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A List of Persian Mythical Women

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A List of Persian Mythical Women

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Abstract

Human being's everyday life and his life related to his rites requires a direct contact with universal and legendary heroes and holy great people's ancient roots, and reflects attitudes of people who admired distant creatures such as sky, sun and stars. They have received erudite antitype through divine religions and beliefs after a while, being firmly enrooted in community's culture and literature. Hence, a countless number of manifestations of nature, because of their power and divinity, have been used as women's names in the course of history. In this article, the writer tries to review these manifestations religious aspects and beliefs belonged to people of Guilan regarding this issue.

Key words: life, human being, culture, literature, woman, name

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Introduction

Xorshid (Sun)

Sun is etymologically *hvar*– *In Avesta* and *xwaršēd* In Pahlavi. Sun gives light and heat, it's a sign of life and the source of power (energy) for human and universe.

This phenomenon, being as the symbol of earthly and heavenly powers, is called mankind's father. Sun arises from the depth of earth or seas and disappears in the unseen world. In numerous sun-worshipping religions its mysterious and hidden moments are appropriate time for prayers . (Dadvar, 2006:p.53).Sun is the secret for immortality and resurrection. In some narratives, it is said that sun climbs down to the "Dead land" and leads the spirits in the Hell and takes them to the light in the morning as if in a marathon.

Shamas (sun) is the god of sun in Mesopotamia. One of his characteristics is his bravery which overcomes the night and makes the winter elude. Maybe mankind has worshiped the sun instead of the moon since he started agriculture he discovered that sun's light and heat causes productivity in land and growth of plants giving warmth and empowering mankind the moment .sun devastates the evil and devils during the day by her warmth and light. .(Samadi, 1988:p.111).While worshipping sun, people considered earth as a goddess who became pregnant by the burning rays of the sun. Therefore they worshiped the sun as every living creature's father. Since then, many manifestations of the month, including the horned beasts were attributed to the sun and most of gods related to the sun are transformed kinds of moon gods.Sun was the symbol of heat, light, dryness and summer. Lions and horned animals were attributed to the sun god. Chamois and a kind of flower placed between its horns were symbols of the sun. (Dadvar,2006:p.54).

Sun's everyday cycle is considered as the secret of human life, its rise and set is equivalent to different stages of human life, birth growth, decline and death. the sun is often thought as the center of the universe and the universe is the sign of a learned's wisdom. Sun has always been considered as a symbol of eternal life and glory and kingdom so far that crowns have always contained pinnacle,light beams or wings.*Mashieh and Mashianeh* were created from two shrubs of rhapsodic coming from Kiumars's sperm and purified by the sun beams and sprinkled on the earth: this story reflects the importance of the sun and the relationship between human and the sun.The sun is divine in folklore legends and beliefs of Guilan and people take oath to its light. In the sun is a female Guilan legends. Therefore it must be the symbol of fertility. It is a sister to the moon in other legends ,and the moon has asked her to prevent strangers from looking by means of by light arrows. Islamic myth and values are assimilated.(Boshra, 2007:p.17).

Anahita (Nahid)

This word is grammatically an adjective which means pure and clean. In astronomy it is The Venus (Mackenzie,2000:p.38).

Nahid is it goddess comes from Anahita in Dari Persian. (Abolghasemi,1997:p.14).This goddess corresponds with *Afrodite* in Greek mythology.In many religions, life and fertility are considered as a female creature. In Iran, *Anahita* is the goddess of *Aredvi SuraAnahita* means arədvī which originally means humidity. It is *rdū* In Sanskrit (Bartolomae, 1961:p.194).

That means all pure and strong waters are the source of water on earth. It is the source of fertility and purifies the sperms of entire males on the earth. It sanctifies all female's ovals and cleans all mothers' milk in their breasts. While she is standing in her own place in the heavens, she is the source of universal sea. She is described as brilliant, powerful, tall, beautiful, pure and freehearted.(Hinnells, 1998:pp.38-39). the goddess's statue was established in the distant cities of Babylon and Damascus, and Sardes and Susa and Hamadan in the time of Artaxerxes's reign. Venus had many temples in Anatolia. (Abolghassemi, 1997: p. 14).*Anahita* is a goddess with a very prominent personality that traces back to a much earlier era, and even before the time of Zoroaster, *aredvi*, meaning humidity, was at first name of a river. And following a principle known in mythology, the river name got godhead characteristics and they consider her equivalent to goddess *Sarasvati* that was referred to a small holy river in present Panjab region in India, but in Iran it was changed to *Harkhvati* a lake and a region full of rivers were called this name.(Abolghassemi,1997:p.15).Later two of *Sarasvati* features , *Aredvi* and *Sura* were replaced instead of the name which was used for a river. *Sura* is another name for, *Aredvi Sura Anahita* meaning powerful and strong. (Amoozgar , 1995:p.21).

In Aban Yasht she is portrayed as a young woman who is good looking, tall, beautiful, with white arms, and graceful elegance, tight belts around her waist ,adorned with jewelry ,a golden collar around her neck ,square earrings on her ears, shining shoes on her feet wearing a golden rippling garment. *Anahita* owns a chariot pulled by 4 horses, each being a god itself called as Cloud, Rain, Snow, Hail. (Pour davood, 1998:p.259).

Nahid, in another image, is portrayed wearing garment made of tiger skin and pouring water from a jug in her hands. This reflects her dependence on water (moghaddam, 2001:p.116) .The goddess is so powerful and wise that is shown as the goddess of love and fertility and called the mother goddess.

Mahi (Fish)

It is (*mahig*)in Pahlavi and Pisces in astronomy.(Mackenzie,2000:p.103).In Ethnic beliefs and myths, Fish took out some mud from the ocean with which the earth was formed, it is also a symbol of beginning and commence and is carrying it on its back which means protection and preservation . it guided people who survived the floods and storms and lead them form the underworld to the world above their heads (Dadvar,2006:p.96) .*Esfand* is simultaneous with Pisces which means fish.

Important artworks containing fish pattern originating in Achaemenid period have been obtained in of Pasargadae, Persepolis and Susa. The works

found in Pasargadae are older than all of them. In Pasargadae, the image which is mostly destroyed, is about the priest of "Eae" (religion of wisdom).the priest's cloths and adornments were like fish in the first millennium B.C. (courtis, 1999:p.34).Some crocks with silver frame were found on which two birds were inscribed. . Their body is composed of humanoid fish and animal heads (bossailey, 1997:p.90)

Nilofar

It is *nīlōpal* in Pahlavi (Mackenzie, 2000:p.113). Nilo, ivy and lotus are common names of a group of flowers and plants which in Persian they are also called water born flower, flower of life or creation or water lily. Lotus was considered the flower of *Nahid* in ancient Persian mythology and *Nahid* is the main idea of female creation in religious traditions of Iran which is, to some extent, similar to ancient Indian beliefs. Ancient and mythological history of water lily in Iran and India is so much that one can see water lilies with 8,12 and even 1000 water lily (lotus)was considered a keeping place for Zoroaster's seed or (Farr) therefore it is close to Mehr religion.(dadvar,2006:p.104).

Probably, the flavorful juice from water lily was drunk as wine or vintage. Sapphirine color of water lily was sometimes reckoned as a symbol of mourning and sorrow in addition to the common implications. (Yahaghi, 1990:p.429).Ancient Iranians held a celebration called water lily celebration. Belief in mythological aspects of water lily and applying its symbolic role is manifested in court and official ceremonies. It was manifested in in official and court ceremonies in Achaemenid period.(dadvar,2006:p.105).

Mitra

The root of this word is mri which means covenant, therefore she is the symbol of friendship, unity and affection among human beings. *Mitra* is the essence of covenant and the base for people's relationship to each other. *Mitra* is the oldest and the most mysterious Aryan god. She is also known as the goddess of sun.(Jakson,1892:p.216).Worshipping *Mitra* was common in ancient Iran, she was the goddess of bilateral covenants and treaties among nations. Thus she was the cause of successful love.*Mitra* has gotten the concept of "friend" in Sanskrit as the time has passed. Later in Persian the word *Mehr* was used as an altered form of *Mitra*. *Mehr* in *Avesta* is *Mithra* in Achaemenidian inscriptions and *MiØra* Sanskrit. The word was changed in Pahlavi to *Mitra* and now adays it is *Mehr* which means covenant, affection and sun.(Amoozgar,1995:p.18).

Parvin

It is *parwēz* in Pahlavi and *paoiryaēini* –in *Avesta* (the third house for the moon).It is a collection of 4 stars in Taurus and 2 smaller stars, in Arabic known as Alcyone and in Persian. It has been used as *Parvin* and *Pirn* in Persian. (Bahar, 1994:p.58).

Giti (World)

This word is female which means universe and possession, its root is *gay* which means live. Its *Avestan* form is *gaē θā*. (Abolghassemi, p.98)

Sepand, Sepanta, Sepandarmaz, Sepanta Armiti (spandarmad)

is the fourth holy belief of *Amshaspand* in Pahlavi (Mackenzie, 2000: p.136).

The fifth day of *Esfand* is named after this angle in charge of females and earth. *Sepandarmaz* is the spiritual perfection of human soul in ancient texts (*Avesta*) and reflects a spiritual and mystical dimension, Later in Pahlavi, it is named as a goddess. This angle, who is called *Amshaspand* in Pahlavi texts, is an antitype of a good woman and guardian of lands. the day dedicated to celebrating women is derived from this angle. (Amoozgar, 1995: p.16).

Setareh (Star)

At night as we look at the boundless sky we observe it full of flickering stars. If you look closer their shining and brightness resemble a bright cross which has been surrounded by light. (Dadvar, 2006: p.59). *Roshanan* is a common name for stars in Mazdaki religions. *Stellars*, non-stellars or *Aba akhtaran* (planets), moon and the sun. *Paradisaic* stars are related to *Ormazd* (God and the planets are related to Devil (Ahriman). (Bahar, 1994: p.165). Historical background and deep exploration in ancient religions show that *Venus* (*Nahid*), among all other stars, was holy and worshipped in various nations. it was called *Zohreh* in Mesopotamia and *Ishtar* and *Anahita* (*Nahid*) in Iran being a goddess. She is called *Anahita* and is holy at the present time. The star was known to the ancient people and some countries' calendars were based on its cycle and also had a religious value. (Bakhtour tash, 1992: p.32).

Herodotus says: Iranians gave tributes to the sun, moon, earth, water and wind in 5th century B.C. Later Estraboun confirmed Herodotus and some of what is said about *Mitra* religion is true. *Mehr* worshippers believed that human soul can pass through the septette. People of *Guilan* believe that every human has a celestial twin and whenever a star falls a human being dies and human's destiny is predetermined. The poor have dim stars and the rich and the happy have bright stars. This concept reflects the belief in destiny (Boshra, 2007: p.77).

One shouldn't look at anyone right after a star falls because it can cause that person's star to fall.

Mah (Moon)

The moon plays an important role in mythology of ancient Iran because the moon is the only divine light ripping through the deep darkness and exposing the black monster of darkness. (Dadvar, 2006: p.55). The moon didn't lose its holiness and divinity in different historical eras but, in accordance with the ideology of religions, some changes were made in the sense of sacredness and divinity and the type of its function. In the *Manichaean* religion, people prayed towards the sun in the day and towards the moon at night. (Bahar, 1994: p.92).

The moon is the guardian of horses and carries their race in Zoroastrianism, the seventh *Yasht* in Avesta is dedicated to the moon and the twelfth day of each month is called Moon day (Mah rooz). In Avesta it is said that the prayer to the moon was held three times a month. (Abolghassemi, 1995:p.11). As *Bondahishn* quotes, The moon protects quadrupled and animals sperm. The strong and pure Proportion of cow's sperm is taken to the moon. "Holy *Ardaviraf*" reached to the moon in his journey in the skies and saw a group of saints there. Crescent was a special sign in Iran in the past, as Abureyhan Birooni said: 'Iranians supposed that the moon's chariot was pulled by a cow made from light having two golden horns and ten silver legs'. It was meritorious to admire, pray and worship the moon. 'praying for the sun every time is meritorious and praying for the moon and fire the same as God is meritorious too.' (Mazdapour, 1990: p.90). Iranian predecessors believed special traits for each god/goddess and considered the moon to have the most miraculous (Mazdapour, 1990: p.263). Although the moon lost its previous dignity after Islam entered Iran, it still had a divine prestige.

In many parts of Iran, especially in public, the sun and moon are considered male and female and are lovers. The spots seen on the moon are the Marks that sun made on her when he rubbed his muddy hand on her face due to his jealousy. Ancients believed that the moon bores cotton garments and if a mad looks at the moon his confusion will be increased. In mythology, the ecliptic is a sign of battle between mythical gods. In Indian mythology, full moon and moon interlunar is a result of his behavior towards his wives, because he has seven wives and is attentive to only one of them. In Persian literature the moon is mostly symbol of beauty, brightness, preeminence and exaltation. Iranian poets have used it in ironies, metaphors and various compositions because of these concepts and particularly, beauty of a woman has been likened to the moon. (Yahaghi, 1990:p.384).

Sinn was the god of moon in Mesopotamia whose offspring was called Shams or Sun and was higher than Shams. Sinn was an old man in concrete form wearing a long azure beard who usually put on a turban. (Elyadeh, 1999: p.147). Probably, in the early days of civilization the moon was the first god to be worshipped because agriculture and breeding livestock were an important part of life. Rain and snow were naturally considered the only factor for survival and people believed that moon caused rainfall. (Samadi, 1988:p.43). The moon brings about rain and coolness; on the contrary the sun is symbol of heat. Moon is sometimes depicted next to a tree and sometimes depicted as a tree on a mountain top, because as the moon brings a soothing shadow after brutal heat of the sun, shadow of a tree brings relief and relaxation. the moon presents water, rain and life. Hence sap of a tree, called tree of moon, *Huma*, *Suma* or *Sumeh* and portrayed with the moon was the extract of life (Samadi, 1988:p.22).

Mah Yasht in *Avesta* belongs to the moon. Fertility is another feature of the moon. Because a relationship between woman and fertility has been supposed since the beginning of human thought, a relationship between woman

and moon is achieved in the ancient era. In the past, moon recommended a winter with log and hot days.(Samadi,1988:p.23).Mountain is another symbol of moon where is the source of herbs and is associated with water. Moon as the source of honey according to ancient Iranian's belief and honey was considered a factor for purification and preserving fruits as well as a protector against death. Therefore the moon is considered as the guardian of fruits and plants.(Romarzen, 1996:p.129).

The white,azure,indigo, and violet which was the color of Iranian flags especially *Kaviani* flag, are the colors which belonged to the moon. (Samadi, 1988:p.37).Of metals, silver belongs to the moon. Rain drop is the geometrical shape of the moon and her human shape is a beautiful woman. Life story of moon is painful and tragic like human being.

Its oldness, like that of human being, ends with death but is followed by resurrection. Death, rebirth and interlunar of the moon is never certain. (Elyadeh, 1999:p.61).The Goddess of moon owns splendor and glory because she breeds. She gives heat because of her trees are warmer, she is productive because she increases the number of herds, she is useful because she keeps everything fresh, she leads to all prosperity. It is fair and generous because it he grants a gift when he rightly wants to. (Bahar, 1994:pp.110-111).The moon is male and brother of the sun in Gilan legends. Snake is manifestation of moon's holiness and does moon's special work. (Elyadeh, 1999:p.165).In other legends the moon goes around the cemeteries, the sun asks aren't you afraid of walking in these kind of places?"The moon replies 'I keep a star besides me and use its light.'(Boshra, 2007:p.16).taking a close look at historical evolution and etymology of the word moon (Mah) and using some evidence cited in Persian literature we can see that it has been used in the names of current Iranian cities such as :*Mahshahr,Mahan* and etc.

Some names of ancient Iranian womenAban Dokht(Persian name):daughter of Aban, Darius I's wife Apam (Persian name): One of Artaxerxes's daughters and Darius's wife

Atena(Arabic name): a Greek goddess, symbol of wisdom ,science and industry, Zeus's daughter who gave her name to Athens.

Atousa (Avestan name): name of several Iranian princesses in Achaemenid era, Cyrus's daughter and Darius I's wife

Azar (Avestan name): the guardian goddess of fire, name of the ninth month of the year

Azrak:Yaz Gerd's daughter

Azarmidokht:Khosrow Parviz's daughter who reigned for some months.

Azar homayoun:A woman ,descendent of Sam, who is remembered in history for her witchcraft

Azarin:An Achaemenidian princess

Artemis: a lady in ancient Iran in Xrxes's reign.she is equivalent to Italian Diana in Rome .She is Zeus and Letto's daughter and Apollo's twin sister .

Arezoo: wife of Salm,Pishdadi fereydoon's son

Azad Dokht :Sassanid Shapour I's wife

Azarmidokht: Pouran Dokht's sister and daughter of Khosrow Parviz
 Asa: sister of Shapour 2nd
 Astiage: Cyrus the Great's mother
 Amsteris: Darius 3rd's niece and Xerxes's wife
 Ami Tidia: Cyrus the Great's wife, Astiak's daughter
 Amitis: Hovakhashtrah's daughter
 Andrea: Darius 2nd's wife and Ardshir I's daughter
 Arshyn: An Achaemenidian princess who was famous for her wisdom
 Arnavaz: Jamshid, Pishdadian king's daughter who was at first Zahhak's wife then was espoused to Fereydoun
 Eshi: goddess of wealth and richness
 Inanena: goddess of sky and land in Sumerian mythology
 Estatia: daughter of Darius 3rd who was espoused to Great Alexander.
 Esther: Xerxes's wife, Achaemenidian Queen's name
 Afry: daughter of Siamak, Kiumars's son
 Afrina: Siamak's daughter
 Irene: the Queen of East Roman empire who is famous for her devotion in belief to Orthodox.

Results

Researches show that many of the names are derived from natural and holy symbols. So that, in ancient religions, each of these natural symbols were considered divine for which especial worship and prayers were allocated. History of ancient Iran shows that these goddesses received sacrifice in especial ceremonies. Besides the magnitude and position, it seems that naturalism was one reason for choosing these names for women. These symbols are all full of blessing and take the Bad and darkness away and the main feature of each is luminosity, power, generosity and wisdom. Tradition of worshipping every natural phenomenon, according to their importance and history duty and authority, provides them with being described as holy manifestations which have gotten divine and beyond human characteristics and then they reach a universal Giti (concrete) form passing through Minovi (spiritual) form.

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