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THE COMPARATIVE STUDY TREE SYMBOLIC POSITION IN ANCIENT AND CONTEMPORARY ENVIRONMENTAL ART OF IRAN

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Abstract: In all eras, tree has been considered as a manifestation of life emerged in different symbolic forms. This element of nature has a close bond with these concepts like life, birth, death, resurrection and eternal life, and manifested in various forms in the arena of myth and art. The manifestation of tree symbol has been seen since ancient art to contemporary art, pictured in various stencils on containers, fabrics, carpets and architectural monument and so on which indicate the spread and relationship with human life. This article mainly studies the respect and honor of tree in Iranian art from ancient time up to present, so the mythical form of tree is placed as an archetype in human's mind, and its appearance has only changed. The question is "why was tree sacred among ancient artists and how was the symbolic and mythical tree related to people's belief? " why has its symbol of strength and power been preserved among contemporary artists with a high value in the visual system? Tree has been the sacred and mythical symbol of stability and human needs it for his survival and living, hence it has attracted the artists. This study deals with studying the symbolic place of tree in ancient art and Iranian contemporary environmental works of art by a comparative approach.

Keywords: Árbol, Mito, Arte Antiguo, Arte Contemporáneo, Arte Ambiental.

INTRODUCTION

Tree has always been something more than a conventional plant in the eyes of human being. Tree, rooted in the soil and head to sky, with its dense greenness and metamorphosis in seasons, symbol of birth, growth, evolution, and in general known as

life has found its sacred manifestations. Trees are particularly significant in the mind of Iranians. Plants participate in resurrection and in fact all these different aspects from the most obvious descriptions to the esoteric and tree of life concept, somehow represent some kind of belief or thought system which is not only worn out over the time, but also live their life in the era of myth and people rituals to keep the old functions parallel to past and their rich content, manifested in form of rituals, spiritual and material dimensions of human's life (9:44) .

Since past, man has believed that trees have spirit like animals and people. It can be the reason of sacredness and honor of tree the eyes of human. Human approach with the advent of contemporary environmental art became more sensitive to the nature like past. This means that the artists create works of art by exploring in natural environment creations and in interaction with the art which invites human to meditate on nature and environmental protection, and audience of these works achieve understanding of the sacred nature which exists in their collective subconscious. In this article, this hypothesis is proven: sacredness of tree and its mythical position is seen in ancient art of Iran today only over a time has found metamorphosis form and its mythical theme has changed from one to another.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The scientific - research articles like "Tree of Life and its Cultural-Symbolic value in beliefs, Totemism and planets totem can be mentioned to review the background and necessity of this research which have been written by Ms. Mahdokht Pourkhaleghi Chatroodi have studied history of trees along with mythical structure recognition in people's belief throughout history. Another scientific - research articles was mentioned entitled "a comparative study of trees symbolic concept in Iran (emphasizing on some literary and mystical texts of ancient Iran and Islamic of Iran have been considered sacred by Farinaz Farboud, Mahmoud Tavousi and et al as MehrdadBahar in "From Myth to History" Adit Pourada and Mohammad Taghi Yahaghiinin their works have mentioned".

The culture of myths and stories in literature" and Abolghasem Esmaeilpour in "Encyclopedia of World Myths ". Also Reza Ghaleh, in field of environmental art in his research entitled, "The Role of Archetypes and Mythology in Environmental Art" refers to the mythology of vegetable in environmental art and also Mohammadian Asiyeh, in her article entitled, "Review of the meaning in works of environmental art through the cultural semiotics" has studied the symbol of tree in environmental work succinctly. In these researches, the relation and comparison of symbol of tree in ancient and environmental art in contemporary of Iran has not reviewed. Therefore, the study of this research is necessary.

THE MYTH OF TREE IN IRAN ANCIENT ART

Tree has mythical structure and nature, full of rich and symbolic contents. Common motifs can be found in all myths related to tree. This means that human imagined it as a link to the superior source of power. Methodological importance of tree originates from the story of first human parents, Mashy and Mashyaneh. The first human couple which was created from Kiumars who was killed by Devil converted to convoluted group stem of rhubarb that was not possible to recognize men and women.

Together they have formed the tree whose yield was ten human races (11:91).

Then God makes them alive, they separated from each other and turned to human. (4: 56) Another sacred tree is tree of life which is usually placed between the monk and priest or two mythical beasts (gryphon, wild goat, lion...) in images and motifs as safeguard and must fight with safeguard monsters because of picking its fruits where divine elixir of life is obtained whoever wins the battle, will promote to the degree of superhuman and will remain young forever and immortal. In Iranian belief, as it is shown in Bahman Yasht, the tree of life has seven branches of gold, Silver, bronze, copper, tin, iron, and steel which refers to the seven holy planets or seven tribes who have ruled over them and each of them corresponds to the seven eras of legendary history of Iran (20:10).

Tree has been named Hametokhmehin Zoroastrian narrations. (Poorkhaleghi) This tree or Vespucci tree is the source of all the plants in the world in which all the plants originate from it. Simorgh, the legendary bird of Iran, nests on it and as it sits there, it breaks thousands of branches and outspread all seeds. This tree located in Farakhkord Sea, the endless cosmic Sea, along with "Gokarn" or "White Hoom" tree. Also, many characteristics such as, healing, sadness repellent, contain the seeds of all plants, the source of all waters and seas in which all trees and plants originate. Nest of Simorgh on this tree is the symbol of the power and majesty, and also is the generous glory of promising victory, the therapist, magician and spell nullifier, it is another reason of the sacredness and refreshing the mythical motifs of this tree.



Figure 1: Tree of Life and its guards, Lorestan bronze, twelve centuries BC, Museum of Ancient Iran.

Another mythical tree is called "Hoom". The tree which grows in sacred apogee at the peak of Alborz Mountain. The Peak which will be counted as the center of world. And it is sacred. (Hinles, 2004, 94) as it is written by Merhdad Bahar Hoom, the name of Goddess of treatment and the guardian of the ritual and sacred Hoome's tree. The place of the goddess is inside of Gokarn's tree. ISNA news explains about this plant: this plant or its sap is far from dying, make women pregnant and girls marry (2:94). Also, there is a literary example of tree in ancient Persia.

Assyrian or Assuring tree is a book written in Parthian and Pahlavi script with one of the rarest non-religious texts remained from Parthian and mixed by Middle Persian language. In this story, we witness the conversation between an Assyrian tree and a goat that finally leads to the victory of goat. Perhaps we can take the goat and Assyrian tree as representative of Zoroastrianism and worship diversity religion of Assyria. It is notable that a dry tree used in religious tradition Assyrians decorated by artificial finery(18: 8).



Figure 2: Musicians plate with role tree of the ancient Sasanian period, Seventh Century AD, Britain Museum.

Tree also has a great value in Manavimyth. In the Manichean paintings, the content of three can be seen as three-branch tree. This three-branch or three-stem tree which named tree of life is the mythical symbol of the creation trilogy in Manichaeism myths. Three – branch is the symbol of three –stage creation. Period of pre-mixing with darkness, mixing period and Golden period of separation of light from darkness, darkness ruining and Joining paradise of pure light to a new paradise in the land of light (Figure 4). This tree is the symbol of light land's nature. According to the doctrine of Manichaeism, light land includes areas of East, West, North and it is bordered on the south by land of darkness. Both elements in Manichaeism (light and darkness) with motifs of two trees, the tree of life and the tree of death have been formed symbolically. The cosmologically speaking, good and evil trees are representative of two domains and in anthropology, they came to symbolize the pious and the pagans. The good tree bears fruit while the evil tree is barren and it means the one who is ruled within darkness forces (19: 42).



Figure 3: Assyrian and goats Tree, drawing on pottery, Jiroft civilization, 5000 years BC, Museum of Ancient Iran.



Figure 4: Murals of the trunk tree from Bozqaligh cave, Turfan (one of the areas that has been discovered the works of Manichaeans), 9 to 12 century AD.

In the history of ancient Iran, some trees such as plane tree, cypress, palms, grapes etc. have been mentioned which specifies its sacredness and special function more and more. Persian kings had always cherished plane tree. There was a golden plane tree along with golden grapevine in Iran's court, they are often placed in the bedroom of the king and adorned the plane tree with precious stones, praised by Persians.

When Dariush the Great was in Asia Minor, he was gifted a plane tree and golden grape tree. When Xerxes went to fighting with Greece, he saw a great plane tree then he said to decorate it by golden ornaments and gave it to his soldiers to be guarded. As the king was the human symbol of heaven blessing, plane tree was the plant symbol as well. (3: 45). In engravings and bas-reliefs of Persepolis cypress and palm and cedar trees can be seen in abundance. (Scheme 5).

The image of Ahura Mazda is flying over these trees. More gods and Farrevaharsare also flying on top of these trees and their feet touch the branches of trees. Long columns of Persepolis are the symbol of tall and huge trees. Tall columns of Persepolis are a symbol of tall and sturdy trees. These columns which had held high ceilings of buildings straight depicted dense groves which was a symbol of a sacred grove. On some seals discovered in Persepolis, the image of fertile and fruitful palm tree can be seen(1:171).



Figure 5: The tree and the soldier, the Achaemenid's reliefs, about 550 to 330 BC.

THE MYTH OF TREE METAMORPHOSIS BY ARRIVAL OF ISLAM

Ancient myths of Iran appeared in a new context of Islamic mysticism with the advent of Islam. For example, in ancient Iran, during the funeral of kings such as Cyrus, funerals pulled out the root of a plane tree and carried it behind the corpse. Cedar was a symbol of male and palm trees were symbols of females in ancient Iran. Gradually, in Safavid period, this tradition of using tree as a symbol of life in Funeral ceremony was rebuilt even in mourning ceremony of Ashura and Tasua, also as a symbolic form means the Alam and Kotal (holy instruments in religious ceremony of Muslims) the same as palm tree and as cedar for being symbolic traditions in Islam. Islamic mystics, philosophers and thinkers speak about tree in their own views of nature.

Ibn-e-Arabi speaks about "tree of life". In his opinion, this tree which has originated from seed of "Kan", has grown three branches. One branch to the right belongs to all benefactors and the people of Paradise, the other branch to the left is for

hellish and the Right-growing branch belongs to who are pious close to lord (God). After describing the tree of life as a symbol of universe and an image of world, Ibn-e-Arabi also describes the Sedratolmontaha, Zaqqum and Touba tree and considers these trees as branches of “life of tree”(12: 48).

This three - branche tree is reminiscent of the three -branch of the tree in Manichaeen myths. Word of tree and its different types such as tuba, palm, cedar, olive, pomegranate, fig etc. and have been mentioned in Quran, very deep and valuable meanings have been stated symbolically as well. Tubaor Sedratolmontaha Tree is the most important tree in Quran which is in Paradise. Its branches are in the house of all paradise residents and Prophet Muhammad and Gabriel visited each other here for the second time.

Sohrevardi, has mentioned Tuba tree in his treatise too in his “AghleSorkh”. In this treatise Sohrevardi speaks symbolically about a lot of things and elements of nature. For example, Ghaf Mount, Tuba Tree, Ordosorspring , contrast of light and darkness, falling light in the well etc... (21: 444). Mollasadra in Hashr treatise also speaks about Tuba and Zaghum tree. In his view, nature in evolution couldn't reach the highest grade unless it has already reached a lower degree previously and every case in this world has a superior case in another world and plants also are not exception from this rule and in this world those trees which have good face, smell and fruit would be in heaven and those which have bad taste and smell would be hell trees, but in general all these trees lead to the trees with total soul base.



Figure 6: Molana Ali, the House Kaykavous, Baisanghari Shahnameh, 29. 21 cm. 833 AD. BC. . The library of Tehran Golestan Palace.



Figure 7: plates, pottery Koubacheh, 11th century H.GH, with the colored glaze, diameter 33 cm, Armitage Museum, 2013.

Respecting the plants and trees and in general all vegetation and useful animals for the universe have been honored among Iranians. Tree has the most important aspect of nature among Iranian people which have always been a symbol of universe and life for human. By studying cultural and historical course of Iran's mythology, the same thought and approach toward nature and tree is seen.

And these periods have influenced each other, so that the manifestation of Zoroastrian and Manichean culture and civilization beliefs in mysticism and Islamic culture is undeniable and it represents the most valuable and important place of trees and plants in Iranians thought and belief system.

MYTH AND SYMBOL OF TREE IN CONTEMPORARY ENVIRONMENTAL ART OF IRAN

Knowledge and understanding of myth value and symbols based on these findings started at the beginning of the twentieth century, shown as a kind of myth in the world and mythological themes continue living in the dark depths of psyche, and replicate their unknown forms in various levels of society (23: 42). Myths like the myth of tree are rooted in reality, but never transmit it immaturely and they are always benefiting from using the element of imagination. Apart from the fact that each period creates its own myths, the myths of ancient also with retaining the old motifs are compatible with the needs and requirements of living in that era.

The symbolic concept of tree mixed with many aspects of the culture and people's life even today when we live in non-ritual period (3: 43). At present, we can see these myths whether in form of regulations such as tying the thread to the tree or protect the trees and planting them in routine life or in art creations.

Arts such as painting, sculpture, literature, etc. always have expressed human's thought in different periods about nature and its elements. Contemporary art can have different meanings in every culture and country depending on people's beliefs in each region which can observe its specific contemporary art. It is obvious that lexical meaning of the word "contemporary" means synchronism and its belonging to this day and time is one of the attributes of the contemporary art. In fact, this art is known as the art which can absorb all aspects of today.

The essence of this art is being modern with all its attributes. In fact, time and place are two determining elements in this art. So, it is obvious that every artistic production is not a contemporary art, but it is created modernly. Necessarily, contemporary art refers to all the surrounding complexities that reflection can be seen everywhere. It is obvious that the environment is multilayered and nested in any subject also contemporary art benefits from today inherent feature (18: 11). In Iran contemporary art, we have seen use of nature and tree with mythical themes in works of artists in all periods.

The artists such as SohrabSepehri, FaridehLashaei, AbolghasemSaedi, BehrouzHeshmat etc. are examples of these indexes (Picture no 8 and 9). The contemporary Iranian artists try to depict garden and nature which have always been in risk of destruction and decline as the eternal elements of nature and its primordial examples in their works eternally and ideally. Since past, man has been honored and always should have tried to preserve and maintain four important elements of the world water, earth, fire and wind.



Scheme 8: Behrouz. Heshmat., trees and houses, Iranian artist living in Austria, 2013.



Scheme 9: Farideh Lashai, trees and nature, acrylic on canvas, 2013.

But in modern periods, Environmental art may be mentioned as an art of the highest tendency to return to nature and environment then return to link with mythical elements. Always there was a question about the place of the environmental art among other trends of modern art and its relationship to contemporary society. In the first place, environmental art is presentation of work in depth of the nature and broad general audience by paying more attention to the environment which is rooted in industrial developments and trends in the contemporary era. From this perspective, the differences in this art, museums and galleries are appropriate places versus conventional places.

Environmental art presents its environmental art immediately to public and sometimes so close to their audience to provide the opportunity to enter humans once again into the nature and this is the major factor in the process of making contemporary art of a society. Early of 70's, artists, represented a new definition of external form and internal value of the art by explicit wisdom and dominant materialistic tendencies in the works of the 60's. Everybody believed that the primary motivation of artistic creation not only was in decoration, entertainment transient or official business and properly, but also rooted in meaningful activities which put artist and audiences in touch with the world.

The inspiration for these artists were the first communities which has close cultural ties with their natural environments, so some of the newest forms of art were expressed concerns from the most ancient human (7: 383) .The environmental works usually show the concerns of artists in relation to environment. The Values and ethics which nature and the elements find them pure are declining. On the other hand, due to society industrialization, the environment in danger and this crisis is serious. One of the most important roles of an artist is representation of familiar topics in new unfamiliar forms in a way that maybe more, make the world aware of environmental crisis. In this art, sometimes artists seek to create works of art beautifully only by the aesthetic approach which are priority,

Sometimes its concept is highlighted and cultural, political and social obligations can underlie this art. Environmental art will stand against any governmental support to announce that an art commodity cannot be bought and sold even if it should not be kept in museums. It insists to be finished with nothing left after implementation.

Immortality was one characteristic of contemporary art at the beginning of its formation (14: 11). In the contemporary world, the artist is present in nature with open-mindedness, adding or reducing elements in nature around them to represent the new form which are usually temporary, hence, the art will be recorded in the exhibitions and virtual environments and presented by photography and imaging through a variety of medias (16: 7).

Environmental artists do not bind themselves only to display nature, but also have chosen living, experience, interactionism with nature and the earth so this insight has become the place of traditional considerations. Common aspect of environmental artists is not only in subjects, raw materials or work methods, but it is in their interest and commitment to a broader view of artistic creation and in this way self-discovery (7: 385). As a dynamic flow in the contemporary scene of environmental art it can be called those arts in which artists often use elements or objects in nature or unusual environments to present their arts in the same location.

So, the quality of environmental art can influence the quality of an art. The idea that visitors can enter their paintings or sculptures and being surrounded by artwork they can be a part of that work and will be invited to companionship to have conversation with its creator or artist. Thus, the process of creation of art is linked with the process of perception and reception in the same way. Environmental artists follow different trends in Iran and several environmental art festivals in the nature in Iran show the development of this art.

Following the trunk disapproval (Figure 10) by drawing the texture of tree trunks on paper, it consciously refers to collective unconscious area of the sacred tree in human. People who are losing their connection with nature, especially trees, every day he was more consumerism and use trees for production of consumer goods.

Sometimes Contemporary world need to return and communicate with mythical themes. As mentioned it was customary among Iranians to respect for the plants and trees and in general all vegetation and animals and tree was the most important aspect of nature which has always been a symbol of the universe and human life Iran's geography dry climate leads to holiness and honoring the elements of nature.



Figure 10: The rejection of the trunk, the work of the design house, village Koutena, Ghaemshahr, Iran, 2011.



Figure 11: Mehr Printing, Ahmad Nadalian, Hormuz Island, Iran, 2007.

In the figure 11, Ahmad Nadalian, who is one of the most well-known and international artists in the implementation of environmental artworks, has presented the effect of trees on pottery and metal works of Iran's ancient art by printing tree's stamp on the ground. In figure 12, artist refers to the myth of the life's tree and also despite of being contemporary by painting rocks in red and linking it to the tree it seems that trees are not watered from earth and feed from human blood, so this cycle of life will continue constantly.



Figure 12: A long tree, Sahar Esmaeil Tehrani, Zibakenar, Iran, 2012.

Figure 13, "spirit tree" is selected from the "Plastic Art" series. The photo is taken during the implementation performance in 86, in Isfahan Bahadoran garden. In this series, plastic is considered as a symbol of environmental pollution with lots of damaging effects and refers to recycling culture which in other countries is a normal occurrence but not ordinary in our country. Uncontrolled tree cutting for many unnecessary requirements sand and city sprawl and industry and on the other hand, burning of forests due to negligence of humans are concerns for all human beings. Environmental artists, by referring to these cases, try to recall protection and cherish keeping trees in collective unconscious mind of people.



Figure 13, Spirit of tree, Fereshteh Alamshah, Iran, 2007.



Figure 14: A cube, Karimolahkhani, Romania, 2015.

In Figure 14, the artist refers to deforestation and death of trees. Trees and human beings are related to each other in carrousel of life and myth, one`s death is destruction of the other and one`s life is another survival. Trees have a vital role in layered human life. If there were not any trees, there was no air for human beings and other creatures. What happens when it does not exist?



Figure 15: Untitled, Mohammadian Asiyeh, Iran, 2015.

The artist of figure 15, says about his work: "He has found the nature as an opportunity to show the delicate relationship between man and nature which needs the

attention to environment. He has shown the nature as art intermediary by studying and deconstructs in his own environment and by using natural elements, sometimes artificial scrap and waste organizes them. It tells about close relationship between man and nature's future.

CONCLUSION

In Iranian culture, tree has viable sacredness because it represents the totality and universe centered. This meaning plays a strong role in various myths and linked with many symbols and it is a sign of resurgence. All the myths about tree describe a verdict with a symbolic language, the world of plants is the symbol of the fact which becomes life, creates moment without drying out its roots, and revitalization by manifestation in numerous forms. We can see this meaning in tree of life, Hoom tree etc. Concept of nature and tree in Islamic thoughts and ideas reflects pre-Islamic beliefs and myths. It can be concluded that the myth of trees such as Hoom, Vispopis, Gukern, Sedratolmontaha, Zaqqum, Reality and so on. All of them have a place in Iranian collective subconscious mind and have been reflected in works of art in various forms in different periods.

Trees in contemporary art have a special place such as ancient times among human beings because humans due to the erosion of the environment, they have protected and preserved them. In fact, environmental artists want to communicate with the past mythology to protect nature, and by sharing audiences in their work, attract their attention to environmental protection. Mythological pictures of tree created huge symbols and codes which manifested in the Iranian art. Presentment of forms sometimes simplified or sometimes with a maze of exaggerated of symbolic tree has a history behind field of books on literary and poetic, religious, mythological and other subjects. The myth of tree has reached modern times and only have changed to a new form. Ancient artist has painted image of tree on various works, but the artist in environmental art uses trees to describe his or her own mind, and it represents trees archetype in Iranian's collective unconscious mind.

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