

## Analysis of the myths of creation and fertility related to palms in southern Iran (Base on Jahrom's beliefs)

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Received: 5/2/2021

Accepted: 8/2/2022

### Abstract

The palm tree in its mythical nature is one of the Mesopotamian and Elamite vegetable gods, whose traces of its alien nature in human incarnation and its transformation have been left in the beliefs and customs of the people of southern Iran in relation to the myths of creation and fertility. The mythical history of the date palm in terms of anthropology is similar to most of the traditions and popular beliefs of the people of the south, and has led to beliefs such as the creation of the palm from human palm and knowing the palm tree as a companion in the south. The sanctity of the palm and beliefs such as that the palm has organs and conditions like human beings and rituals such as marriage, the dramatic threat and sacrifice of the palm, etc. are rooted in the myths of birth and fertility. The process of characterization of the people of the South from the palm tree in terms of the cycle of death and life and resurrection to the goddess of fertility, complement each other and express the perception of the cosmic position of the female force in the universe. This article is a descriptive-analytical field and library study to analyze the myths related to creation and fertility in the folk beliefs of the people of the south about the date palm based on the people of Jahrom and its mythological elements in customs and beliefs such as: birth and sanctity of palms. It has shown fertility, love, madness, death and the coffin of the palm tree.

**Keywords:** *folk beliefs about palm trees, The myth of fertility and palm trees, Mythology of creation and palm tree, Folk beliefs of Jahrom people.*

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*Extended Abstract*

**1- Introduction**

The rituals of each nation are formed based on their beliefs and mythological beliefs. These rituals are one of the most important manifestations of social identity and show the way each people views their lives. Palm has a prominent role in mythology and religions. This tree also has many spiritual connections with the lives of the people of the south of Iran and is woven into their culture and is related to rituals, traditions and folk beliefs in these regions. Date trees and palm trees have been so important in the south of Iran that they are mentioned in the names of many cities and settlements, ports and islands, such as: Nakhle Taqi, Nakhle Izadi, Nakhle Ibrahim, Nakhle Nakhda etc. In Jahrom city, there is a mountain gorge called Tang Reza Khorma and a spring called Ab Nakhlo or Ab-e Tarok. Therefore, most of the popular beliefs of the people of southern Iran about the palm tree are similar or slightly different.

Due to the scope of the research, this research relies on the customs and folk beliefs of the people of Jahrom city in southern Fars, which have many religious and religious commonalities, probably due to being located between the southeast and southwest of Iran, with the folk beliefs of the south of the country, including Fars, Hormozgan, Kerman, Bushehr, Khuzestan and Sistan and Baluchestan. Also, this city has been called "Palm Forest" since the Safavid era by the tourists and travelers from the past (Taverniyeh, 1358: 671-673).

**Research Question(s)**

- 1- How are the mythological elements related to palm and dates reflected in the beliefs and customs of the southern folk?
- 2- Are the beliefs and rituals related to the palm in the folk culture of the southern people compatible with the myths of creation, fertility and rebirth of plant gods?
- 3- What common mythological elements about the palm tree as a vegetable deity are there in the beliefs, customs and traditions of the southern folk?

**2. Literature Review**

**Mythology of human creation and fertility**

The creation and especially the creation of humans and gods, beings

created from humans and gods and how it is, has a lot of diversity among the myths of different nations of the world. Frazer considers almost all religions as "fertility rituals" that are focused on the same cyclical story of birth and death (Fraser, 2006: 7).

One of the methods of human creation in mythology is the emergence of humans from trees or plants. The creation of plants and creatures from the remains of holy beings and gods is also seen in mythology. In the mythology of Mithraism, when the blood of the sacred cow is poured on the ground, grain grows and life begins (Khosravi, 2003: 94). The annual rituals of death and rebirth of the vegetable god are the central point of ancient cultures in connection with the mythology of creation. These rituals are the focus of tragic romances about the goddess of fertility or her human successor and the martyred hero-god who was her wife.

These traditions have an inseparable connection with topics such as: the circulation of time, the sequence of the calendar, and at the center of this belief, the belief in the repeatability of the death and birth of nature, which is one of the first human thoughts.

## ***2.1. Myths of creation and fertility related to the palm tree in the beliefs and folk customs of the southern people***

### ***2.1.1. The sanctity of the palm***

According to the people of Iran's date-growing areas, the palm tree is from a child's cradle to a coffin, and all the parts of the tree have been used in people's lives in the past. This valuing has found religious and spiritual aspects in rituals, beliefs and local customs and of course in connection with the sky and has been expressed in religious texts.

In Jahrom, fresh and green leaves and branches of the palm tree are not set on fire until they are dry, and they believe that they have life and feelings as long as these leaves and branches are fresh and green. Therefore, burning or cutting down a green palm tree is bad or ominous, and the person who cuts down a palm tree should plant another palm tree, make a sacrifice, or give alms in order to remove evil from him (Qazli, 1394: 176). The use of halva and dates in the funeral ceremony is also on the occasion of the food offered to the souls of the departed, there is a sequence of human plants. Since dates are the product of an evergreen tree like the palm, it was considered a symbol of resurrection and an invigorating food. According to these beliefs, date fruits gave strength to the departed soul to walk the long way to the valley of the dead.

### **2.1.2. The human embodiment of the palm tree**

In the mythologies and popular beliefs of the people of the south, the palm tree is considered to be like a human being in many ways, such as: having organs and vital organs such as humans, male and female, having a brain, type of fertility, uprightness, etc. Southern people also believe that the fibers inside the palm are like human veins and nerves. If the head of the palm tree is damaged, like a human being, either in moving or otherwise, the palm tree will dry up and die. Because in the head of the palm tree there is a brain or a local expression, *kach*, which is like the brain of a person, and if water passes through the head of the palm tree, the death of the tree is certain, or if a needle is inserted into the head of the palm tree, the palm tree will die. Many of these beliefs are also consistent with reality, and for example, a palm tree drowns and dies like a person in water. In the south, the palm tree is bipedal and its fertility is considered to be the same as that of a man and a woman, and the unit of counting a palm tree, like a human, is a person. Like humans, the palm tree matures at the age of sixteen, that is, it bears fruit, and its maximum lifespan is 120 years, just like humans.

The anthropomorphism of the palm is not limited to its external features, and in the oral culture of the South, many terms and allusions derived from the parts and states of the palm are used to express human states and situations. Only in Jahrami dialect, there are more than 46 ironies and proverbs using the palm and its parts and moods to express the state of a person.

### **2.1.3. The creation of the palm tree from the waste of Adam**

In the beliefs of the people of the south, the palm tree is from *nakhale*, that is, the remains of humans at the beginning of creation, and they believe that the words palm and *nakhale* are from the same root (Qazli, 1394: 170). This belief, in addition to being consistent with the Mesopotamian beliefs about the palm tree, is a continuation of the mythic belief of the anthropomorphism of the palm tree in the south, that is, the palm tree is created from the mud and soil of the human body, and as a result, it has human value and credibility. In Islamic traditions, it is said that the palm tree is made from the remains of human mud, and since the palm tree resembles a human being, it is the aunt of the human being. Apart from the metaphorical aspect of equating the human race with the palm tree, this narrative also brings the femininity of this tree to ancient Semitic myths and beliefs.

#### **2.1.4. Palm, women and fertility**

One of the beliefs related to the field of fertility in the south is the belief in falling in love and marrying palm trees, which is part of the myth of the anthropomorphism and female gender of the palm tree. In the belief of southern people, palm trees in love must be connected, otherwise they will not be fertile. In legends and religious traditions, it is said that when Maryam (A.S.) became impatient with the pain of giving birth, she took refuge in a palm tree. The connection between fertility and palm can be seen in other rituals in the south, such as placing palm as a dowry for women, eating palm parts for male and female fertility, and believing in planting palm fronds in the direction of Qibla. Due to the sanctity of the date palm as a symbol of fertility since ancient times, the pollination of dates had the importance of performing religious ceremonies. Even today, in some parts of the south, prayers and sometimes special songs are sung before pollination. In folk medicine and folk beliefs of southern people, eating some components and palm products is considered effective in strengthening the sexual powers and fertility of men and women. The Assyrians depicted the universal tree in the form of a palm tree, and since they artificially pollinated palm trees, it was accepted as a symbol of pregnancy and fertility (Garry, 2005: 464).

#### **2.1.5. woman and Palm wedding**

The interpretation of conquering and marrying the palm tree and, accordingly, the ritual of threatening the palm tree in the south is also related to the mythology of creation and fertility, women, and of course, the anthropomorphism of the palm tree. As a deity, the palm tree can not bear fruit and, in the local sense, it can be angry. In the belief of southern palm farmers, if a palm tree is upset with its owner, it will get angry and may not bear fruit for a year or more. Women in Jahrom used to reconcile for a palm tree that was angry or small and had not yet borne fruit during a ritual, wedding or celebration. Also, palm is used in the marriage ritual in southern Iran as a dowry for a woman.

#### **2.1.6. crazy palm**

In the belief of the ancient man, the tree's head is facing up and the sky, and it represents its connection with the heavenly forces. If the head, branches, and fruits of the tree were down to the ground or the tree was bent, this state was considered the act of a demon and the tree was considered mad and insane, i.e. possessed by demons. The people of Jahrom believed that if the head of a palm tree bends down for no reason, that palm tree is crazy and in the local term *genā* (*genā*) and

mortal. In this case, the head of the palm bends down so much that it is separated from the trunk. The people of this region believed that this palm disease has no prevention or treatment.

### **2.1.7. Palm Sacrifice and Rebirth**

The palm tree was the symbol of the god Dumuz or Tammuz, one of the martyr gods of Mesopotamia. Palm coffin burial and palm sacrifice are seen in various forms in southern mourning rituals. One of them is the symbolic burial of the bodies of the martyrs of Karbala, in which palm and its parts are used. In the 13th evening of Muharram, the people of Jahrom perform the symbolic burial ceremony of the martyrs of Karbala by chanting laments and beating their chests and wearing Arabic clothes. They are called Bani Asad tribe.

## **3. Methodology**

This article, in a descriptive-analytical way, examines and analyzes the presence of the palm tree in the folk beliefs and customs of the south and Jahrom city from the point of view of creation and fertility myths. In this way, it first recounts the myths of fertility and creation and plant gods and analyzes the belief or customs related to it in the south as an example. It also tries to explain the connection or at least the similarities between myths and rituals related to fertility, creation and rebirth and recurring themes and patterns formed based on the beliefs and folk customs of southern Iran with the palm axis. Based on this, the common themes and themes, which we will express and analyze in the rest of the article, the pattern of the story of the palm tree as a divine plant in the beliefs and customs of the southern people can be introduced.

## **4. Results**

The annual rituals of the death and rebirth of the plant god are the central point of ancient cultures in connection with creation myths, and the myths of different nations emphasize that man was born from a tree. In the eyes of palm-growing communities, the palm tree is a symbol of the tree of life, that is, a symbol of life and existence.

The palm tree is one of the trees that, although it was not native to Iran, has a presence in Iranian civilization for thousands of years and is considered sacred due to its various functions and mythological beliefs. In the south of Iran, they believe that the palm tree was created from human waste, which goes back to the mythological belief of the creation of life from the tree of life and the relationship between the tree and the

sky. As a spiritual and sacred symbol, the palm tree evokes the mythological conscience of man in connection with God.

In its mythological nature, the palm tree is one of the Mesopotamian plant deities, and signs of its divine nature have been left in its human and transformed incarnation, in the beliefs and customs of the people of the south in various forms and completely related to the myths of creation and fertility. The fruitfulness of the beliefs and rituals related to the palm tree has caused the continuation of these beliefs and rituals for several thousand years in the south. In the beliefs and customs of the southern people, the palm tree is known more for the female gender and its special customs, and its range of self-care is from the myth of creation and fertility and its manifestations in the myth of plant gods, the process of childbirth and rebirth, or spiritual properties in order to maintain fertility, life and continuity. Their ritual continues in the form of the sacred philosophy of survival.

Since the palm tree is thought of as a human being, people have considered it to have qualities such as anger and going crazy, and rituals such as threatening the palm tree and making the palm tree a bride have been considered, which are related to the myths of creation, fertility and blessing.

On the other hand, according to the story of the mythical god Tammuz in ancient mourning, the palm tree, which became the symbol of the god and later, the king, was sacrificed for blessing, fertility and resurrection of nature. In more recent times, this tree was later used in religious mourning as coffin palm or mourning palm. In the popular belief of the southern people, the crazy palm also dies if it is not treated. The process of personification of the people of the south is complementary to each other in terms of the cycle of life and death, from the plant god and martyr to the goddess of fertility and life in the presence of the palm tree, and in terms of quality.

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