



## INVESTIGATING THE DEPICTION OF “ONE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS” STORIES IN IRAN AFTER THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION

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### ABSTRACT

*The present study has dealt with the depiction of an eclectic selection of “one thousand and one nights” stories after the Islamic revolution and factors influencing it. The study was an applied research in terms of its objective and it has been carried out based on a descriptive-analytical method. The required information has been collected based on library-field research. At first, the history of depiction and illustration was explored; then, the quality of its occurrence was examined in regard of the idea as to how a story can be better presented through pictures and images and how it helps children better understand. Next, the quality of the relationship between image and text was investigated so as to find out what are the characteristics of the children’s pictorial books. In the second part, the role of myth in illustration as well as in the ancient stories, especially in the primary subject of the current research paper, i.e. one thousand and a night stories, have been pointed out to see how much the illustrator has paid attention thereto and how effective myths can be used in offering a good image and, eventually, a good story. In the end, the properties of “one thousand and one nights” stories have been mentioned.*

**Keywords:** *Illustration, One thousand and one nights’ stories, Myths*

### INTRODUCTION

Children love short stories and they become all ears when something is spoken in this regard (Gha’emi, 1981). Stories can be useful and constructive for children; they can dry out the roots of many of the perversions and deviations in the individuals, be extremely effective on children and pave the way for the achievement of the educational goals specified for the children. Traditions and customs, ethics, philosophy of living, being social and even economic issues can be taught to children and adolescents and even adults within the format of the stories. In the meanwhile, the society’s stories are per se reflections of the social issues, traditions and ethics accepted by the enlightened minds and occasionally the members of the society.

Of course, children demand different stories specific to their various ages. To children, seeable things are more useful and hearables are less useful. To the youngsters, hearable and seeable things are equally interesting and useful and a simple piece of readable texts can be also appropriate. To adolescents, seeable and hearable things are less influential and readable things are more effective (Mazloumi, 1979). The seeable things in the area of our discussion include images presented in the stories even of the makeup and hair and clothing styles specific to the children and adolescents.

The images of a book should not only grant beauty but they also should reflect a good and meaningful design full of content. Of course, they are commissioned to a duty beyond this. The illustrator is an artist helping the children more and better understand of the text and subject of the story and it does not matter to them if they are depicting for books with many images or for

books with not so many images. The artist should recreate the valuable scenes and ideas of the story; each image should be equivalent to one of the ideas and notions expressed in the text.

The images encourage the reader to apply his or her power of imagination and move faster than the story's text. Such a skill is one of the essential and admirable goals of an artist because awakening and corroboration of imagination faculty is one of the primary factors of expanding the mind of a child and, to this end, the artist should offer images with sufficient details acting as guides in the conceptualization and retelling of a story.

There are studies performed in this regard. Yu (2012) showed that if children are left alone with colorful pictorial books, they will turn over the pages and retell and reconstruct the story based on the images and, in doing so, they make changes in the story and offer interpretations based on their own knowledge about the story. Gonen and Goller (2011) dealt in a study with the investigation of the environment and place in the colorful pictorial stories for children and demonstrated that the pictorial story books for preschool children should also contain bioenvironmental concepts. Saffari (2014) showed in a study that collage, 3D illustration, cartoon images of the adolescents, cultural and ethnic depictions, use of texture and configuration, application of ornamental margins and frames and serial pictorial stories are important considerations in making book illustrations for children.

### *Literature Review*

#### *Illustration*

Book illustration possesses a background older than the printed books. Accompaniment of writing and image began earlier in the east than in the west. Paper was invented in china travelled all the way thence to Egypt wherein the first books of the ancient era had been written on papyrus. The Egyptian papyrus books remaining from that time are called the book of the dead and they are predominantly found with images (Gha'eini, 2011). Illustration, expression of thoughts, ideas and concepts within the format of an image serve the better perception by the audience (Hasanpour, 2009). Illustration is the strengthening of the foundation of the concepts that are posited for children by the assistance of the image (Ebrahimi, 1988).

Illustration generally includes instructional (upbringing), cultural (educational), recreational, topical and economic and financial goals. The followings are amongst the properties and characteristics of an illustrator: familiarity with the goals of depiction, familiarity with the specifications of image, familiarity with the children's psyche and paying attention to their psychological needs, feeling responsibility towards children, familiarity with the children's growth stages, having considerable information in the area of child literature and illustration for children, familiarity with the native and national culture, paying attention to the issues related to chromatics and the various effects of colors on the children's nerves and psyche, power of perceiving the subject, content, space, goal, beliefs and interests in the concept and content of the writings to be depicted, strong and positive power of imagination, the ability to create and use proper pictorial language in proportion to writing, awareness of the publication facilities and establishing good communication with the author (Habibi Da'avisara'ei, 2009).

#### *Myth*

Myths are transferred orally from chest to chest. Many of these ancient beliefs have found their way into the general literature and culture of the various nations and they are still continuing their life in the people's daily life. Beliefs in the sun and moon, trees, magic, divination,



fulfillment of such rituals and traditions as birth, marriage, burial, rain prayers and many of the other customs signal these ancient beliefs and stories that are still quite commonly held by the people.

Myth development by the ancestors can be assumed to have been motivated by the transferring of the ethnic experiences from a generation to another and explanation of many of the daily life's truths in a mysterious language for preserving them in the long upcoming years.

Amongst the most important reasons for studying the myths, the pulling away of the modern layers and bringing out and rereading of the forerunners' lives can be pointed out. That is because the history of the world has been monopolistically specific to the kinds and their descendent princes. The only method by which the life of the primitive tribes and general public can be investigated is the scientific study of the culture and myth of these communities. Myths constitute the most important part of the mankind's cultural heritage.

The term "myth" refers to the stories about the fairies, magic and impossible incidents (Propp, 2012). It is currently widely applied and incorporates many of the unreal stories. Such types of myths are either created in written form and by the authors or orally transferred from a person to another. The preliminary plot of the myths encompasses a huge struggle between good and evil.

Many individuals are of the belief that myths are the oldest literary format in the world. Such stories have not been destroyed in the course of history for they have been transferred from chest to chest. These types of stories have been codified with two intentions: recreation and amusement and instruction of the various themes. The interesting point is that the myths have a remarkable power and force in such a way that they can have considerable effect on their audience. Such a type of works plays a considerable role in developing the human beings' emotions and feelings. Jalal Sattari has the following statements in an introduction to his book (mysterious language of fairytales) (Dolasho and Lefler, 2008): "stories with wonderful magic and involvement of supernatural creatures in their events. Wonderful magical stories that are complex and include supernatural elements, i.e. sorcery, spelling, witchcraft and bewitchment and have been left for us from long ago; to wit myth embraces a vast area of the human beings' imagination wherein the mankind has attempted to make use of elements outside the real world to attain things well beyond".

Myth is an extent of the human beings' mental processing wherein it has been attempted to use imagination and fancy for explicating the materials that are not expressible in ordinary ways and various factors like magic, sorcery, bewitchment and spelling are applied in doing so.

Myths have certain properties that are missing from the modern stories. It is very important for a person to figure out that not the entire life is sunny and pleasurable rather many dimensions of every day's life are accompanied by misery, death and sad incidents. Myths put forth the worries and dilemmas and bottlenecks of the human beings' existence in a serious manner and induce the human beings with the need for being loved, fear of being defamed, love for life, fear of death, frustrating feeling of loneliness and fear of being repelled by the society as well as an array of the other irritating concerns.

### *The Quality of Myth Formation*

It has to be known that the human imagination does not invent anything arbitrarily and spontaneously rather it makes things under the influence of the mankind's psyche



reconstruction in whole, and its imbalances by the ego's feeling of inferiority have to be compensated in another form (Propp, 2012).

To be able to overcome the unknown factors of the wild nature, the people have resorted to their power of thought and imagination and constructing and processing stories featuring imaginary heroes with certain traits and attributes, the possession of which is fancied by the same people who also endeavored to excite themselves by recalling these stories and their heroes and/or bridge the gap stemming from their own illiteracy, inability and lack of information. In the minds of the imperfect people, these heroes were forms of the perfect people serving the compensation of their shortages in confrontation with the peripheral nature.

It was also occasionally the case that the mankind personified these forces out of his lack of knowledge about them and the expectations that came about by doing so aided the mankind in achieving their wants and dominating the nature in the form of worshiping the totems and masters. Another factor that played a role in the emergence of the myths has been and is the fear of death. It was a fear that influenced both the rich and the poor and slaves. To compensate such a deficit, they resorted to the heroes who had eternal life and/or acquired it by the means of a magical factor (Dolasho and Lefler, 2008).

The mankind's curiosity for achieving the secrets and mysteries of the animal world and the quality of their speaking with one another caused him to put oneself in the format of animals and live their lives. The fear of expressing materials in human language sometimes became a reason for the mankind to make myths in the form of animals' stories. Elements like soil's infertility, the body's need for rain and drought in such communities as the primitive communities whose economy was based on agriculture, induced a feeling of inferiority and misery in those environments and this made the people in those communities see the solution in constructing myths.

One of the other essential factors of creating myths and legends in epic forms is that some biased tribes become frustrated upon seeing that their dear homeland wherein they are established and residing is at the risk of raid and attack and about to be inflicted with calamity and disaster. It is at this time that the people begin making myths and carve a legendary protagonist to restore the situation and try compensating their inferiority complex by the assistance of an imaginary story that is exactly opposite to the truth.

Source of Myths:

As for the roots of myths' formation and genesis, the thinkers, sociologists, pediatrics, folklore experts and many others have conducted researches and opined theories and opinions, some of which have been pointed out below (Propp, 2012).

- ***The Geographical History Source:***

This perspective belongs to the Finnish folklore experts' school<sup>1</sup>. According to this school, the story that has been told in hundreds of oral varieties should have been consciously invented and created once in a certain place by a person and its wave-like dispersion should have been influenced by the written ways and texts and it has to have been scattered in a breadth of geography. The authors of this school believe that story and myth can easily transcend beyond the lingual barriers and be geographically dispersed amongst the various tribes. In this school of

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<sup>1</sup> Finnish School's theoreticians are the inventors of the geographical-historical method in finding the roots of the myths and Warren Roberts can be mentioned amongst the researchers of this school.

thought, a researcher chooses a myth existent amongst the various tribes in identical or similar forms for doing research thereon.

Amongst the criticisms made to the Finnish school is that a myth might undergo such a change in its structure during its migration that it becomes impossible to identify and trace the seminal myth. Albert Weskily and Carl Fancido, Austrian researchers, have stated that, in the course of migrating from a place to another, the main story may turn into an ancillary form featuring a different structure and history.

The most important aspect of each myth is its artistic style and aspect and, because the Finnish school, investigates myths in a statistical manner by the assistance of the comparative tables, the artistic aspects of the myth is diminished, hence it cannot be identified. This is amongst the essential objections that can be made to the aforementioned school (Propp, 2012).

- ***Fictional Source:***

Lord Raglan, an English researcher, believes that the myths and epical stories existent amongst the various tribes and nations are rooted in legends read in the course of holding rituals and at the time of fertility ceremonies. These rituals are the same ceremonies stemming from the happiness for harvesting the product of one year's efforts. They are expressed every time by the people in a special form and the people try every year to grant these rites a more beautiful and a better shape and perform them in the best possible way. These new forms sometimes become so innovative that even the rites are changed and transformed to hidden stories and myths in the collective unconsciousness.

- ***Heroic Source:***

The English researchers, Hector and Nora Chadwick, have another idea regarding the roots of the myth. They believe that there has been a period in the history of every nation known as the heroic period, which deals with the explication and processing of the life of the heroes and protagonists and usually serially describes the amazing deeds and actions by them and orally expresses the heroic stories of that nation in the form of myth.

- ***Intellectual Source:***

Johann Gottfried Von Herder, a 19<sup>th</sup> century German literary critic, is another person who has done researches regarding the roots of the myth. He has certain beliefs about the colloquial and slang poems and literature and states that this special type of literary form that has been undoubtedly retold in the ancient myths and old stories was born of the intellectual processes and was the result of mystic inspirations and intensive affections. It means that it has been created all of a sudden by a certain person in a specific time and place hence having no history. He generally denies any root for the myth in the societies and realizes myths as handmade stories that are the products of the preliminary works by a person and processed and given branches by some others.

- ***Ritual Source:***

Vladimir Propp, a famous Russian researcher, believes that the myths date back to the sacrifice and burial rites and reflect such types of rituals and ceremonies. Propp realized the identicalness of the fairytales as stemming from the identicalness of the honor rituals in all the spots. In his



mind, one reason implies to and suffices the justification of the similarity and identicalness of the myths.

Besides Propp, other scientists, like Andrew Lang, have also expressed theories for supplementing this theory. Some researchers believe that the stories and myths have a past history but it is not attainable in practice due to the fact that we know little about the past civilizations in which the stories are rooted. The mythical plots have been made by the few primitive people and their forms of imagination and thoughts that were in the initial stages of the social perfection and these plots could have been transformed in the course of the mankind's historical and knowledge perfection from legend to myth thence to epical poems. It means that the plots have migrated from a type to another. George Frizer, a 19<sup>th</sup> century English sociologist, believes like Propp that all of the myths have stemmed from the sacrifice rituals and land fertility ceremonies.

### *Finding the Roots of the Stories in One Thousand and One Nights*

Numerous studies have been carried out for specifying the exact root of the narrations in one thousand and one nights. These complexities can be justified by stating the truth that the works written in Arabic and the manuscripts have only been discovered in partial and imperfect forms and they are found having originated from various sources. However, there is an old writing under the title of the book of the lists "Kitab Al-Fehrest" written in 987 that informs the existence of a version in Persian language titled one thousand myths (one thousand narrations). No trace of this book can be found, although it narrates the story of Shahrzad (Alisef, 1949).

Shahrzad and Shahriyar are two Persian names wherein the prefix "Shah" is originally Persian and the rest of the elements are Indian and date back to a time before the third century (Loyl, 1998). Metamorphosis in animals and the fairies that appear in semi-god appearances point to Hindus' polytheism school. Re-delaying of the death is amongst the other elements specific to the Hindus and it can be observed in the other Hindi works like Panchatantra and Hitopadesha (Alisef, 1949).

Different handwritten scripts with dissimilar numbers of the nights can be found. On the other hand, all of these manuscripts feature identical narrations and a similar preliminary framework. Shahrzad and Shahriyar are present in all of them. These narrations are rooted in Hindi and Persian. It is presumed that the one thousand myths do not come to an end until the 1001<sup>st</sup> night (Alisef, 1949).

### *The Characteristics of the Iranian Stories in One Thousand and One Nights*

In a general look, the forthcoming part points to these old stories' evident attributes specified by the researchers.

- *Superstition, Myth and Supernatural Forces:*

The specific properties of the old Iranian stories are the beliefs in such supernatural and magical creatures as ghosts, witches, jinn, ogres, monsters and benevolent fairies who prove an active presence in the course of the human beings' lives with their own free will and independence and without any blind obedience of the inlaid image or spell, which cause the emergence of wonderful and remarkable events in the stories. Sattari has the following words in this regard: "as the intermediaries between the human beings and the gods, ghosts intermingle with human beings like ogres and fairies and angels and this is an Iranian element missing from the Arabic race ... if the Arabs were knowledgeable as much as Iranians about the fairies and ogres and



were in contact with them, they would have surely recalled them in their literary works” (Dolasho and Lefler, 2008). Or, as put by Ripka, in one thousand and one nights’ stories, the true fairy tales with such a feature as the involvement of the good and evil forces in the life of the heroes have Iranian roots more than anything else” (Ripka, 2003).

In this same area of magic and sorcery, the magical pregnancy can be pointed out that matches with the ancient Iranian myths. In such a type of stories, the characters give birth to babies by drinking potion or by the help of a servant in the course of completely magical events and incidents (Samini, 2000).

- ***Haunting and Transmigration:***

The frequency of transmigration and transformation of human beings to animals and animals’ speaking ability are amongst the other properties of the Iranian stories in this collection. Sattari has the following words in this regard: “haunting in this story is not born from the Semitic people’s imagination and Iranian names can be seen in them signaling the Persian originality of these stories. Because only Arabic names could have been seen in these stories if they were completely and wholly Arabic as only Arabic names can be found in Baghdadi and Egyptian stories” (Sattari, 1987).

- ***Love and its Secrets and Mysteries:***

Another Iranian sign of the stories in One Thousand and One Nights is the love stories. Samini has the following words in this regard: “all of the Iranian love stories [in One Thousand and One Nights] revolve about an anonymous and unknown beloved. The main plot of these stories is simple; upon hearing the name or descriptions of the beauty of a girl belonging to distant lands, the hero falls into the trap of her love. Then, the lover rises up and starts a journey to unify with his beloved and, in the end, he unifies with the girl by the good omen of his perseverance and persistence. The thing that endows motility to these stories is the geographical distance between the lover and the beloved” (Samini, 2000).

- ***Historical Personalities:***

Another sign of the Iranian literature found in the stories and narrations of One Thousand and One Nights is the existence of historical characters before Islam. These stories speak about the existence of such pre-Islam historical characters like Anushirvān, the Sassanid King. Therefore, it is quite likely for these stories to have been remained as souvenirs from Anushirvān time especially because there are narrations made in these narrations about his justness and fairness. Such narrations as Anushirvān, the just, Anushirvān and the village girl and the narration about the thoughtfulness of a woman in this set of Iranian stories pivot about pre-Islam historical personalities (Ibid: 66).

A few of the other Iranian stories have been selected due to the similarities in topics and characters that have Iranian roots (Maslov, 2004). Moreover, the story of Saif Al-Moluk in One Thousand and One Nights seems to be the only story that is perfectly matching with its Persian version and Lin has shown the Persian versions of it in his book indicating the Iranian originality of this story (Mahjoob, 2003).

- ***Imaginary Creatures:***



Another trait of the Iranian stories in this collection can be found within non-human but righteous personalities, including Ahmad and the Pary Banou, Qamar Al-Zaman, Abnous Horse, sea angel and the two greedy sisters all of which have Iranian roots. Furthermore, it seems in terms of such a theme as taking journeys in *One Thousand and One Nights* that there are similar Iranian characters in this set of the stories plus their common theme of the heroes' setting out on journeys such as in Qamar Al-Zaman stories, Abnous Horse, Pary Banou and Ahmad all of which have Iranian roots (Maslov, 2004).

## CONCLUSION

Iranian myths or legends incorporate a collection of fictional stories that have Aryan roots and are largely shared by the Iranian and Hindi tribes. Iran's myths have been derived of a single origin and source and the environmental differences between Iran and India as well as the different cultures of the Iranian natives and Iranian Aryans who have migrated to India, have all caused differences between the Iranian and Indian myths and legendary characters. The things presently left by the ancient Iranian myths have stemmed from Avesta. In the beginning of the first millennium BC, Zoroastrianism brought about reforms in the beliefs and subsequently the Iranian myths. However, in the ending parts of Avesta, such as in Yashts, Iranians' pre-Zoroastrianism beliefs have been embedded into the religion and they can be applied as the source and origin for recognizing Iranian myths that are based on dualism and the good and evil manifestations featuring certain narrative history different from the history recorded for the territory of Iran. Besides being reflected in the subsequent Avesta, Iran's myths have been limitedly inscribed on the ancient Persian reliefs as well as the non-Iranian, especially Greek texts. In addition, Iranians' myths are different from the myths in Avesta but they seem to have originated from a single root; these include Manichaeism, Zarvani and Mithraism myths. Iran's mythical history, as well, has been recorded since Parthians' era and, then, from Sassanid Era in Persian and translated into Arabic. Ferdowsi's *Shah Nameh* is the most important source for recognizing Iran's mythical history.

In the course of history, legends have turned to myths and the entire complexity of the myths' foundation has been transferred into the stories revealing the mankind's constant and latent effort for adapting to the environment. Hence, as long as myths live, the ancient legends can continue striving. Colloquial myths are amongst the constituents of the culture in the human communities. In fact, myths are amongst the sources considerably contributing to the comprehension of the psychological, social and cultural properties of the societies. Besides being envisioned as a cultural function, myths are viewed as the means for spending leisure time and amusement.

Undoubtedly, myths play active roles in global level. Such a type of narration has a notable effect in the other various literary formats and it is readily transferred from a tribe to another. In fact, the cultures of various nations are blended with one another by the aid and means of myth. On the other hand, the elements and constructs of the myths are seen in the majority of the dramas, films and books made for various age groups.

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