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Representation of environmental cultural norms in Bakhtiari folk literature

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Abstract

Folk literature plays a prominent role in recognizing different types of attitudes and cultural norms of ethnic groups to various aspects of life, including environmental issues because this type of literature affects not only the institutionalization of these issues, but also their construction in any society. Accordingly, this research investigates the environment-related cultural norms in common Bakhtiari folk poems and tales in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari and Khuzestan provinces using the documentary method and analytical-descriptive approach, and provides answer to this question: What is the role of the environment in the formation of Bakhtiari folk literature? and, what cultural norms (beliefs) about the environment have been reflected in this literature? The results of this research show that Bakhtiari folk literature is an animal-plant-based literature and cultural norms in the area of environment have been represented in this literature, such that to preserve the hunt, factors such as age, gender, and hunting time have been considered, and in order to prevent the cutting of trees, the issue of their sanctity and regarding them as the symbol of life has been addressed. Of course, besides positive cultural norms, there are some inappropriate beliefs, such as the negative attitude toward some animals, plants, and trees, causing damage to the environment.

Keywords: *Bakhtiari folk literature, environment among Bakhtiari people, cultural norms and folk literature, folk literature and animals.*

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Extended Abstract**1. Introduction**

Learning oral and folk literature is of paramount importance because this literary genre, as a subset of the folk culture, has its roots in the past of ethnic groups and nations and in people's lives, and its study is indicative of ethnic traditions and human values. This literature includes social life, way of living and customs, taste and aesthetics, good human actions and behaviors, and in other words, the history of human evolution, and without studying and learning folklore issues [especially in the area of environmental issues], the progress of society is delayed (Zulfaqari, 2017: 10; Tamim-Dari, 2011: 17); Therefore, studying the folk literature to find out the existing beliefs, especially about the environment is essential, and accordingly, attempts were made in this research to study Bakhtiari folk literature.

Research Question(s)

The present research seeks to answer this question: what is the role of the environment in the formation of Bakhtiari folk literature? What cultural norms (beliefs) about the environment have been reflected in this literature? and what role do these norms play in preserving or causing damage the environment?.

2. Literature Review

Regarding Bakhtiari culture, Bakhtiari folk poems have been collected in books, such as Barzegari's Poems and Migration in Bakhtiari Culture by Ruhollah Karimi (2018), Bakhtiari People's Folklore by Qanbari Adivi (2012), Bakhtiari's Music and Songs by Poreh (2002), Bakhtiari Culture by Khosravi (1992), Understanding and Evaluation of Bakhtiari Music by Lak (2005), Bakhtiari Ethnic Encyclopedia by Davoudi Hamuleh (2014), Materials for the Study of Bakhtiari Dialect by Zhukovsky (2017), and History of Literature in Bakhtiari Tribe by Asmand (2001). However, it should be noted that the environment-related cultural norms in literature, especially folk literature have not been represented in the above mentioned works. In the present research, for the first time, this issue is investigated in detail.

3. Methodology

The data were collected using the field study, library method, and *document analysis procedure* in such a way that after studying documents and talking to knowledgeable people, beliefs and poems

related to the environment were collected. The collected materials were then categorized and finally described and analyzed.

Results

Different cultural norms regarding the way of using the environment and establishing a relationship with it have been established in Bakhtiari tribe such that by relying on the moral, rational and emotional reasons, the people are asked to avoid excessive hunting and the hunters are asked to pay attention to the age and gender of the hunt and hunting time to preserve the species of the hunt. Moreover, animal cruelty has been represented as an undesirable issue and people have been prevented from annoying animals by establishing ethical standards. In order to prevent cutting of the trees, the sanctity of trees and regarding some of them as the symbol of life has caused the tree to be positioned in a special place in this culture and caused people to avoid cutting some of them. By giving emotional reasons, children are asked not to harm the birds and not to destroy their nests. With regard to milking animals, there is a belief indicating that a person who excessively milks animals will not achieve salvation in this world and hereafter. In addition, some of the occupations leading to the cessation of reproduction of animals and causing damage to their survival have been negatively represented. Many animal species have been known to be transformed from humans in Bakhtiari culture. This causes animals transformed from good people to be treated with kindness and pity. However, some beliefs in this culture may ensue destructive environmental consequences. For example, animals, such as boar and bear are known to be transformed from bad humans, therefore, they were/are hunted excessively, or some birds, such as crow are known as the symbol of ominousness and flawedness, causing a negative attitude toward this bird.

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