



The Impact of “Afsonaguyon” (“Short Storytellers”) on Fairy Tale Composition and Their Abilities

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Abstract

This article discusses Iranian folk tales’ positive and negative aspects, including stories, tales, epics, narratives, and storytellers. Professional storytellers (or story tellers) narrated fictional examples back then. We can find terms in Persian, Dari, and Tajik encyclopedias and dictionaries based on the behavior of these legends.

Keywords: *Storytellers; Positive and Negative Aspects; Narratives; Culture; Legend; Persian Language; Ethnic History*

Introduction

First, let’s dwell on the term used for storytellers. Storytellers are called in the following order: teller of a legend, story, epic; writer of a legend; reader of a legend, story; creator of legend, story; singer of tales; storyteller; narrator and others. We can find these terms in Persian, Dari, and Tajik encyclopedias and dictionaries.

The history of fairy tales and story–telling has been recorded as a form of simple entertainment in the common human experience and numerous cultural and ethnic histories. Numerous Egyptian, Chinese, and Sumerian literature include fragments and examples of this past. However, these writings need more information regarding the storytellers and performance methods. Some scholars believe that the earliest written text, the Westcar, composed on Egyptian papyrus between 1300 and 2000 B.C., references storytelling. According to certain reports, people in ancient Iran recounted tales, stories, and tales in front of various populations. In the section “Fairy Tales in the Field of Oral Culture” of the “Iranian Children’s Literature Book”, it is said regarding ancient fairy tales: “At that time, there were professional storytellers (or fairy tale tellers) who narrated fictional examples. With the use of facial expressions, language abilities, and facial and hand motions, storytellers were able to fascinate the audience. In ancient Iran, these individuals were known as (“gussan”). In the Pahlavi language, “gussan” denotes “musician, actor, and dancer”. However, experts believe that this word is of Parthian origin. The Gussans and their deeds are documented in Firdausi’s “Shakhnoma” as well as numerous other textual sources. Later, those who tell stories to others in various ways were referred to as “kissaguyon” (“storytellers”). According to the sources, the majority of storytellers were poor soldiers who told the people various stories and tales.

According to other sources, people sat on street benches as storytellers read what was written orally or sometimes on rolled-up paper. Information indicates that throughout the Islamic era, storytellers performed religious propaganda by recounting religious events based on the Qur'an and Hadiths in mosques. The storytellers relied on shallow information and masked the errors in their statements with a pleasant voice and lovely speech expressions. In order to attract more attention from the audience, they would sometimes apply olive oil, black sedana, and cumin to their faces and wait for them to turn yellow (yellowness was a sign of revelry at night). Some of them allegedly contained chemicals that generated a youthful odor. According to certain documented texts, when telling stories, the storytellers occasionally lost their temper and began to rip their clothes. "Storytellers should have thick, white beards, a clear, pleasant voice, great, real enthusiasm, and be young at heart". Some historical texts discuss the connection between monarchs and fairy tales. In 279, for instance, the order of Mutamad Abbasi prohibited storytellers from sitting in the streets and mosques. In 367, Azd al-Dawla issued an edict prohibiting storytellers from entering mosques. Such instances are provided in numerous further works. Aswad bin Sari was regarded the oldest storyteller, and following the mosque's construction in Basra, he was one of the first to tell stories in this mosque. According to some sources, storytelling was popular in Sadr Islam, and he was one of the first to tell stories in this mosque. Obviously, the duality of such relationships is attributable to the fact that some storytellers also told religious tales to lure listeners to their side. They added to these tales and occasionally even recited Jewish stories. Dr. Ahmad Tamim Dori, the author of "Iranian Fairy Tales", writes about the stories of the Islamic era: "After the death of the Prophet (pbuh), the Hadiths and their correct interpretation began to be forgotten, and the storytellers who had learned from the stories of the Prophet (pbuh) began to study doctrines against his family. Until the Abbasid dynasty, this style of work was quite popular. Even during city fairs, storytellers are widespread, drawing crowds in front of stores to tell tales".

Obviously, the "Shakhnoma" stories were told for a long time, i.e., during the pre-Islamic era. Following the advent of Islam, stories about the valor of the Companions, noble individuals, and other such works gained popularity. Numerous sources offer details regarding the class to which the narrators belong. The general public got familiar with these groups of storytellers as storytellers. They journeyed from town to town and village to village, gathering people and regaling them with tales and anecdotes. Ulrich Martsof, a German scholar of Iranian folklore, discussed the educational usefulness of these tales. The teaching approach via narrative and metaphors demonstrates that traditional storytelling has deep roots in the Middle East.

Ibn Nadim, an orientalist, argues that the first creators of fairy tales were Persians. "Iskander was the first person to listen to fairy tales at night. He was surrounded by people who laughed and told jokes". According to the information, the kings who passed after him used the services of such a group. In his book "History of the Storytellers", Ibn Nadim lists the following most important works such as "Hezardastan", "Khazona and Nazehe", "Al-Dab wa Al-Sa'lab" and "Ruz beh Aletim", "Meshk Zanene and the king of women", "Babylonian king Namrud", "Rostam and Esfandiyar", "Bahram Shush", "Khodo-i-Name" and "Bahram Farsi" told and collected by Persian storytellers.

Numerous historical and social sources discuss the use of fairy tales among Iranians. It is believed that nurses at Jandi Shapur Hospital used fairy stories to heal some patients. In the book of "Al-Masakh" by Ibn Batlan (458 AH), it is stated: "Samargoys (storytellers) should cut and join them, shorten and lengthen them, and tell them well and attractively. It makes the listeners joyful so that the food digests on its own, the blood is purified, and the heart may freely breathe". S. Hidayat, U. Martsof, A. A. Romaskevich, O. Mann, and A. regarding Iranian storytellers' personality and performance qualities. In their works, Christenson, M. Sobhi, B. Sottun, A. Shirazi, S. Khumayuni, M. Mihandost, M. Salimiy, Hasan Zulfakori, and Kanavati were joined by others. However, in his article titled "Fairy Tales of Iran", A.A. Romaskevich provided additional information about fairy tales and highlighted certain tales that played a significant role in the spiritual life of Iran at the turn of the 20th century. He spoke about the tales he had heard and transcribed from the mouths of Iranian storytellers on the streets, in the markets,

and at gatherings. E.A. Schwartz, who conducted several scientific research projects in Iran, observed and heard storytellers traveling from town to town like itinerant actors, writing: “Such performances were typically held on Fridays in crowded places, market squares, or in some tea house, which the Iranians refer to as a coffee shop, although coffee is never sold”. Storytellers are aware of every occurrence. The purpose of tales and stories is to be told. This offers the storyteller a cause to be there, as the majority of stories begin with clichés such as “Once upon a time, there is no one except God” and “in ancient times”. Folk tales are important: “Wherever the storyteller desires, he changes the locale, he changes the shape of the story, and the hero leaves the plot”. Typically, in the folktale tradition, storytellers rely on a pre-existing narrative core, and such tales are composed of simply linking themes. Linking motifs are fundamental, immovable, and unalterable structural aspects in fairy tales, such as characters and plot events, that alter the circumstance in relation to the logical storyline. Storytellers’ agility and aesthetic abilities are primarily restricted to employment elements of the type-free themes (narrator, setting, time, persons, situation, events, additional and variable elements of the type of secondary events, and conclusions). Therefore, the amount of talent and aesthetic value of these storytellers can be assessed by their ability to incorporate these aspects into their tales.

Unexpected circumstances give folk stories their vitality. The audience should be startled by the ability with which storytellers relate their tales. Due to the fact that folk tales are marked by extraordinary lies, outrageous exaggeration, and considerable detachment from the actual surroundings, storytellers should communicate these elements in their manner. As discussed previously, fairy tales have their opening, middle, and closing sentences. These phrases also pertain to the skill of the narrator. “Before starting the main narrative, storytellers read certain words, sentences, or poems”. Many nations’ storytellers are eager to tie their tales to the distant past, and their innovative and fantastical phrase structures reflect this. For instance, such words as “there was a kingdom”, “in ancient times”, “a hundred years ago”, and “in the past” are among them. When storytellers of different countries, including Iranian storytellers, cite such phrases, the majority of them indicate, on the one hand, the falsity of their tales and, on the other, their connection to the distant past. Iranian storytellers connect the various elements of a tale with specific phrases. In reality, these words are fabricated by storytellers to divert the audience’s attention from the preceding mood (examples of this are given in the previous section). The phrases provided by the storytellers at the conclusion of the fairy tale are likewise distinct; they serve to remind the audience of what was discussed, that they diverged from reality, and that they were influenced by a stranger’s imagination (examples are given in the previous part). In addition, when the storytellers tell their tales in separate groups, the language they employ, the motions they make, and the tone of their voices vary. For instance, storytellers know not to use certain statements and expressions in front of young children and adolescents. Whether the audience is male or female, the narrator tailors his story to them by employing gender-specific language and phrases. The explanations and terminology of storytellers vary between socioeconomic groupings. Importantly, prayers, insults, curses, promises, and oaths are also distinct for each group of listeners. Fairy stories amuse all peoples and ethnic groups in the world. As there were no entertainment organizations or mass media in the past, the entertaining aspects of fairy tales were highly valued. Delving deeply into the past is not required to demonstrate these characteristics. In his collection, the English folklorist L.P. Elwell-Setton says of the Iranian storyteller Mrs. Mashdi Gilan: “Famous families loved her greatly since she had a reputation for telling fantastic and engaging tales”. If fairy tales lack entertaining elements, the fact that they lose their effect is sufficient evidence of the significance of these characteristics. Because, as stated by Bettelgeim, fairy stories fascinate youngsters. Since antiquity, storytellers have been fascinated by the instructional role of fairy tales. “The Hindus considered this matter carefully and felt that if youngsters listened to their stories, they would grow up to be good people, and if they did not, they would become evil people”. A crucial aspect of Iranian tales is that advice and counsel are rarely expressed freely. In reality, Persian fairy tales emphasize educational and artistic themes. In Iranian fairy tales, Pandu’s counsel is more oblique. Storytellers occasionally attempted to educate their young audiences.

Thus, the storytellers or storytellers in Iran have the freedom to alter, shorten, or lengthen the tales by modifying the compositional structure of the tales. They continue to tell their tales in the cities and villages, streets and coffee shops, markets and neighborhoods of Iran, by men and women of various social groups, children, and adolescents.

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