

**Investigating the Foundations of Totemism and the
Place of Trees and Animals in the Story "The Girl and
the Simorgh"**

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Introduction

Totemism, which is the belief in animals and sometimes plants, is one of the beliefs of primitive peoples, examples of which can be seen among Iranians, too. One of the sources in which these examples can be studied and analyzed is the folklore literature of each nation, especially the stories and legends of that nation. Sorkhi tribe is one of the ancient Iranian tribes which has a rich treasure of pristine folk literature which is, however, on the verge of being forgotten and sometimes destroyed. In this essay, in order to preserve a part of this treasure and show parts of the beliefs and thoughts of this people, the author first recorded the story of "The Girl and the Simorgh" which has not been written before. Then, in a descriptive-analytical way, he investigated the totemic beliefs evident in the story and also the position of trees and animals that have a transcendental and sacred aspect.

Research Method, Review of Literature and Purpose

The author recorded the narrative of "The Girl and the Simorgh" through a field method for the first time, and then analyzed the totemic

beliefs and the place of trees and animals in this story in a descriptive-analytical way.

So far, no research has been conducted on the totemic beliefs in the stories, legends, and narratives of the Kohmarreh Sorkhi region, around Shiraz, Iran. However, some researches have been done on the appearance of totemic beliefs in literature. For example, Kazzazi and Farghdani (2007) examined totemism and its types in *Shahnameh* in "Totem in the stories of the *Shahnameh*". Mohseni and Valizadeh (2013) analyzed plant and animal totem motifs in folk tales in "Totem elements in Iranian folk tales". Sattari and Haghighi (2013) in the article "The Role of Totem in the Negation of Marriage with Incest in Ancient Iran" investigated intra-marriage in ancient Iran.

The importance of this type of research is that it is instrumental in the recording and preserving part of the culture and literature which is on the verge of being forgotten and even destroyed. Additionally, it creates the opportunity to analyze the beliefs and thoughts of our predecessors. Undoubtedly, one of the ways of knowing the past is the careful and detailed examination of their stories and legends.

Discussion

1. Examining totemic beliefs: Animal totems: Examining the stories, legends and narratives of the Kohmarreh Sorkhi region shows that due to the way of life of the people, which was based on agriculture and animal domestication, cows had an important place among the beliefs and thoughts of the people. Surveys show that the people of this region do not eat beef, they value cows as sacred. They cry and wail for the cow when it dies, and if the cow dies for any reason, they bury its bones

(Jabbareh and Hessampour, 2015: 31). On the other hand, the cow appears as having two roles in these stories: first, in some stories such as the story of “The Tree of Life”, it is a factor in giving birth. In these stories, it is only by rescuing the cow that famine and drought will end and nature will come alive again.

Sex and food taboos: As mentioned before, it is forbidden to eat an animal or a plant that is a totem. In this story, the girl knows that she should not eat beef; therefore, she tries to refrain from eating beef by making excuses.

Another totemic element that can be seen in these stories is extramarital affairs. In this story, the girl goes to another country to escape from her father's clutches and his incestuous desires, and finally marries a wealthy boy of that country.

Names: There are two important points about the names in the stories and legends of this region: first, most of the characters are not named and are only addressed by nicknames or by their gender; second, the main character and hero of the story is often introduced by a name, and most of these names consist of the names of totemic animals.

2. The position of animals and trees: Horse: In this story, the horse has three basic characteristics: first, it is not an ordinary horse because it comes out of the spring; second, it has the ability to speak; third, it is the supporter of the hero of the story.

Simorgh: In this story, Simorgh appears in two parts: first, as the savior of the hero of the story, who saves her from suicide and death and brings her to a safe and green place. In the second part of the story, it also plays the role of a therapist and actually revives the protagonist's child.

Tree: The plantain tree has several important properties in this story. Firstly, one of the important properties of this tree is its protective power. According to this story, the sycamore tree protects women who take refuge in it. Secondly, the tree in this story has the ability of transformation. The transformation of man into a tree occurs in two parts of the story: first, the plantain tree is a woman who has escaped from the oppression of her husband and turned into a plantain tree by the decree of God; and second, in another part of the story, the girl buries the bones of the cow in the ground so that they do not become food for predators. A lush and green tree grows from these bones, which is a symbolic way of transforming the human body in the form of a tree. Thirdly, the plantain tree in this story has fertility properties. Fourthly, it is the tree of life since under the sycamore tree is a snake that guards the tree. This snake is a fairy. It seems that the snake in this story has the mission of guarding the cosmic tree or the tree of life. In this story, the plane tree is the center of the world. In the mythology of nations, this tree is often referred to as the tree of life. There is no mention of the tree of life in this story; If fertility can be considered as a kind of life-giving, the plantain tree in this story is also a symbol of the same tree of life. Fifthly, tThe tree has healing properties.

Rhubarb also plays the role of a totem in this story. In the first part of the story, when the girl wants to eat rhubarb from the starving plant, the cow appears in front of her and warns her about eating it.

Conclusion

Examining the story “The Girl and the Simorgh” shows that totemic beliefs can be seen in three ways in this story: first, an animal totem that

appears in the form of a cow. Due to the fact that the people of the Kohmarreh Sorkhi region are farmers and herdsmen, the cow has acquired a very important role in the daily life of people and has taken on a totemic position. The people of this region do not eat beef, and when a cow dies, they mourn and bury its bones. The cow has two main roles in the narratives of the people of the region as either the procreator or the supporter of the protagonist.

Sexual and food taboo are the second group of totems in these stories. In some stories, the character of the story goes to another land to escape from committing incest and marries the son of the king of that land. On the other hand, eating the totem is forbidden.

The third group of totems is the names of people. Based on the old tradition, the name of the hero of the story comes along with the name of an animal such as lion, wolf, etc., which seems to have been the tribe's totem. Among animals and birds, horses and simorgh have a special place in this story. Horses often have three basic characteristics: they are connected with water, they are talkers, and they play the role of supporting the hero of the story. Simorgh has a strong presence in most of the narrations of Naqali in this region. In other words, Simorgh always appears at the turning points of the story and unravels the knot by supporting the hero of the story. The tree also has a special place in the stories and narratives of this region, especially in the story "The Girl and the Simorgh". In general, trees have five fundamental characteristics: they support the hero; some of them transform; this means that in most cases, a human has become a tree; some of these trees, like the sycamore tree in the story "The Girl and the Simorgh" or the pine tree in the story "Tree of Life", are located in the center of the

universe and are like the cosmic tree and sometimes the tree of life; some trees have therapeutic and healing properties; and they have fertility properties. Rhubarb is also a totemic plant that the character of the story is forbidden to eat it.

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