

## Plant Antecedent in Iran's National Epic and World's Myths

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### ABSTRACT

Primitives' minds weren't able to analyze the incidents and events occurring in their environments, therefore they used to imagine the smallest incidents in their minds as devils and hence to keep their families and tribes safe they used to provide a thing or plant as their totem.

Most cultures in the world have pointed out the importance of trees and plants as the life symbol; and the tree of life (universal) and plant is an image of Middle East in ancient times and it is related to the name of Siavash in Iranian culture; because this name was related to the common beliefs of Indo-European cultures and is a sign of sacredness of nature elements of ancient Iran so that oak tree in this belief is extremely sacred and has been considered as the house of gods.

In the ancient beliefs and among the various nationalities there were extraordinary plants; plants and trees which caused relief of death and used to be life giving fruit, eternal fruit, destruction, symbol of life, symbol of amplitude, regeneration and sacredness. Therefore the history of beliefs about the trees and the linkage of human beings desires with the plants could be observed in the other nations' cultures.

**KEYWORDS:** Plant Antecedent, National Epic, Siavash, the Plant Symbol, Tree, the Plant Origin of Human Beings, Nations' Cultures

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Observing the similarities between themselves and their environment the primitives would look to the world with a superior vision. They would imagine the earth as an entity that used to have all the characteristics of a living creature and is the origin of human beings and other living creatures' emersion. From the viewpoint of the primitives, the living creatures and trees are also not exempted from this principle.

In some nationalities and cultures they used to believe that gods were created from the plants. Greeks believed that human beings like plants would grow spontaneously from the earth. Therefore human beings and gods would experience a plant life. And due to this belief, plants and trees were of a special importance to them.

The supernatural belief to the plants caused that human beings to recall plants and trees in their myths and epics; such as epic plants in the *epopee* [Shahnameh] that each of them has symbolic glory and characteristics because the evolving of plants from human beings blood and human beings birth out of a plant in Firdausi's opus has granted a kind of mysterious quality to the plants.

In this article we will briefly discuss the basic thought, the way the thoughts were formed, plants evolving out of blood, human beings birth out of the plant, the incredible tree of plenty seeds, the tree of life, healing power and life increasing in Iran's national epic and other nations' myths.

### 2. Plants (plants, trees)

The bases of ancient myth tales in the *epopee* [Shahname] and other cultures are so deep and mysterious that it is very difficult and sometimes impossible to talk about their roots. Since very long ago plants and trees have been just like a mirror which reflects the human and his deepest desires. These plants have extended association and hidden concepts that have to be decoded. "Plants are images of life and the symbols of evolution. Continuous growth of plant is a sign of periodic revitalization and a myth of eternal return to one single origin." (Debokor, 1994, 21) The plant life is burying and hiding the seeds beneath the soil. Until the seed is not disappeared it won't give another birth and most of the myth tales with all their characteristics go back to the farmers in the prehistoric ages. Death, martyrdom, hiding, escaping from the life and turning into a plant out of a seed, sacrificing, growing, re-productivity, and growing out of blood are of beliefs and customs of the agricultural age; as in Greece it was believed that "vine" had grown out of Dionysus's blood. (Bahar, 1997, 429). Also the seasonal behavior of the deciduous trees reflects a kind of far away symbols' system that is an image of life and rebirth (Jane Green, 2007, 63). According to this point trees and plants (vegetables) have spirits and in the primitives' vision, the spirit of a tree is imagined as a living human being; as the Basooka tribe in the central Africa believes that by cutting down a tree, its angry spirit would cause the death of chieftain or his family (Frazer, 2003, 155). In the Mayan myths also the gods had made the human from the plants' woods (Toop, 1996, 76). And the people of Zulu in the southern Africa believe that the primary man and woman had been created within a straw or the people of Herdu in the southwestern Africa believe that their ancestors were born from a specific tree (Payender, 1997, 58). And the china myths believe that man's baby was born from berry tree (Cambel, 2004, 381). In Mesopotamia, the tree of life is composed of various plants that are considered to be

sacred because of their long age, beauty and productivity; such as pomegranate, cedar, vine and palm (Debkor, 1994, 13).

In Iran also there are beliefs that some plants and trees are sacred. Iran's myths as one of the bases of myths and rich "Indo-European" and "Indo-Iranian" cultures and a part of universe's cultural bases have had special attention to the beliefs of creation recur, doomsday and the afterlife.

In the epos [Shahname] tales "Borzooye, the physician", Borzooye goes on a journey in order to find a plant that gives eternal life to a death man. This narrative has great similarity to a Chinese tale because Husufu gets a mission from the emperor, Wu-Ti, to find the fruit of life.

Olive is one of the most sacred plants among the Greeks. This plant has been discovered in the Egyptian tombs 2000 years ago and after that it entered ancient Greece. This plant gained such an importance that most of the gods and statues built and found in the Greece possess a crown of the leaf of this tree. The olive tree has the concept of mercy, peace and bliss and in the Christianity it is a symbol of hidden mercy by which the sinner achieves eternal peace.

Imagining a tree as the symbol of life has been related to the tree customs in the ancient eastern cultures, Greece and Rome and among the Germans also oak tree, an evergreen tree that its branches reach the sky, is the position of gods, specially the plant God. In the Jewish religion, tree has a special position and is imagined to have spiritual value and power; as far as God emerges through it at Muses. There is a kind of relation between species of trees and the prophets and more or less there are some stories and narratives related to them in the religions.

Japan is one of the eastern Asian countries that believe in the plant totems. One of the most valuable trees for them is cherry-tree. And also the "Bamboo-tree" is the symbol of tenacity, bounty and luck which is flexible against wind. On the other hand, the ancient signs of Japanese families include native flowers and plants of their land more than animals.

### **3. Plant's growing out of blood, plant figured, flowers**

In each age the creation of man is a subject that makes his mind busy. The outset of human civilization has been always accompanied by the diversity in the cultures and ethnics and has had great importance among these nations; as far as it has included a great part of each nation's myths and the most famous myths about the creation are derived from soil or plants.

Sometimes in the myths, the man turns into a plant and plants grow from his organs or blood; as "Patrina" and "Miskanto" are two plants that are seen beside each other in Japan. Japanese believe that these two plants were in fact two lovers that drowned themselves and then had grown as two plants out of the water (Pigout, 1999, 130) and sometimes the gods emerge in plant form like "narcissus", the god of beauty.

In myths of ancient Iran also this point has been noted that human beings were plant figured at the beginning and then they turned into human beings and gained human characteristics. Man and woman shaped from plant and now are as a grown tree which load (fruits) is ten kinds of people (human beings). (Kambel, 2004, 39).

In the aforesaid myths man's life and death are linked to the plants. This death and life cycle has been always emerged in various forms. As in some cases death of someone was depended on a tree or one of its branches, in some myths this relation was reversed and man's life would begin from plants. India with thousands of year antiquity, a rich culture, and plenty of common points with the Aryans and Iranian culture is among those regions that possess very valuable plant and vegetable life. The customs and culture of southern Aryans and Hindus just like their siblings, ancient Iranians, was that they used to make an intoxicant drink named "Sooma=Soome" from an unknown plant and then mixed it with milk and drank it and used to consider it as a divine drink and would offer it to the gods (Naas, 1986, 133). Saffron colored flowers, various fruits, tree's green leave and figs were among those gifts which Hindus used to offer to the gods in their religious ceremonies and temples.

Iran's myths believe that man was born from the soil. They consider a plant origin for him and they imagine a human to plant and plant to human transformation during the period of life and death. These are myths that narrate the relationship between human and nature. Other nations' myths also imagine the plants as the indicators of human beings and consider creation of human beings in form of plants.

Water lily has been considered to have magical meanings such as immortality, fertility, freedom and the secret of human beings dynamic spirit. Water lily has close definition in Iranian and Indian myths. This flower, that is one of the most ancient symbols in the Indian culture, is greatly sacred and holy among Hindus because it grows on the water and is clean from any impurity. Water lily "Lotus" is the symbol of brightness and re-birth and the result of creative powers of fire, sun and water, and is recognized as the product of sun and water. Therefore, the sun grows from lotus. In Iranian myths, the water lily is considered as the flower of "Anahita" and Zoroastrians' believed it as the symbol of "Ahura Mazda".

In ancient Iranian myths, man and woman both were the roots of a plant named "Rivas (Rhubarb)"; as this root grew and came out of the ground, it was divided into two similar stalks. Then one of them became the symbol of man and the other became the symbol of woman. (Doustkhaah, 1991, 1054/2).





by looking at these plants person's name would be associated, remain immanent and everyone in every ages would recall him as a good person.

According to Elyadeh, this is the return of human being to the universe's womb which establishes a relationship to life and its origin again because death is transpiration from one level to another (Elyadeh, 1983, 289). It shouldn't be neglected that the origin of aforesaid cases in beliefs of primitives is the ancient patterns, beliefs, and old desires of human beings that are transmitted chest to chest and generation to generation in mythological and symbolic area.

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