who despite his high social standing, is commonly known as a dishonest and villainous person.

4. The Significance of King in Iranian Legends

It was earlier mentioned that legends are not independent of tribal and national myths. Kings, princes and princesses are important parts of myths. For instance, in ancient Egypt, the king is the child of Ra (sun god) and as a result, he also had god-like characteristics in the eyes of the ancient Egyptians. In Mesopotamia, when someone acceded to the throne, he received the title of the child of God, and thereafter “he played the role of God on earth and represented his nation before the gods” [4].

In other words, the king was the mediator between God and people and was a god-like, sacred figure. In the Sassanid era and in Iran, some kings, particularly Khosrau Anushirvan, held the role of king-magus [5]. Thus, religious and political leadership was simultaneously conferred on the king. In ancient Persians’ belief, the forces of good in their battle against the forces of evil possessed two means: fellow believers and king. They may exist in symbiosis, but they would never become one. Obeying the king and knowing and following the religion (Zoroastrianism) were two factors necessary to defeat the forces of evil. “A just king is the manifestation of the benevolent God and a symbol of His rule on the earth. His duty is to encourage and increase creation, religion (Zoroastrianism) and happiness of people under his rule, because these are manifestations of God’s dreams for mankind...” [6]. The Achaemenian Darius in an inscription calls himself the manifestation of the benevolent soul in that he has improved and elevated the world: “with the grace of Ahura Mazda, I have accomplished this; what I have done appears great in the eyes of the entire world.” [7]. In Iranian Legends, the king does not convey such an impression. In Delasho’s words, “legends only convey symbols related to worldly system [8]. The king is no longer a celestial figure but is reduced to a character assuming a role.

In legends, the king who is the manifestation and possessor of spiritual and physical powers and everything is in his control—and perhaps this is why he is god-like, albeit with a single defect, which is being confined to a geographical place—is often like ordinary people without those extraordinary and mythological powers. He is unaware of the future and is prone to mistakes and in the end realizes his wrongdoings. One of the few important things about kings of the legends may be their place of abode, i.e., castle, of which the hero often builds a better version and lives there with his spouse. “Yerji Chipak” believes that legends featuring kings and princes were created for the pleasure of “the aristocracy” and “ruling families.” [9]. But it hardly seems true that legends are created for the pleasure of kings and courtiers, because then we must ignore many legends and consider only a small number of them.

It seems that legends are more the creation of the mythological mind of ordinary people, who imagine the ideal of worldly and sometimes spiritual life can be found in the castle of the king, a belief which is

reflected in legends through the attempt to marry the king's son or daughter. Since in tribal beliefs, the king is the symbol of earthly goodness, and the hero is also in a way the manifestation of goodness. And when between these two, indirectly through marriage with king's son or daughter, or directly through marrying the king himself, a link is established, perfection follows. The hero of the story can be a simple shepherd, who in order to win the princess's hand, tells big lies. The great class difference that exists between them is obviated by his perspicacity and intelligence. Even in some legends we observe that the hero himself is a prince who because of unkindness or other reasons leaves his father's castle and marries a princess in another place. In popular legend of people, the king does not live away from them in gigantic, labyrinthine castles. Like all people, he has children, who go with "leather-maker's daughter" to school and live among ordinary people. The door of the king's house is open to everyone and all attend his son's wedding ceremony. King's daughters gather in the city square with an apple and choose their favorite youth, who may be from ordinary people.

We should not, however, forget that there are legends with political meaning in which the king is the hero, such as the legends about King Abbas. Probably, some of these legends have earlier origins, dating back to the Shah's time, when they were created by courtiers for political purposes. In Iran, "King Abbas" is depicted as having a holy aspect. His most important duty is said to have been solving people's problems. For instance, in the legend "King Abbas and the Chare-nevis," it is said that whenever one of the people had a problem, King Abbas contracted a painful stomach-ache, so much so that his pain would not cease unless the problem was solved.

5. Conclusion

Iranian legends seek to depict and encourage endeavour and perseverance evident in Iranian culture, and present themselves to their audience in a form that is exalted and true to their cultural origins. In these legends, individual and collective efforts are emphasized. But more importantly, helping others and earning a decent living are paid extra attention, factors which lead to the hero's affluence and higher social standing. Thus, even the hero's prosperity is not reasonless and irrational and is completely logical, which is no other thing than the victory of the good over the evil. And since working and endeavouring is something positive, the hero as a good character attains this position and time and again the repetitive story of Ahura's victory over Ahriman is retold. Perhaps, this is the essence of all Iranian legends, no matter what their content or characters be.

6. References:

- [1] Jahazi, Nahid. "Characterization in Iranian Legends." *Iranian People's Culture Quarterly*, 2009 No. 17, p. 20
- [2] Khadish, Pegah. "Social Manifestation of Character in Iranian Legends." *People's Culture Quarterly* 2007: No. 23, p. 118
- [3] Safinejad, Javad. "The Social Structure of the Rural Society of Iran." *Cultural Research Quarterly*, 2004, No. 9
- [4] Hinnells, John R. "Persian Mythology", Trans by Zaleh Amozegar & Ahmad Tafazoli, the Hamlyn publishing Group, London, 1975, pp. 3-51.
- [5] Bahar, Mehrdad. *Asiatic Religions*. Tehran, Cheshme: 1996, P. 50.
- [6] Hinnells, John R. "Persian Mythology", Trans by Zaleh Amozegar & Ahmad Tafazoli, the Hamlyn publishing Group, London, 1975, pp. 3-51
- [7] Delachaux, Loeffler M. "Cryptic Language in Fairytales" Trans by Jalal Satari, Tus, Tehran, 2008, p. 153
- [8] Hinnells, John R. "Persian Mythology", Trans by Zaleh Amozegar & Ahmad Tafazoli, the Hamlyn publishing Group, London, 1975, p. 153.
- [9] Chipak, Yerji. Trans. by Yaqub Ajand. "A Preface to Persian Folktales." *Literature Quarterly* 1998: No. 49, p. 58.