

Literary Research

Year 19, NO. 77

Falii 2022

 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2634/Lire.19.77.39>

 DOR: [20.1001.1.17352932.1401.19.77.4.2](https://doi.org/20.1001.1.17352932.1401.19.77.4.2)

Reflection of Matriarchy Myths in the Stories of Shahnameh

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Received: 23/5/2020

Accepted: 18/9/2021

Abstract

matriarchy refers to a time in previous millennias when women played a special role in society and without them, the lives of the tribe's members would be in danger. In some of the stories of Shahnameh, one can see signs of the matriarchy era. In this research, an attempt has been made to classify the matriarchy stories of Shahnameh with a morphological approach and to provide a model for these stories. For this purpose, after introducing the characteristics of the matriarchy era, a number of mythological narratives that have similar structures in different cultures and whose similarities are same as the events influenced by the matriarchy period are briefly introduced. In the main part of the research, by examining four stories from Shahnameh, namely “Kaikavus and Soodabeh”, “Siavash and Soodabeh”, “Bijan and Manijeh” and “Esfandiar and Katayoun” in terms of morphology, we have shown a common pattern in them: The presence of the goddess of love in these stories causes death or a trouble for the main character of the story as a vegetation deity, and then a return or, in other words, a resurrection occurs for the vegetation god. All of these events are allegorical narratives for the season rotation as a matriarchy myth.

Keywords: *morphology, matriarchy, Shahnameh, Kaikavus, Siavash, Bijan, Esfandiar.*

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Extended Abstract

1- Introduction

Signs of matrilineal culture and thought are evident in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh. In order to get a correct understanding of these mythological narratives, it seems necessary to search for common possible structures in them in order to approach their background and origin. Some elements related to matriarchy such as outside the tribe marriages can be seen in different parts of the Shahnameh, but what this article focuses on are stories such as Siavash and Sudabah, which in terms of structure are almost completely consistent with the narratives influenced by the era of matriarchy. It seems that they have been reflected in the Shahnameh with not so many changes compared to the original. There are other stories with the same feature in the Shahnameh, but due to the wide range of characters, the diversity and difference in the time and place of the events, and the transfer of some actions between different characters in the story, all of them are not recognizable at first glance.

2. Literature Review

First, we mention some of the famous myths of the change of seasons, which actually show the barrenness and shedding of plants in the winter season and the re-appearance of plant life in the spring season, and are considered to be influenced by the relationships of the period of matrilineal descent.

1. The Babylonian myth of Ishtar and Tammuz
2. Greek myth of Adonis and Aphrodite
3. The Roman myth of Attis and Sibel
4. The Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris
5. The Indian myth of Ram and Sita

Among the main characteristics of the mythology of the matrilineal era that can be seen in these stories, the following should be mentioned:

1. The role of the goddess of love in the life and death of the plant God
2. Fertility and drought of nature
3. The test of marriage and the holy king
4. Linking the plant God with the plant
5. Mourning rituals
6. Resurrection of the plant God

The stories of the Shahnameh, in which the mentioned matrilineal elements are reflected with changes, are as follows:

1. Kikavus and Soudabeh: Soudabeh is in the role of the goddess of love and without being directly involved in this matter, puts Kikavos in prison. His imprisonment can be considered equivalent to the banishment of the lover of the goddess of love to the underworld. After the defeat of Hamavaran's army, Kikavus takes the king's daughter as wife, which reminds him of the test of marriage and becoming a holy king.

2. Siavash and Soudabeh: Soudabe, in the role of the goddess of love, repeatedly expresses her love for Siavash, and Siavash, in the role of Izad Nabati, gets angry with the goddess of love for rejecting her love and goes to Turan, which is a symbol of the underworld. His resurrection is in the form of his son Ki Khosro. By showing his fighting skills and his strength, Siavash somehow emerges victorious from the marriage test and then marries the king's daughter. Parsiavshan's plant growing from Siavash's blood is a sign of his relationship with the plant. After his death and as the result of Iranians' revenge from Turanian the country will be destroyed and a great mourning ceremony will be held for him.

3. Bijan and Manijeh: In this story, the anger of the goddess of love indirectly affects the lover. Of course, the predatory dimension of the goddess of love has appeared in the face of Afrasiab, Manijeh's father. Bijan's falling into the well is a symbol of the plant God going to the death world, and his battle with the boars can be considered the test of marriage.

4. Esfandiar and Katayun: Katayun is Esfandiyar's mother, but in the mythology of matriarchy, sometimes the goddess of love falls in love with her child. Katayun has appeared in the role of a compassionate mother in the story, and there is no trace of the anger of the goddess of love in her, but perhaps Katayun's anger is attributed to Esfandiar in the deep construction of the narrative with the process of displacement and inversion. Esfandiar's effort to save his sisters and pass through Haft Khan is somehow reminiscent of the marriage test. Esfandiar has a special relationship with the plant, such as the fact that killing Esfandiar was only possible with a part of a plant (Gaz tree). His death was followed by a mourning ceremony and chaos and destruction, and his resurrection takes place in the form of his son Bahman.

3. Methodology

In this article, through the morphology of these stories, we try to show their identical and similar structure with the basic narratives that were the possible origin of all these stories or parts of them were borrowed in these stories. Morphology is a kind of "classification" based on similarities and differences in structures. In structural methods, the researcher does not consider the various phenomena of the subject of knowledge independently and separately from each other, but tries to examine each phenomenon in relation to the set of phenomena of which that phenomenon is a part. The term morphology was first borrowed by Vladimir Propp from the science of biology. Since the basis of the current research is also the identification and classification of some themes, characters and fictional actions of a number of narratives of the Shahnameh based on structural and functional similarities, we also borrow the term morphology for our research and consider the approach and method of the upcoming research to be morphological.

4. Results

In this article, it was found that the mentioned stories have a similar narrative structure despite having different characters, different motivations, different time and place of events and even shifting of some roles in the story, and all of them reflect events similar to the mythology of the change of seasons or the mythology of matriarchy. The differences that can be seen in each of the stories are related to the details, and the main interactions in the story and the main narrative structure of the story are the same. By examining these four stories, one can find the sometimes clear and sometimes obscure traces of this common pattern in them: the presence of a lover or a central female character, who often drives the main events of the story, is reminiscent of the goddess of love in the mythology of the change of seasons. The usual selfish actions of this lover directly or indirectly cause the death, imprisonment or trouble of the protagonist. In these stories, the connection of the main character with plants and nature makes his face more like the God of plants in mythology. In the following, his lover or those around him try to free the hero of the story, and finally these efforts lead to his return or release, which is, in a sense, the resurrection of the plant God. Usually, in some of these stories, some kind of test or battle also occurs, which can be a transformed form of the marriage test in matrilineal mythology.

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