



## “Children in Iranian legends”

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### Abstract

Legends are regarded as a type of oral literature. Holistically, the children's family life can be divided into 3 categories: living with parents: living with a parent either of them and living with a guardian (anyone except parents such as grandmother, aunt and, etc.). Parents reflect a specific personality or behavior toward their child according to each of these forms. Moreover, the personality of child is remarked as the only born one in the story and it usually plays an important role in any legend plot. Ten samples of the legends series are studied to analyze in order to specify family formation and parents behavior to their child. The main question is how the family and parents behavior are made in a legend. A hypothesis is presented to answer this question clarifying that child is the only one born in a family who is often living with one of the parents or both or a guardian and parents provide their child with innovation. The current research aims at presenting the family conditions of child as an important factor identifying his life style.

**Keywords:** Children's Literature; Legend; Family; Persian.

### 1. Introduction

Child literature denotes to a group of books that their nature is fundamentally founded on their addressees who are children. So, the basis of this literature specifies that this literature tends to be unique because this specification relates it with its addressee (child) who is enthusiastically engaged with this literature (Khosronezhad, 2010:293). In general, theorists disagree on one unified definition of child literature. To some scientists, "it refers to books appropriate for children". While some others believe it is made by adults or the child for the child as addressee. Some ponder that the two concepts of literature and child should be separated from one another. In contrast, other experts think that they are inseparable and they rely on each other in nature (the same: 299). Children's literature consists of two concepts of literature and child and each one of these terms complete each other in this regard. Literal text should satisfy the child's requirements from both form and content point of view. Consequently, there is an interaction between child and literature. Any writing embracing such conditions is regard as child literature (Jalali, 2013:42). Legends are referred to a story or a group of stories transmitted verbally from the past that exaggeratedly report about a real person, place or history and is often about one of the saints, kings or heroes.

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In fact, legend is a story based on imagination rather than reality. Legend illustrates adventures whose heroes are either real or unreal and do unreal works. The heroes of legend are humans, animals, things, natural phenomenon or imaginary creatures. It avoids hyperbolism and too many explanations. (Mohsen Aligh 2011:70).

Legend aims at creating joy in us and others and this is done by making some changes in the original legend. (Chehrzadi, 2000:28). Despite the fact that some people say the legendary story-driven rather than character-driven and "no complex characters"(Glazer, 1979: 213), we see that the children are involved in the legend.

Child's spiritual life relies on legends, religious stories and fables after the very first experience in family context. In child literature, legends symbolically teach child how to cope with problems and how to succeed. These stories illustrate how to challenge against the most fundamental problems of life based on imagination. Consequently, child gets acquainted with the very essential matters of life (Imani, 2012:111). Every nation's old literature holds the thoughts, tastes and requirements of people in the most possible artistic form of writing and speech culturally inherited from the past for the next generation. Although the children and adolescents literature does not last more than a century, the fable genre has been applied more than its other literal types.

According to the fact that child of legend usually live in family and less out of this frame, it seems significant to scrutinize child's growth and training.

Holistically, there are three types of Iranian legend illustrating three types of family life:

\*Legends in which child lives with his parents (mother and father).

\*Legends in which child lives with one of his parents (usually mother and rarely father).

\*Legends in which child lives with his guardian (grandmother, aunt, step- mother and, etc...)

Due to the author's studies on legends, it is concluded that about 90% of Iranian legends are of the second and third types.

In the legend of *Pablevan Panbe and Nane Panbe*, we read that: an old woman who used to make cotton people once owned a cotton baby son for her own. It starts like this: 'once upon a time, there was an old woman who had nothing to do and was called *Nane Panbe* (cotton nanny) because from morning till night she circled pillow and blanket and she made little cotton people. All of a sudden, one of them opened his eyes and bounced and sat in front of *Nane Panbe* and said: Nanny, why do you want to change me? I will be your son to make your dream of having a child true.' (Yousefi, 2001:2). Mother is the parent in this legend. Moreover, baby camel, known as one of the old stories, starts like this: 'once upon a time, an old man was living with his only son who took camels to desert every day.' 'This boy was wearing the camel skin he was called baby camel'. (Safdari, 2001:72). In this story, the boy is living with his father. In the legend of bald, parent is shown as mother. In this story, a bald boy is living with his mother: 'There was no one around the ruler's castle. No flower, no tree, no bush, just a small cottage. The walls are white and the ceiling is muddy. This cottage belongs to a boy living with his mother.' (Barjesteh, 2006:6). The dominant figure observing in other legends is while children living with a guardian such as aunt, grandmother or grandfather, step-mother and, etc.... This part is going to study four legends: *Mah Pishuni*, *Namaki*, *Chel Gisu* and *Gol Khandan*.

In *Namaki* legend (beast and girl), grandmother is the guardian. The story starts as: 'there was a hungry beast looking for food. He reached the people city. He smelled human and said to himself: at which home I'd better find my food? All doors were closed except one. Whose home was it? It was for an old woman living with her only grandchild called *Namaki*.' (Ghasemnia, 1997:1)

In Gol Gis legend, it starts that "once upon a time, there was an old city with a big castle which had 101 doors. An old woman was living with her seven beautiful and intelligent grandchildren. *Chel Gisu* was the youngest of all. She was very naughty and troublesome.

*Gol Khandan* is the last example retelling the story of a wife and husband who had one spoiled daughter called *Dordaneh*. There was also another daughter in this house called *Gol Khandan*. *Gol Khandan* had no one and worked as a maid there. *Dordaneh* and her mother bothered her a lot". (Farahani, 2004:2). In this story, *Dordaneh's* mother is the same as step-mother of *Gol Khandan*. What make the role of being a step-mother are the woman's negative behaviors. The pattern of this story is that of Mah Pishuni.

## 2- Child's main and partial character in legends

This part is going to study child's main and partial character in legend. There are three children in one family; the third one is the center of attention. For instance, the role of *Habbeye Angur* is more sophisticated than other children. Because *Habbeye Angur* is more courageous than others and she can save his life from the wolf. *Chel Gisu* is the seventh grandchild. Her personality differs from other children. She is naughtier, more intelligent and curious than others. She is the one who creates the story.

Although children have the same parents and live at the same home, they don't have similar social situation. Furthermore, being the first or the last born affect their personalities. Last born ones are more extravert than other children and get more attention from their parents. Last born ones are more successful in the society. The last born ones are usually violent. They are happy and humorous.

The only one born children have a higher position in the family and are the center of attention. They spend more time with adults and reflect more matured concepts and behaviors. They are more independent and clever and innovative. They ponder the details of phenomena and are more analytical. The common characteristics of such personalities can be revealed through analyzing legends. The narrators and legend writers concentrate on subjects neglected by others. For example, as

## 3- Child's gender in legends

The role of girls become less prominent in the society, some legends are created showing them more sophisticated. While families pay more attention to the first born child, legends stand out the last born one. It seems that authors consciously select the genders due to the patterns common in the culture.

Most cultures agree that boys are aggressive, active, and independent and girls are kind, dependent and timid (Hoseini Nasab, 1993:19). Such character traits cope with the gender as well as child personality. For example; *Gol Khandan* is kind, *Mah Pishuni* ignores her desires, and *Pablevan Panbe* is active and stands against problems to save *Mah Pishuni*. Studies demonstrate that boys experience a much more mental pressure than girls while missing their parents. That is why; boys usually live with their mothers in legends because mother can compensate the absence of father. Girls usually live with their grandmothers or step- mothers and can tolerate the sufferance they are exposed to. As a result, authors create their story character according to the personal traits and the society norms. If the author chooses a method rather than this, child cannot distinguish the real and story world. Based on patterns, two groups of genders are created as boyish and girlish legends. While reading the story, child gets acquainted with his/her future roles. For example, in the story of *Mah*

*Pishuni*, child learns to be patient in order to achieve his/her wishes. In the story of *Hasani*, child learns to not to be lazy.

#### 4- Only born child in Iranian legends

Only born child is observed in most Iranian legends and the researchers have ignored it. Some of them are: *Hasani*, *The daughter of pumpkin*, *Khale Suske*, *Pablevan Panbe* and *Mab Pari*. *Hasani* is a lazy and bald boy living with his mother. Because he is bald and other children bother him, he has to stay home. He only eats and sleeps every day. His mother makes him leave home. The only born child is retold as "Bibi was alone with just one son called *Hasani*." (Fatemi, 2002:1).

The story of *the daughter of pumpkin* is about the grieves of *Khale Ghezzi*. The loneliness of *Khale Ghezzi* is retold as: "Khale Ghezzi was very kind but with lots of sorrows in her heart because she had no child." (Shababan Nezhad, 2006:2). The heart of the garden gives a daughter to *Khale Ghezzi*.

Sorur Puria has rewritten the story of "where are you going *Khale Suske*?" And it describes the story of *Khale Suske* whose father is sick. She is also the only daughter. The story starts like this: "once upon a time, there was *Khale Suske* living with her father. Her father has been sick for a while. He didn't feel well. She was worried for her father. She was worried what will happen for her if her father dies?" (Puria, 2011:1). She chose Mr. Mouse and lived with him happily ever after.

The story of *Pablevan Panbe* and *Mab Pari* starts as: "in a very remote city, a cotton boy was living with her mother and he was called *Pablevan Panbe*. He was very kind and wanted to help everyone" (Yousefi, 2001:2). In this legend, he leaves his city to save *Mab Pari* who was trapped by the beast. Once more, *Pablevan Panbe* is the only child living with his mother.

In some of the legends, being an only parent gets along with being an only born child and there seems to be a balance or interaction in between. Such interaction is sometimes observed as a parent with more than one child. For example; there are seven grandchildren in *Chel Gisu* legend but the last one is sophisticated enough to attract the addressee's attention and the same only born child is observed. The form of families is very limited in legends and doesn't exceed more than few ones. For instance; in *Khale Suske*, there is only her and her father. In *Hasani*, there is just him and his mother the same as daughter of pumpkin and her mother. The study reveals that the author prefers the only born child to absorb his addressee's attention. Even if there is more than one child, the focus is in the youngest one.

The type of family in which child grows affects the way of parental behavior. This varies from the type of treating children in different families. Speaking of parents, which one is more responsible? Which characteristics make a parent outstanding? Some others can be influential in the story who is not parents like a guardian. The very prominent and considerable character of Iranian mothers is observed in two legends of *Shangul and Mangul* and *Hasan Kachal*.

She is a woman who cares for her children. She doesn't want them stay hungry. So, she leaves home early in the morning to find food for her children. Her pedagogical way is through giving advice. *Khanum Bozji* goes to the wolf. She isn't scared of him. Self-confidence is one of her characteristics. So, a woman can fight against a man. She aims at helping her family. She is logical. She fills the wolf's stomach with stones. At the end, the wolf leaves the village and the children survive. She doesn't punish her children but makes them aware. Anyway, *Khanum Bozji* is like a warrior defending her children. The other prominent story is *Hasani*. His mother is a rational woman because she makes *Hasani* leave home. "Bibi worked and saved the grass in the storage" (Fatemi, 2002:3). The main story starts when she decides to help her son. *Hasani's* weak point is eating. *Hasani* leaves home for cookies and mother closes the door. *Hasani* is afraid of being humiliated by other children because of his baldness and asked his mother to open the door. His mother doesn't do this. *Hasani* is self – dependent and ignore children. Fathers are sometimes as

effective as mothers in Iranian stories. Fathers are most sophisticated in *Khale Suske* and baby camel stories. *Khale Suske* lives with her sick father. Her father wants her daughter marries a good man. The personal character of father is outstanding. Father is worried for his daughter. He can't do anything and asks her to take the responsibility and finds a husband for herself.

Grandmothers are very prominent in personal traits. Grandmother is someone who is politician and clever. She plans well. On the other hand, her social character is remarkable in interaction with the beast. Amazingly, the beast accepts whatever grandmother orders. When grandmother said to the beast: 'my child is hard. First, you should drink some syrup no to get stomachache' (same page 6) the beast promptly drinks the vinegar jar. Grandmother orders *Namaki* to be eaten. *Namaki* sits in the middle of the tray to be eaten by the beast" grandmother brings a tray and said to *Namaki*: now, sit on the tray to be eaten by the beast."(The same: 4)Undoubtedly, grandmother appears like a leader and the child doesn't give his opinion. In *Chel Gisu*: grandmother's leadership makes her prominent. Every night, the grand mother asked one of her grand children to close the door. She gathers the children around her and tells them stories. As the beast steps into the castle, all children hide behind their grandmother. Here, grandmother supports them. Finally, *Chel Gisu* saves herself from the beast. It is very obvious that grandmothers usually support children. This is the question why grand mothers are seen in most stories? Why don't others absorb attention? It might be responded like this. When grandmother becomes the guardian, she pays too much attention and does her best to her grand child and the child experiences the same comfort. Legends narrators also agree that grand mothers are the best guardians of all. As mother do their best to support their children. Same thing is observed in grandmother, too. *Khale Pirezhan* is very supportive in the story of beast and the daughter is an observant. *Namaki* was crying and said: *Nane Jan*, I had forgotten to close the door. What should I do now? The beast comes now and he will eat me. *Khale Pirezhan* said:" ever never. I will protect you and give him a good lesson, cool down" (Qasemnia, 1998:2). The character of step-mother has been presented like this in *Gol Khandan*.The character of *Bibi Khanum* is presented as the one that put too much pressure on *Mah Pari* the same as Cinderella's step-mother. The difference is that the negative character is changed into a positive one and is very regretful. Looking back *Mah Pishuni*, there is one repeated pattern. The guardian looks like a step-mother and lives with her daughter. *Bibi Khanum* wants the best things for her daughter. When she sees that *Mah Pari*'s face shines like moon, she persuades her to confess otherwise, she will dreadfully punish her. Step-mother is presented as the one who is mean, negative and jealous to the child.

In the Iranian legends, the families dived into three types: easy taking parents; hard taking parents; authorized and serious parents. Children raised in such conditions reflect different traits.

**Easy taking family:** there is limited number of rules in such families and people are not obliged to obey the customs and rules. It is not acceptable to meddle with other affairs because every family member has the right to declare his opinions .Such children are spoiled and expect too much attention from others. These parents let their children decide on their own.

**Hard taking families:** Parent's strength stands out in such families. Parents expect their children to obey their orders without asking any questions. The dictatorial person usually has either mother or father. In fact, children are less depend on themselves in such families and are afraid of giving their opinions in such situations. These people are not curious enough and face with problems in moral, emotional and mental problems. The dictator decides in these families, he determines the aim, directs and specifies the responsibility and arranges the life issues.

**Authorized family:** it is referred to family in which let the child feel free in a way that the family believes it is confident and suitable. In such families, child can decide by his own although he is indirectly controlled by his parents. Every family member can interfere based on their position.

These families are founded on obeying mental principles and expect their children according to their capabilities and parents pay attention to their needs.

The legends described we this study implies that the way of raising children is somehow dictatorial in Mah Pishuni, the girl and the beast, and *Gol Kbandan*. The children don't have the right to give their opinions. The guardian is the only one who decides. In fact, children lose their self – confidence.

the pattern of other legend including: *Pablevan Panbe and Mab Pari*, *Khale Suske, Hasani*, the daughter of pumpkin, the bald dove player, *Pablevan Panbe* and *Nane Panbe* and baby camel is close to easy taking one and there are some traces of being hard on child to some extent. The child is allowed to do whatever he likes to and there is no trace of parent's interference. The story of *Shangul Mangul* is the only one reflecting the resolution of a parent. She not only doesn't hurt the children but also advises them. This is more effective than other pedagogical ways. Each child is permitted to make mistakes just in case they are experience in his life. Eventually, the method of raising children depends on parent, guardian or the gender of people.

## 5- Conclusion

It is concluded that the hypothesis of this article is going to prove that the family form is usually a parent and living with a guardian in the second place, the child is also the only born or the last born in legends. Thus, there is equilibrium between being an only born child and a parent. Mostly, there is a child against a mother or father. The behavior of parents or the guardian to the child and the way of nurturing him may be changed due to family structure. In a life where child is raised by a guardian, he isn't free and life is kind of hard on him. In a single parent family, child feels free and the parent isn't hard on him. Iranian legends haven't been decisive to give birth and raise them. Punishment is less recommended in pedagogical methods but there is no trace of motivation. Child doesn't have stable position in a guardianship family and never experiences the comfort he expects with his real parents. In single parent families; the role of mother is more prominent and active than father. She is more supportive. Grandmothers seem more intelligent and step-mothers use child for their own benefits. The arrangement of giving birth and the methods of raising them affect his life style and his specific characteristics. The gender is chosen by the authors according to the criteria of the society.

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