



Holy plants and flowers in people beliefs

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ABSTRACT: In the ancient times when human being did not have the modern human's scientific subjectivity and he could not perceive the reasons for effect of the plants, he considered them possessing holy and supernatural forces like other phenomena. Construction of gardens and planting of flowers and plants in all over the world indicate the holiness of the plants. In the past, plants especially trees were symbol of life, eternity, fertility and virtue and they were respected. The holiness of the plants and the trees in ancient world and particularly in ancient Iran had caused to consider the plants as the first ancestor of human. And because of this we can refer to "Mashi" and "Mashianeh" as holy plants which human has been descended from them. Sometimes in legends, the person's life is associated with a tree and withering and destruction of the tree is linked with death. According to the legends The Big and Evergreen tree with the fruits of eternity waters all trees. In mythologies tree was expressed green, flourishing and delicate that its fruit was eternity and life lasting that was existence of other trees. In this article, it is tried to investigate some mythical and holy flowers and plants and related beliefs among different nations and religions.

Key words: Tree, flower, myths, world, belief

INTRODUCTION

Our ancestors ate plants and gradually they recognized that some of the trees and flowers have thorn and they are venomous and some others have healing property. Some of them could be eaten and others were fatal with side effects. By progress of the human beliefs about gods and goddesses and souls the happiness and misery of the mankind was related to the plants although the plants were fatal, tranquiller and relieving so they were powerful" (Warner, 2007:566).

Since the past, human beings have lived besides trees and the trees were shelter, fuel, agriculture tools and lumber for house so that they built their weapons from the tree and the leaves and fruits and the seeds of the trees were inspirations for spiritual growth (Dadvar & Mansouri, 2006:5). The symbolic meaning of tree in the past and even in the present has combined with humans culture and life" (Bahar, 1997:43).

"The importance of some trees is rooted in the relationship with mankind and event such as sleeping under the tree. So trees were holy and they granted the people requests" (Rangchi, 1993:33).

In Zoroastrian myths the plant was the fourth thing that was created in the world.

"It was believed that human being feeds from the fruit of the tree and uses its leaves and seeds. In Neolithic period the expansion of agriculture and human settlement influenced the relationship between man and

tree. For this reason, in the ancient myths tree was a spiritual and exalted creature that grew in the sky and rooted on the earth. The old ziggurats, Babylon Tower, the temples minarets and Noel Palace are all the symbols of the cosmic tree" (Hilinse, 2004:460-461).

The beliefs on the trees and plants are related to animus. "The belief in the human life continuation in the plant causes to plant a tree on a tomb and it is probable that planting of trees in the cemeteries is rooted in this belief" (ibid).

A. Madonna lily

Madonna lily by the scientific name of *lilium candidum* is the flower that has been mentioned in the myths. This name depicts the importance of this flower in the late periods and it is symbol of Virgin Merriam. Before birth of Jesus Madonna lily was respected. In the primitive civilizations Madonnalily was symbol of mother and fruitfulness. It can be found the references to this symbol in the Sumerian, Babylonian and Egyptian myths. The Greeks and Romans put the ring of Madonna lily and maze- as the symbol of virginity and fertility - on the head of the brides. According to a Jewish legend after leaving the paradise, Eve knew that she is pregnant and she cried and a Madonna lily grew on the earth by her tears. Madonna lily has been referred several times in the Old Testament. In the "Sonnets of Solomon" the white and red lilies are seen. Even in that period it was symbol of power against evil.

The holy concepts of this flower led to use it for witch crafting and talisman. It was one of the flowers that used in the saint Juana ceremony as a protecting talisman. This ceremony was held in London.

According to an ancient belief if a man squashed a Madonna lily his wife and daughters chastity was endangered. The white lily is symbol of chastity and sweetness but yellow lily symbolizes bad omen and ridiculous and recreation. If a person dreams Madonna lily he or she will be happy (Warner, 2007:574-575).

In myths different lilies such as white lily, blue lily and white and yellow lilies have been mentioned. The white lily is more popular and it is related to gods of water and as a result lily and cypress are symbols of liberty and gladiola and narcissus are signs of Venus (Eggedari,1975:2).

In David psalms, Madonna lily is a song and musical instrument that it strengths its relation with Venus. This flower was employed in architecture and it symbolized "Shush" city and lily goddess in the ancient time. In Old Testament (The first book of kings and second book of histories) application of lily in architecture has been referred. In religion and art it is sign of purity.

It was said that if the lily is smoked on the 15th of Day (tenth Iranian month) the family will be safe from poverty and drought during that year. In "Tohfatommenin" it is written that: "Lily is related to Syrian "Somana" and "Hamania" and also fabulous bird"(Eggedari, 1976).

B. Lotus

In Egyptian myths lotus was symbol of new created earth that it was floating on the water and hold the secrets of the gods. In Indian mythology it was symbol of life and anima and female organ. In Indian creation myth the Holy Spirit was manifested as a golden lotus in an endless sea. From his naval a lotus came out that there was lotus on it. This lotus was expanded and the mountains, hills, valleys and rivers were created from its petals. Lotus was symbol of Buddha and sun (Warner, 2007:575).

C. Lotus for lamenting

"Blue lotus is used only in lamenting. The color of lotus is sometimes symbol of lamenting"(Adelzadeh, 2008:243).

"In the Iranians rituals lotus was symbol of light, water and appearance that had a relationship with Venus. According to Bundehshe, lotus is flower of Anahita and "Mehr" was born from water and lotus" (Bolkhari, 2005:9).

"Flower of lotus is equivalent of the world cycle and in Hinduism and Buddhism it was referred to *Imago mundi* and conversion of the objects and creatures. Brahman was born from a lotus and he grew from its stem that passed the endless way"(Shamisa,2003:134).

This flower represents anima of the world, creation and nobility in Iran and India myths"(Dadvar, 2006:271). "According to Mahayana, Buddhism everything in the world has created from lotus"(ibid:211).

"Lotus was a holy plant for Indians and it was origin of water and life"(ibid:212).

"Eight petals of lotus were symbol of eight existences directions that appear after creation from the depth of primary waters and these eight directions are right, left, front, back, up, down, inside and outside"(ibid:212).

"Lotus was important in the ancient eastern countries. In eighth century before Christ lotus was transferred from Egypt to Phoenicia and then to Assure and Iran and in this realm it was a holy plant. Apparently, the flower on the hand of the kings in Metropolis was symbol of peace and happiness. Since lotus is opened in the morning and closed in the evening and it is similar to sun. The sun is origin of divine life and so lotus represented life and it was symbol of luminosity, creation, fertility and life and immortality. Lotus represents perfection since its leaves, flowers and fruit are circular and the circle is the complete shape so it is symbol of perfection and extraordinary man and divine birth. Since it appears neatly from dirty waters"(Safarat,2010:66-67).

"In China lotus is symbol of purity, protection, spirituality, peace, fertility and anima and also summer. The Chinese people know the lotus as symbol of the past, present and future since it is a flower that blossoms and flowers one time. It represents nobility since it grows neatly out of dirty waters. In Assyrian, Phoenician civilization and also in Greek and Roman art lotus means funeral and lamenting and symbol of death and rebirth and resurrection and the nature regeneration forces and in Greek and Roman mythologies it is sign of Aphrodite and Venus"(ibid).

D. Mandrake

The myth of mandrake is about its claw like roots that they were likened to human body. The Romans discovered it and called it "Anthropomorphon" and "Semihomo". In old botany it was described as a plant with leaves, flowers and fruit that grew from the head of man with beard and a woman with long hair. Since it was assumed that it is in the form of man and woman. This plant sometimes was called male mandrake and sometimes female mandrake and this similarity with human body had gender based relationship.

"The first reflection of this belief on the value of mandrake was using as exciting sensuality and energizing drug referd in the Old testament. The Arabs pointed to the lustful properties of this flower and they believed that it could treat infertility. In England it was famous for "Apple of love" and then it was converted into "Tomato of love"(Warner, 2007:575-576).

In the ancient Germany the term of “alruna” was meant witch and mandrake and probably they made talisman from the root and seed of mandrake and they washed and dressed them and consulted with them. Sometimes they hid them in the coffin or boxes. The French villagers believed that these golden talismans were in the house of fairy called “main de gloire” or “magloire”. In other countries this talisman was like a ghost in the shape of a giant and sometimes it was seen as a semi human and semi chick. If this fairy was fed and respected it was used for prediction and if the owner did not pay attention to it he died. This plant was believed that opens the locks. Also, it was believed that the leaves of mandrake shine at night and if a person wanted to pick up them they fly into the sky and the Arabs call it “the candle of Satan”(ibid:576-577). Probably due to the magical and wonderful properties of mandrake it was called symbol of threat. “In mythology after death of Kumarth some water was poured on the earth then two plants called Mashi and Mashianeh grew. According to the legend this plant grew from sperm of innocent man. Mandrake was resin of a plant that the witches were aware of its properties and they calmed down the tyrant men and women. For this reason, in the courts of kings particularly Fatalishah and Naserrdinshah the women used mandrake to attract their husbands. The magical properties of this plant were known in China, India and Arabic countries and the women used it for attraction of their husbands (Rangchi, 2007:796-797). It is said that mandrake is a plant that its leaves are opened in front of the sun” (Adelzadeh, 2008:20).

E. Tree of life

In the Scandinavian mythology the universe is represented as a tree. In this myth *Yggdrasil* is a cosmic tree but this concept can be found in other myths. According to mythologies this tree brings a fruit that the gods feed from it in order to assure their mortality. The paradise fills with tree of life. In some religions the tree of life represents god, human and world (Warner, 2007:588). “In Mesopotamia mythology “tree of life” was considered as combination of different plants that was holy because of long life, beauty and fruitfulness, such as cedar that its wood is expensive and palm tree that produces dates or grapes and pomegranate trees. The tree of life was symbol of holy and fearful force that for picking up its fruit as an elixir of long life it was necessary to fight with the demons. Everybody who won this fight promoted to exalted position and the person became immortal” (Dadvar, 2006:99).

F. Cypress

Cypress was tree of shrines and symbol of death and resurrection. The Greek and Romans considered it related to underground world forces. It is narrated that

the cross of Jesus, the pillars of Solomon temple, the stick of Hercules and arrows of Cupid were made of cypress (Warner, 2007:587). “In Iran in Achaemenian and Sassanid periods cypress was considered tree of life” (Dadvar, 2006:100).

“Cypress is the evergreen tree called tree of life in Arabic. It is believed everywhere is cypress there is snake” (ibid:101).

“Cypress is related to sun and it is an evergreen tree symbolizes spring. But some group considers it related to moon. It symbolizes pleasure and positive aspect of life. Thus in all holy places in Iran cypress is seen” (Abdullahiyan,1999: 57-61).

“Zoroastrians believed that cypress is tree of sun and sunrise. It is an evergreen tree that stands against darkness and coldness. It is symbol of shining sun, energetic and sign of immortality, liberty and resistant against dreadful forces. The Zoroastrians decorated cypress in the birth of Zoroaster and offered it gifts and promised to plant another cypress next year. So, cypress has been seen in the Iranian gardens from the past. After progress of Christianity in the Europe the followers of Zoroaster followed this tradition and now they plant and decorated the cypress and pine tree” (Safarat,2010: 63-64).

G. Fig

Fig is symbolical and mythical tree. The leaf of fig is sign of Buddha and it is holy for Behrman and Zoroaster followers. Several types of fig were worshipped by the ancient Egyptians. The leaves of Egyptian fig tree called *Ficus xcamorus* were used in the past. The South East Asians believe that the fairies and angles live on the leaves of fig tree” (Abdullahiyan, 1999: 258).

Fig was manifestation of eternity in China, it was symbol of religiosity in Egypt and it symbolized synagogue that recognized Jesus and as a result it was left without fruit. While, some believe that it is sign of abundance, blessing and religiosity.

In Islamic mysticism fig is related to olive tree. There is a verse on this tree in Quran (Al-Tin:1). In Quran interpretation texts fig is introduced as a heavenly fruit and sign of Mosques of Damascus and Masjid Alagasa. There are old fig trees in front of the Islamic shrines and tombs of the mystics that depict holiness of the place. “If the fig tree is destructed or its fruit is defected it is sign of pain and disasters. In Noah storm all trees were destructed except fig tree (Yahagi, 2007:168-169). The first plant is mentioned in the Old Testament is fig and it has been mentioned 57 times. It is believed that fig tree is one of the trees that Judah strangled him of that so it is bad omen tree. Fig was symbol of fertility and creation for Romans” (Warner, 2007:569).

H. Apple

“Cutting of apple tree causes to misfortune since it is symbol of immortality, youth and eternal pleasure after death. The Scandinavian gods were young due to eating of Idun golden apples. She was the goddess of youth and spring. In Celtic and Greek mythologies apple was symbol of new life and youth and because of its appearance when it was cut it was considered useful and belonged to goddess of love”(ibid:566). Christians and Jews consider apple forbidden fruit.

I. Ash tree

In different Greek myths the birth of human is related to the ash tree. According to Scandinavian mythology human was born from ash tree by Odin. Carrying the branch of ash tree or putting its leaf on head prevents sting of snake. In case of sting by a snake eating the ash tree resin has healing property. The sticks made by ash tree wood prevent snakes. This tree was used for eliminating the effect of talisman and the resin of ash tree was used for eliminating the evil souls around the infants. The new born was washed in a bath that it was heated by the wood of ash tree. Some leaves of ash tree could protect the person who slept on them (ibid:567).

CONCLUSION

In the past the plants not only played role in the environment but also they were holy in the beliefs of people. Each nation had specific holy tree and the people respected it. What was effective in their holiness was property of regeneration and fertility. Since human being has paid attention to the birth and death and regeneration and he sought immortality.

These properties of some plants and trees in treatment of the illnesses and meeting the needs and relationship with religious beliefs have added on the importance of the plants so the religions advised their follower to plant tree. In the legends removing and cutting of some trees was considered sin and the sinner was punished.

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