

**A Study of Mythological Motifs in the Story of "Chel-Gis" as  
Narrated in the Village of Romqan, Koohmarreh Sorkhi, Shiraz**

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**1. Introduction**

Folk tales are a rich part of the literature of any nation and by analyzing them, one can understand the beliefs, thoughts, ways of life, archetypes and totems of that nation. Studying these stories and legends is the best way, and perhaps the only possible way, to know the ways of life of the past generations. "In folk tales, all history is recorded with astonishing cultural and doctrinal ups and downs to be used in a structural study of popular beliefs" (Hassanzadeh, 2003: 19). On the other hand, these stories have a wonderful and mysterious connection with myths; so much so that researchers are concerned with the question which of the two was formed first. May we assume that myths have influenced stories, or that stories are the bases on myths rather than being remnants of them? (In this regard, see Saberi et al., 2019: 205; Afshari, 2009: 70). Neither view can be completely accepted; however, it is clear that stories and myths have similarities and differences. The story of "Chel-Gis" is one of the narratives in which it is

very difficult and even impossible to determine the exact border between the story and the myth. This narrative has wonderfully used mythological themes and motifs in different levels.

### **Methodology, Literature Review and Purpose**

The author has first recorded the folk tale using a field method and then examined its mythological themes in a library method with a descriptive-analytical approach.

No research has been done so far on this story and its mythological themes; however, other researchers have looked at similar stories from the same perspective. For example, Farzaneh Mozaffarian (2012) in the article "Myths and folk tales", has studied mythical features in folk tales. Zahra Ansari et al. (2014) in an article entitled "The analysis and classification of the mythical idea of the tree-man in the folk tales of Hormozgan" have analyzed this idea in four parts of the marriage of a girl with a tree, the fertilization of the female by the tree, the belief in the presence of a male demon or jinn in the tree, and the transformation of tree-male and male-tree. Morteza Heydari (2017) in a research entitled "The explanation and the analysis of mythological themes in the structure of the story Mah-Pishooni" has studied the structure of this story based on Propp's theory. The importance of this type of research lies in its preserving and recording a part of the literature of this region, which is on the verge of oblivion and even extinction. Folklore literature has been the subject of serious studies from two centuries ago by scientists in the field of humanities; however,

such studies have not found their place in our country. On the other hand, with the spread of modernism and its manifestations in society, the growth of urbanization, the death of the elderly and the indifference of the young generation toward the stories and the beliefs of the past, this rich part of literature is on the verge of destruction. The author considers it obligatory to work hard to preserve a part of this treasure.

### **Discussion**

**Goddess Anahita:** Anahita has a special place in the story of "Chel-Gis". Although Anahita is not explicitly present in the story, her distinctive features are mentioned. The first and perhaps the most important feature of Anahita is her role as the protector of waters. The spring plays an important role in the folk tale. The girl advises Aunt Puppet-master to go straight to the spring to get pregnant. The spring seems to have been given a sacred or at least a mysterious aspect; a sacred place where you must first wash your head and body to get ready to get pregnant.

Anahita's second characteristic is her ability to cleanse women's wombs. When the girl arrives at the spring with her aunt, the girl asks her aunt to enter the spring first to be cleansed. After entering the spring and performing the so-called cleansing ritual, the aunt is prepared for pregnancy.

The third characteristic of Anahita that can be traced in the story is her power in increasing the grain and the herd. In the folk tale, it seems that

Anahid comes out of the water in one of her animal manifestations, the horse.

**A magical animal supporting the protagonist:** In the story of Chel-Gis, the cow plays this role. This animal has several important features in the story of Chel-Gis: a) This cow is from a fairy breed. b) It has magical powers. c) It seems to be a totem for Chel-Gis. d) Before its death, the cow knows that it is going to be killed, and of course it does not resist and surrenders to its fate. e) it is aware of the future and can easily transform itself.

**Magical plants and their support of the hero:** In this story, the trees have magical qualities. In general, trees in this story have three basic characteristics: a) protection, b) speech, c) revival, as one of the mysteries in this story is the resurrection of the tree; and d) transformation.

**Transformation of Fairies:** The fairies transform themselves in two parts of the story: a) Zardak is a beautiful fairy who turns into a cow to accompany the protagonist; b) another fairy appears in the form of a deer to support the protagonist.

**Transformation of humans into trees and vice versa:** The transformation of a human into a tree and a tree into a human occurs in two parts of the story: a) in the first part of the story, the aunt rests under an oak tree which is actually a beautiful woman who is also a messenger of God; b) in another part of the story, Zardak asks Chel-Gis to bury his bones so that he will not be eaten by predators. A lush tree grows from these bones that symbolically embodies man in the form of a tree.

**The role of trees in female fertility:** In this story, with the help of the girl, the aunt, who cannot get pregnant, first washes her head and body in the water and then gets pregnant by eating the fruit of the oak tree.

**The place of fairies in the story:** In general, fairies are mentioned in four parts of the story: a) the real name of Chel-Gis is Pari (Persian for fairy). She is called by the title “Chel-Gis” (metaphorically meaning long-haired in Persian) because of her long hair. b) The cow that appears in the role of support for Chel-Gis in the story is actually a fairy. c) A woman who combs her hair by the spring is a fairy. d) The deer that plays the supporting role of the protagonist is also a fairy.

**Hair as a tool for fertility:** In the oral story, one of the events that surprises the stepmother is a scene in which a woman washes her hair by the spring and all the apple trees at the bottom of the spring bloom.

**The birth of the hero of the story:** In this story, we encounter two types of magical and wonderful births: a) The birth of the girl: in similar cases in folk tales, the name of this girl is Nokhodi (literary meaning chickpea), Nokhodak or Nim-Nokhod. The girl has no name in this story. In the oral story, the little girl is born like other similar folk tales. b) The birth of Chel-Gis: This type of birth -the birth of a hero with an origin- has many previous instances.

**The sanctity of numbers:** The only number in the story is seven. In other words, all the actions and behaviors performed in the story are related to this number.

### **Conclusion**

The mythological themes of the story of Chel-Gis are as follows: 1) Goddess Anahita has a very important role in the story, though her name is not mentioned. The three basic characteristics of this goddess, i.e., her being the goddess and guardian of water, her power in increasing the herd and her power in cleansing of women's wombs, can be seen in the story. This goddess appears in the form of one of her animal manifestations, the horse. 2) Magical plants and animals support the hero and take care of her in difficult moments of the story. 3) Fairies are influential characters in the story who are present in different parts of the story with three basic characteristics: they support the protagonist; they are remarkably connected with water; and they are able to transform themselves. 4) One of the most repetitive mythological themes in this story is transformation, which happens in two ways: a) turning a human body into a tree and vice versa; b) the transformation of fairies. 5) The theme of female fertilization by a tree or a plant is one of the common themes in the mythology of nations. In this story, this theme appears in the form of the fruit of an oak tree. 6) In the story of Chel-Gis, the hair is presented as a tool of fertilization, which seems to be a repetition of the myth of the formation of the world from the body of an animal or a giant-god. 7) Two of the characters in the story have births that are different from normal births: a girl who is born without the intervention of her parents and is in fact a pea seed; and the character of Chel-Gis -the protagonist- who is born without the intervention of her father and after certain stages that give a mythical

atmosphere to the story. 8) The only number that is repeated many times in the story is number seven.

**Keywords:** Myth, Anahita, fertility, transformation, Chel-Gis.

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