

Survey on The Status of Cypress in Iran Myths

Khalil Hadidi, Parvaneh Adelzadeh, Ashraf Jabari

Department of persian literature, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran

ABSTRACT

Cypress is a symbol of eternity, liberty, honesty and truth. The effect of cypress on Iranians beliefs and works is undeniable. Drawings of cypress in Mitra and Persepolis temples can be reasons for the importance of the cypress in myths. Cypress has deep relationship with Iranian beliefs and ceremonies, so that Zoroaster brought cypress from heaven and planted in Kashmar. This article tries to investigate the methodology and ceremony of cypress tree in beliefs of Iranians.

KEY WORDS: cypress, myth, tree, holiness.

INTRODUCTION

For beginning, it is necessary to know myth and manner of its shaping. For doing so, we should study the past beliefs and thoughts and consider that their beliefs are the same as the myths which we talk about them. In following the myth of cypress is investigated in Iran civilization. Myths indicate culture and thoughts of people in old times. Language expresses pre-history, it is a speaker of valuable remainders inside the ground and rocks and mountains. Myth is representative of the cultural life of people and it is a history of a nation.

"In Hinzle opinion, myths are mirrors that reflect images beyond millenniums since history and archeology are silent, myths speak and bring old cultures into present and make available logic of unknown but thoughtful people" (Hinzle, 2001).

"Green believes that myths are feedback of individuals unconsciousness demands and anxieties" (Green, 1998).

"Myth has been important as the product of old people thoughts and it is turning point in human thoughts led to science, industry and technology" (Rezeai, 2004).

The other question raises about the relationship between religion and myth. As before said, myth is a product of human thoughts and his holy life. Is there any interaction between religion and myth? Are they in the same direction?

Religion and myth

Religion and myth were progressed besides each other. By survey on myth its root is found in religions and beliefs. The mission of religion is training of people and society. Myths indicate environmental characteristics of people that believe in these myths.

"Myth is a custom that today nobody believes in it and if there is a belief, it will be a religion. When it is necessary to explain and interpret beliefs we encounter with myth. If the story of The Cave Men is accepted, it will be religion and if it is interpreted, it will be myth" (Shamisa, 2002).

"According to a narrative some goddesses were born from a tree like a butterfly that leaves its larva. So "Rah" was born from Egyptian fig tree and Wepwawet the goddess of upper Egypt was born from tamarind tree with jackal head and goddess of sun was born from cypress" (Hall, 2004).

Except this belief that goddess of sun was born from cypress, there are other legends related to cypress:

"since its branches rise and since it is free from falsehood and joining to other trees branches it is called cypress" (Adelzadeh, 2009).

"a tree without fruit called liberal, since cypress tree does not produce any fruit, it is called liberal and some individuals believe that every tree has perfection and decline, sometimes, it has many branches and it is fresh and sometimes it is faded and leafless and cypress is ever green and fresh and this is trait of liberals, so it is liberal" (Dehkoda, 1998).

"cypress was taken to Chypre from Turkey and Iran. The name of Chypre island is the same name changed to cypress. Then it was taken to Hellad and Greece. There, cypress was entered to myths and gained supernatural value" (Shariyat, 2004:72)

“in old Iranian myths it is said that some people ate life bestowing plant during famine and trouble and as a result they became young and obtained eternal life, cypress is one of these trees that people were treated by resorting to it and it had significant influence on Iranians and it was generous” (Rangchi, 1994).

“cypress was called liberty tree by Iranians. Our fathers interpreted that fruitless cypress is result of its liberty. Cypress obtains this trait because it has relationship with Nahid” (Yahagigi, 1990).

Persepolis carvings as a sculpture of splendour of this mythical tree are another witness of Iranian cypress credit. “Iran” means place of liberal and humble people so cypress is symbol of Iran and Iranians.

Cypress in Zoroaster religion

In Avesta, Zoroaster points to cypress and calls it heavenly tree that its leaves are knowledge and who eats its fruit becomes eternal.

“before Zoroaster, there were other collective religions that myths played an important role in them. Most of these religions had followers that lived together. Since each religion has defined social and geographical origin, so every religion has signs of thought elements and social tradition. The characteristics of goddesses in each religion are different considerably. The God introduced by Zoroaster is creator of good deed and joyfulness and he never becomes angry and punish and likes people and does not threaten others to revenge and punishment and he is advocate of peace and calmness. These traits are characteristics of Iranians (Dehbashi, 2008).

“Mazdaism believe that Zoroaster brought two cypress branches from heaven and planted one of them in Kashmir and the other one in Farimad. Hamdollah Mostofi in the book of “NozhatolGolub” points that Chamasab planted cypress. These heavenly plants grew and their greatness became famous (Yahhagi, 1990).

Dr. Moein in the book of Mazdaism and Persian literature writes:

Kashmer is the name of a village in Tarshize. In the story of the old fantastic castle the legendary bird is located above Kashmar (remainder of tree eliminating of pain. In Zoroasterian resources like heavenly wisdom, Bandhesh, Zadsperm and Dingerd this bird has nest on it and when it flies put tree seeds on the water and these seeds flow by rain on the ground and plants grow near this tree that they are enemy of oldness and surviving of the deads and alives). The oldest reference to Kashmer is found in Dagigi Shahnameh (some part of Goshtasb story from Firdousi Shahnameh) that it points to planting of tree by Goshtasb.

Zoroaster adopted two fortunes and ordered to plant cypress in Kashmir (Tarshiz) and the other in Farimad. In “Samarogolub” of Khajeh Abu Mansouri Sabeli it is said that Goshtasb ordered to plant these two trees. Motavekel Ali Allah Jafar iben al Motasem the Caliph praised this tree and he was founder of Jafariyeh and wrote to governor of Neishabour Khajeh Abou Tayeb and Amir Taher iben Taher to cut the cypress and put in the wheel and sent to Bagdad and put in felt carpet and they planted it in soil and fastened its all branches and stem and showed it to people, then used it in construction, thus all subordinates gathered and asked Khajeh: we gave five thousand Dinar of Neishabour to Caliph treasury to prevent cutting of this tree, since thousand year is required to grow this tree. It was one thousand and four hundred and five years old and they said cutting of cypress was inauspicious. The Neishabour governor said that we could not disobey Motavekel order so Khajeh Abo Tabib appointed Amir Atab iben Varga Alshaer Al Sheibani as the son of Omer iben Kolsom Al Shaehr and he was master of carpentry in Neishabour and nobody was not like as him, he was called Hussein carpenter. He spent somehow to build saw and prepared the tools and the stem of the tree was so big that it is said in books that it had twenty seven area and each area was called Rashi and Rabi of Shah Bazareh and it was said that ten thousands sheep were pastured under the shadow and branches of this tree when there were no human, sheep and sephered, the cattles and wild animals and different birds rest so that their number was so high that nobody could count them. When it was cut the ground was shaken and buildings were destroyed and at the time of evening prayer different birds came so that the sky was filled by mourning sounds so that the people were wondered and the sheep were calmed and begun to mourning.

Five thousand Derams were spent to moving this tree from Kashmir to Jafariyeh and its branches and stem were placed on one thousand and three hundred camels. When the caravan arrived to one of the Jafariyeh houses that night, a servant killed Motavekel and he did not see the tree and benefit it.

“Today cypress has important position among Zoroasterians and it is common that young boys and girls put branch of cypress above of bride head in wedding party and walk beside her. This ceremony shows the direct relationship between cypress and happiness ceremonies and in other hand it remains the attendance of Mitra, the goddess of contracts and cypress is eternity tree in bound between couples. Also in ceremony of decorating cypress that it is held by Zoroasterian family for their

children, a white cloth is opened and a vase of cypress, a candle and a fire place with Sandal wood are placed in the cloth. In this ceremony all Zoroastrian sons and girls in age of puberty have to learn their prophet teachings and use them in their life. The ceremony of decorating cypress is conducted and they accept the customs of their ancestors officially and wish health, long life and loyalty to their religion. Cypress in Zoroaster religion is sign of life, promotion and evergreen" (Niknam, 2000).

Cypress in worshipping sun

The beliefs of people in old age were similar to each other and it was an obvious reason which caused that one religion became common among different people and its symbols were registered on old works. One of these religions is worshipping of sun and the memory of cypress is related to this religion.

In old times our ancestors that lived in the nature set their daily activities based on observing sun, moon and stars and experience of seasons change and shortness and longness of day and night. So, they praised life bestowing aspects of these natural phenomena and among natural phenomena, sun was praised more than others with its rays and heat. Then our ancestors by comprehension of the biggest origin of light achieved light of God and praised its pure and eternal aspects like kindness of God. They tried to raise these superior traits like kindness and fidelity and just and they called it sun religion.

Sun worshipping was common in Iran and most of the countries and had many followers so that in the first century of B.C, this religion was propagated in all over the world, west and north of Africa and minor Asia and around Black sea by Romans and it was progressed in most part of worlds during five centuries.

"It seems that sun worshipping can be considered as "mother of all religions". It can be said that: holiness of the cypress relates to beliefs in worshipping of sun. There is a relationship between Zoroaster and Mitra and symbol of cypress. The sculpture of Mitra shows her birth from cypress" (Vermazon, 1995).

It can be referred to:

"Decoration of trees and using lights is an old tradition. Cypress decorated in Christmases in birth night of Christ being affected by sun worshipping and Zoroaster. There are other sculptures from Mitra that she has fire place in one hand and dagger in other hand that it may be rooted in cypress. It reminds us that cypress is seen many in Mitra drawings" (Atahi, 1998).

"Cypress is dedicated to sun. Cypress trees indicate trinity of Mitra. In Petto region this belief is seen in a drawing of a tree with three branches" (Vermazon, 1996).

"In a sculpture, Mitra is seen with three heads as the theme of Soshiyan (the last grand child of Zoroaster) that looks around with six eyes. The myth of Mitra is originated from Buddhism and a sculpture of Buddha with three heads has been found. Mitra has two main facades. One is a ray seen before sunrise and sun set in the sky. The second is a star and its trace can be found in birth of Christ that as bound between sun and Zoroaster myth is clarified by meaning of Zoroaster as goddess star and it was found by the name of "life giving star" so that the first Zoroaster is the releasing Mitra or "Mashiya" called Christ and it can be found the trace of this releaser in most of the religions" (Atahi, 1907).

Cypress and the night of "Yalda"

Most of the Zoroastrian symbols are seen in different aspects of beliefs and traditions of followers of other religions among different nations. Yalda ceremony is one of them. As before said in Zoroastrian religion cypress is special tree of sun and birth and it is ever green and fresh tree stable against coldness and darkness. So there was a symbol of sunshine and life giving and sign of eternity and liberty and stability against dreadful forces. Thus in night of birth of sun "the sun cypress was decorated and the gifts were offered and the people contracted to plant other evergreen cypress for next year.

Cypress the sign of mourning and happiness

Cypress was accompanied by mourning and happiness in Iran. In survey on the ceremony of Ashura and similar ceremonies; we will find many signs of this tree. The sign is moved in front of the mourning groups. According to Ali Boluck Bashi in "moving of palm tree" book, it is a kind of cross shaped wood with some cypress like metal blades. But this interpretation is insufficient and it should not be considered the symbol of cypress in the blade. But whole sign composed of cypress like structure that each blade in it separately shows this tree. It is spiritual concept of unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity.

The lights of mourning groups have abstract appearance of cypress by this difference that the cypresses like blades are replaced by lantern. The holy attendance of fire with close relationship with cypress is observed. From old age the fire was made inside or beside cypress; sometimes as candle and sometimes as in fire place. In sum it can be said that in these chandeliers the interference of fire and cypress (light) is symbol of attendance of sun in needle like tree of pine. Now the attendance of sun is seen as decorated lights in Noel tree of Christian nations. In other hand, the palm tree in the moving palm tree ceremony is symbol of coffin. But there is a cypress like part in front and behind of it with latticed surface. In addition in most cities of Iran a cypress like crown with gladiolus and Mohamadi flowers is prepared for memory of the dead.

All of these ceremonies are old signs of a great culture and they are considered as sign of fertility and agriculture in Islam.

Even Ashkanian coffins in old Iran museums have cypress like appearance. Also the corpus of the dead person was covered by "Termeh" textile with flowers designs as memory of mourning ceremony and even abstract drawing of cypress. Even metal blades of the holy places have cypress like flags on their domes indicating attendance of cypress in these cemeteries.

Drawings of cypress in Iranian artistic works

Cypress is a holy symbol near Iranians by valuable background. The believes of Iranians have been tied with greenish, highness and silence of this beautiful tree and has been manifested symbolically. The Iranian artists have used cypress in their works. In spite of passing years from primary believes and conducting different ceremonies, the drawings of cypress is yet holy and it is seen in all cities of Iran. Cypress plays an important role in decoration.

Drawings of this tree can be seen in Achaemenian period in west stairs of Persepolis Apadana palace, because cypress was important and it was called plant symbol and was famous for life tree among people" (Dadvar and Masuri, 2006).

Frequent drawings of trees and flowers in Persepolis are sign of interest of people to flowers and plants in Achaemenian period. In this period each drawing probably referred to supernatural creatures; since these drawings are seen besides Ormuzd and they were used for showing special ceremony or believes of that time.

"Cypress as symbol of Ormuzd and lotus as symbol of Anahita in special places in Persepolis depict people believes and respect to these Ormuzd gift" (Atroush, 2006).

Yet the old cypress is seen in Iran holy and religious places. It can be referred to two big stairs of Apadana palace in north and west parts. One part of it shows the eternal army and the other part shows representatives of twenty three dependent countries of Achaemenian come from far to Persepolis that each group is separated by cypress (Atroush, 2006).

In Ashkanian period, the drawings and motives of cypress are seen in some works. It can be pointed to a king sculpture that has a cypress like tool as sign of holiness and respect among Ashkanian. Jalil Ziya Pour writes:

"His hand is arisen as a sign of respect and he has a leaf in his left hand". (ibid)

This branch is similar to cypress and sculpture of Achaemenian period.

Cypress motive in Iranian carpet

Carpet is one of the best backgrounds for showing cypress. Flower and tree are common motives in Iranian carpet. Indeed bush is deformed shape of cypress seen in a carpet.

Cypress motive in textile

There is valuable Iranian textile by motives of cypress. The motive of bush is common in Iran traditional textile. This motive is seen in most artistic works.

In Safvid period work, a cypress is seen between two men in velvet textile.

Other Iranian textile with cypress motives is seen in textile of Gajarid period. It is said that this motive belongs to this period drawn as a droplet of tear.

Cypress drawing is used abundantly in "Termeh" textile as heritage of Safvid and Gajarid period.

Conclusion

Cypress is one of the main elements in Iran myths as a symbol of liberty, brevity and eternity. In Zoroastrian religion, cypress is special tree of sun and birth of sun, the ever green and fresh tree that resists against cold and darkness so it is a symbol of shining sun and life giving and sign of eternity. Cypress was symbol of happiness among Zoroastrians and it has important position in decoration of cypress and wedding ceremonies. The Zoroastrians sit besides cypress at Yalda night and put gifts near

cypress and promise to plant other evergreen cypress next year. There is other attitude toward this tree in Iran and they believe in it as a symbol of death, a sign used in mourning by carrying chandelier. Drawings of cypress in artistic works are other aspects of this symbol. In Acheamenian period, cypress is seen in stairs of Persepolis among flowers and plants. In Ashkanian period, the image of cypress is seen on the spears. In Gajarid period the textile was decorated with cypress. Now the image of cypress is seen in carpets and most motives in Iranian artistic work tied with importance and its relationship with Iran special believes.

REFERENCES

- Dadvar, A., E. Mansouri, (2006), introduction on Iran and India myths and symbols in old period, Tehran, Kahor and Alzhara university publication, Tehran.
- Dehbashi, A. (2008), life and thoughts of Zoraster ,Tehran, Afkar publication, 1st edition, Tehran.
- Dehkhoda, A.K., (1998), dictionary ,Tehran ,Tehran university publication, 2nd edition, Tehran.
- Rezaei, M,(2004), birth and death in myths, Asatir publication, 1st edition, Tehran.
- Rangchi, G.,(1994) flower and plant in Persian verse literature to early Mongol period, humanities sciences and cultural studies research center publication 1st edition, Tehran.
- Shariyay Samsam, H., (2004) herbal plants from Quran and diffeent religions view points, Charbag publication, Esfahan.
- Shamisa, S.,(2009) look at old Iran myths history, Elm publication, Tehran.
- Adelzadeh P., K. Pashyi Fakhri (2008)dictionary of plants in Persian literature, Molla Ali publication, Tabriz.
- Ataei ,O.,(2007). creation of goddesses ,secret of Avest stories, Ataei publication, 1st edition , Tehran.
- Atroush, T.,(2006). What is Boteh Jegheh, translated by Mortaza Tarsali ,Tehran ,Sibal Honar artistic cultural institute publication, Tehran.
- Green, W., (1997), Basics of literary criticism, translated by Farzaneh Taheri, Nilofar puplication, Tehran.
- Moein, M., (1959), Mazdisna and Persian literature ,vo. 2, Tehran university publication, 2nd edition, tehran.
- Vermazonern, M.,(1996), Mitral customs, translated by Bozorg Nader zadeh, Cheshmeh publication, 1st edition, Tehran.
- Hall, J.,(2004), dictionary of symbols in west and east art, translated by Rogayah Behzadi, Farhangeh Moaser publication, Tehran.
- Heliniz, J.,(2000), identification of Iran myths, translated by Galeh Amozegar and Ahmad Tafazoli, Avishan publication, 6th edition, Tehran.
- Yahagi, M.J.,(1990), dictionary of myths and fictions in Persian literature, Farhangeh Moaser publication, 1st edition, Tehran.