ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Folk Medicine in Iranian Tales (A Case Study of the Book *Iranian Tales*)

Abstract

In modern research, attention to folk literature for understanding the culture of a people is of particular importance. Among the various facets of folk literature, the tale is the oldest, with remarkable longevity. People in different societies love tales; they have lived with tales, and storytelling has been an integral part of their lives.

In Iranian society also, tales have a very ancient and rich history. *Iranian tales* have expressed the thoughts and ideas of the people of the Iranian land, reflecting the quality of their lives as well as their joys and sorrows.

The themes and motifs found in *Iranian tales* are highly diverse and interesting. One of the themes of these stories is folk medicine. Although it is not one of the main subjects of *Iranian tales*, it remains important throughout the stories.

Over the past century, extensive research has been conducted on *Iranian tales*, including their collection and classification. Among Iranian researchers, the scholarly work of Seyyed Abolghasem Enjavi holds a distinct place.

In the history of Iranian medicine, alongside Persian medicine preserved by Iranian physicians and sages such as Avicenna, Qutb al-Din Shirazi, and others, folk medicine also played a role among people. One of the manifestations of folk medicine in Iran is reflected in *Iranian tales*.

This research aims to examine folk medicine in Iranian folktales. The tales studied are those collected by Seyyed Abolghasem Enjavi in his four-volume work, *Iranian Folktales* (*Qesseh-ha-ye Irani*).

Key words: Folk Medicine, *Iranian Tales*, Enjavi Shirazi, Folklore, Iran, Physicians

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Introduction

The term tale (*qesseh*) signifies a narrative or story; technically, it refers to stories in which the emphasis lies on extraordinary events rather than on the development and evolution of characters. (Darvishian and Khandan, 1998, p. 28)

The origin of the story can be traced back to the time when humans first learned to use language and speak. A hunter recounting his hunt and observations to his family can be considered the origin of storytelling. Despite this antiquity, after thousands of years, the tale and storytelling have retained their social function; hence, it can be said that the tale is the oldest form of human literature and culture in human society. In reality, the story maintains an active and continuous presence in human life. While certain forms of oral and folk literature may appear in human societies only occasionally or during certain occasions, the tale has been an integral part of human existence. Storytelling, like dreaming, has a unique connection and resemblance to life itself; therefore, stories are not confined to any particular age group. Although the concept and function of the tale are more closely associated with children, the very nature of tales indicates that all age groups, from children to the elderly, engage with and enjoy stories; of course, compared to other age groups, children's connection with the tale is greater.

The primary reason for the human connection to tales lies in their themes, content, and constituent elements. Tales express human emotions, feelings, desires, needs, aspirations, and wishes; in effect, they express the social condition of a society in a particular manner. Consequently, examining tales from various perspectives allows researchers to gain insight into the social characteristics of a society.

Iran's cultural geography, characterized by a diversity of natural and human landscapes, as well as the interactions among people throughout history, has provided a fertile ground for stories and storytelling. The existence of civilizations dating back thousands of years, including famous ones such as the Elamite civilization, indicates that the tradition of storytelling in Iranian culture is very ancient and as long as history itself.

Iranian folktales are considered one of the oldest authentic examples of the thought and imagination of the people of this land, reflecting the quality of life, mental preoccupations, and joys and sorrows of this nation. Since ancient times, Iranians have woven their notions, beliefs, ideas, aspirations, and experiences into the form of tales, polishing them over time like a rare gem until they achieved a beautiful form and were ultimately passed down to the following generations. (Enjavi, 2014a, p. 20)

Consequently, the study and analysis of Iranian folktales hold particular significance for understanding Iranian culture and the social conditions of Iranian communities in past periods, and this is apart from the educational value of these tales for children, which was, in fact, the main purpose behind their creation and narration. Nevertheless, the analysis of tales is not easily accomplished. Folktales are rooted in the mythology of a given people—mythology that emerges from the cultural, natural, and human geography of a specific land. For this reason, the characters of these folktales, their occupations and trades, vary from one land to another. For example, figures such as the bald man (*kachal*), the beardless man (*kuseh*), the thorn-gatherer, and the dervish appear more prominently in *Iranian tales*. With all this in mind, it is clear that an understanding of mythology is essential for comprehending and analyzing these tales.

The oldest collection of Iranian folktales, gathered from the oral accounts of the people, dates back to the first decades of the twentieth century (Marzolph, 1992, p. 17). This collection was compiled by Western scholars; however, their primary research focus was

Iranian dialects. In fact, these studies were more from a linguistic perspective than an examination of the themes and content of the tales. Subsequently, in Iran, folktales began to receive attention alongside broader research into folk culture. Fazlollah Mohtadine, known as Sobhi, was one of the first individuals to carry out significant studies in this regard. Sobhi began telling stories on the radio, frequently inviting his audience to send him further tales. This request resulted in the collection of a large number of stories, portions of which were published in later years. Sobhi's work is highly valuable; however, the most significant flaw in his collection is that he reconstructs the tales (Mohtadi, 1963; Mohtadi, 2007), undermining the scholarly credibility of his work.

Scholarly work on folktales began in the 1350s/1970s with Seyyed Abolghasem Enjavi. He succeeded Sobhi as a storyteller on the radio. Through a network of associates and cultural field workers across Iran, he collected a vast number of tales, which were later published in several volumes. The most significant aspect of Enjavi's research lies in his scientific approach to the collection and compilation of these stories. In publishing the tales, he preserved the local dialects and presented the original tales without any addition or omission. *Iranian Tales* was published in three volumes in the years 1352 and 1353 (1973 and1974) under the titles *What Did the Flower Do to the Pine*? (*Gol be Sanobar Che Kard*?) and *The Patient-Stone Doll* (*Arousak-e Sang-e Sabur*), and one volume without a title. In 1357 /1978, the first volume was expanded to include new versions of the same tales, and the work was published in two volumes. The most recent edition, released by Amirkabir Publications in four volumes under the titles *What Did the Flower Do to the Pine*?, *The Girl of the Bitter and Sweet Oranges*, *The Yarrow Flower*, and *The Patient Stone Doll*; this edition was produced through the efforts of Seyyed Ahmad Vakilian.

Iranian folktales have particular features in terms of both language and theme. In this study, we shall focus specifically on the nature of the characters in Iranian tales. One of the most important characters in a tale is the hero; however, depending on the theme, content, and structure of the story, various characters appear. Among the most well-known ones are: the youngest son of the family, who is usually the younger prince; the bald one (*kachal*), who is usually depicted as a shepherd, or as a lazy, good-for-nothing person; the beardless one (*kuseh*), who often resembles the bald one; the thorn-gatherer; the cobbler; the dervish; and the woman—who typically plays a negative role, except for the princess whom the hero seeks to rescue.

Among the themes observed in Iranian folktales is the involvement of the tale's characters with physicians, medicine, and medical practice. Although this theme appears less frequently than others—and is, in fact, relatively uncommon—it is nonetheless present in the tales. The medicine depicted in these tales belongs to the realm of folk medicine rather than Persian Medicine. However, the prescription of the remedies was sometimes correct and aligned with the principles of Persian Medicine. Briefly distinguishing between Iranian traditional medicine and folk medicine, it should be noted that the former, rooted in ancient medical traditions, relied on specific texts and was practiced by well-known physicians referred to as *hakims* (sage-physicians). Folk medicine, by contrast, is rooted in popular culture; its practitioners provided treatments based on remedies derived from common folk beliefs. Our discussion here is not about legitimizing/ delegitimizing and judging this kind of medicine; it is worth noting that this form of healing still serves a social function in certain small regions of Iran, even though it is often accompanied by superstitions.

In Iranian folktales, medical themes are generally concerned with folk medicine rather than Persian Medicine; this is due to the origins of the tale and its place among the people



and the characteristics of Iranian tales. At times, a remedy prescribed by a character in a story may have a humorous point, or it may contain an underlying moral lesson; in such instances, neither formal Iranian medicine nor folk medicine is truly at play—rather, the element is simply a feature of the narrative itself. This article intends to examine the subject of folk medicine in Iranian tales based on the four-volume book *Iranian Tales* (*Qesseh-haye Irani*) collected by Seyyed Abolqasem Enjavi Shirazi.

Diseases

Baldness and the bald one (*Kachal*)

Baldness (*Kachali*) was a common disease in Iran in the past. It is a superficial fungal infection of the skin that affects keratinized tissues, including hair, nails, and the outer layers of the skin. Dermatophyte infections have been known for centuries; Greek physicians described their symptoms (Harizchi, 2006, p. 123). From an anthropological point of view, people usually did not treat the bald person (*Kachal*) with respect; this perception largely arose from the resulting changes in the patient's physical appearance. In the past, other conditions, such as smallpox or leishmaniasis, also adversely affected one's appearance, specifically the face. However, people viewed these two diseases as involuntary occurrences, whereas their attitude toward baldness was negative; baldness was primarily associated with poor hygiene. Naturally, people at the time were unaware that a fungus was the actual cause of the condition. In any case, bald individuals were often viewed with contempt, though the wise and rational people would understand that the affected person was not at fault. In the author's view, the motif of the bald hero in folktales served to absolve such individuals. In most Iranian folktales, *The Bald Man* (*Kachal*) is initially portrayed as a lazy and idle person, or as someone holding a very menial occupation. However, when a crisis arises—one requiring wisdom, cunning, or courage—it is this very man who provides the solution, saving the people or a victim (often a princess). In reality, his laziness and lowly status are largely related to the way others treat him; he possesses no value in society. Telling these stories to children was intended to change their attitudes toward such individuals.

The Bold in Folktales

The story of *The Bald Man and the Devil* is about a very clever young man, known as the Bald Man. He works as a shepherd for a rich man. The master promises to marry him to his daughter, provided that he performs his duties well; however, the wealthy man has no intention of keeping his word. One day, a heavy rain occurred while the bald man was out in the fields. He dug a hole, put his clothes inside the hole, covered the opening with his large wooden bowl, and sat on top of it. When the rain stopped, he retrieved his clothes, which had remained completely dry, and put them on. At that time, the Devil was passing by; he noticed that the young man was dry. Then he asked the bald man to reveal his secret. The bald man said, "*I will reveal my secret only if you teach me the Greatest Name of God*." The Devil agreed, and the bald one told the story of *digging the hole*. The devil said to himself, "*What a fool I've been made of*!" The rest of the story recounts the bald man's clever tricks until he finally marries the *Hajji*'s daughter. (Enjavi, 2014a, pp. 299–302)

The story of *The Bald Man and the Judge* is about a merchant who intends to make a long journey and entrusts his wife to the care of a judge. However, the judge looks at the woman with lust and betrays this trust. The King, who wanders the city streets at night in disguise, learns of the judge's deceit from the bald man. He summons the bald man and

asks for his help. The bald man agrees to assist the King on the condition that he be allowed to serve as King for one day; the King agrees. The bald man then summons the judge to the royal court and cleverly exposes the judge's deceit and betrayal. Finally, the King appoints the bald man as his vizier and decrees that after him the kingship should pass to the bald man because of his exceptional wisdom and intelligence. (Enjavi, 2014a, pp. 311–313)

The story of *The Girl from the City of China* is a famous tale that has been told by storytellers under various names in numerous countries across the world. Enjavi collected nine versions of this tale from different regions of Iran. In three versions, the hero is the Bald One. These include the fifth version, titled *The Lion—The Lion Inside a Lion's Skin* and *the Lion's Load*; the seventh version, titled *Mr. Bold Man* (*Akachal*); and the eighth version, entitled *The King with Carpet-Like Ears*. The main content of all versions remains the same.

The fifth narrative serves as an example. The tale is about an old woman who has a son who is bald. He is an intelligent boy. In this story, he is referred to simply as "*the bald boy*" (*Kachal*) and has no proper name. When he is fourteen years old, he asks his mother about his father's occupation; she tells him that his father was a hunter. Then, the boy demands his father's tools, and the old woman gives him her late husband's trap. The following day, the boy goes hunting, but nothing is caught in his trap. The following day, only a small sparrow gets caught. The boy takes the sparrow home and intends to kill it, but the sparrow begins to speak, promising to help him if he liberates it; the adventures of the story begin here. The sparrow predicted that a gazelle would fall into his trap the next day, advising him to take the gazelle as a gift to the King. The King was pleased; however, the sinister vizier, instead of giving the poor bald man a reward, had him punished. Then, the sparrow predicted that, the following day, the gazelle's mate would fall into the trap; this also happened. The bald man took the second gazelle to the King and told the king about the vizier's maltreatment the day before. The King ordered to punish the vizier, and the bald man was given a lavish reward. The remainder of the story follows the vizier's continued hostility toward the bald man; the vizier, while pretending to praise him, convinced the King to send the bald man to fetch various items the palace supposedly lacked. Getting these items was extremely difficult, yet each time, with the help of the sparrow, the bald man succeeded in his mission. Ultimately, the bald man fulfilled all demands of the King and was generously rewarded; the vizier, however, got the punishment he deserved. (Enjavi, 2014b, pp. 219–232)

In the tale of *The Bald Man*, *The Tablecloth*, *The Stick*, and *The Ring of Prophet Solomon*, Enjavi wrote nine complete versions in his book, while briefly mentioning eleven others. In these nine versions, the hero is a bald man in the first, sixth, and seventh accounts. In the first version, the bald man has no specific name; he is referred to simply as "*the bald man*"; whereas in the other two, he is named Hassan; Hassan is a common name for bald characters in most Iranian folktales. From among these, the first version has been selected for presentation here:

There was a bald man who lived by gathering thorns. One day, while returning home from the desert, he crossed a marketplace and saw a man who intended to sell a chest. The bald man bought the chest for a high price and brought it home. When he opened the lid, he found a baby snake inside. The snake asked for food and water; the bald man gave it what it asked for. After the snake had eaten the food, it told the man, "*I am the son of the King of the Snakes. That man imprisoned me in this chest for six months. If you take me to the Mountain of the Snakes and return me to my father, he will give you a good reward*." The bald man does the same. He goes to the mountain, sets the baby snake free, and the snake's

father fulfills his wishes. The bald man asks the snake for a magical tablecloth, a stick, and the ring of Prophet Solomon; the snake provides him with all he asked for; and the bald man becomes very wealthy and lives happily ever after.

The bald man who lives in the oven (*Kachal-e Tannouri*) is the story of a lazy bald man who is used to spending all his time inside a clay oven. He does absolutely nothing. In this tale, he has no specific name. One day, he tells his mother that he wants to get married. His mother asks whom he would like to marry; he replies, "*The King's daughter*." His mother disagrees, saying, "*This is impossible; the King will never give his daughter to a lazy man who spends all his time in an oven*!" But the bald man insists, so his mother goes to propose on his behalf. The King turns down the proposal, but the King's daughter herself consents to marry the man. After marrying the King's daughter, the bald man becomes clever—thanks to the cleverness of his wife—and sets off into the desert in search of work. On the way, he faces a *div* (demon), and with courage and cunning, he defeats the *div*, brings it under his control, and gets all of the *div*'s wealth. (Enjavi, 2015a, pp. 147–151)

The main subject and content of this story is the role of the woman in the man's advancement. The King's daughter transforms a lazy, idle, bald man into a brave man who acquires great wealth; yet, the bald man still has the leading role in this story, and his cleverness serves as the main factor in his advancement.

In the tale of *Akchelek* (a diminutive form used for a bald man), an old woman has a bald son. In this story, too, the bald boy has no specific name. He is lazy and idle, but his mother earns a living by spinning thread. One day, she gets very angry with him for being so lazy, urging him to find a job. The boy leaves home and later, in the countryside, sees a stream with a beautiful bouquet floating on it. He takes the bouquet from the water and goes to the city. The King's daughter spots the bouquet from the palace and buys it from the boy for a large sum of money. The next day, the boy finds another bouquet; this time, he follows the course of the stream until he discovers a girl who is being held captive by a *div* (a demon).

At this point, the story enters a new phase. Through his cunning, the bald man obtains the life glass (*shisheh-ye omr*) of the *div*, smashes it, and ultimately kills the *div*. He then rescues the girl. It happens that the girl is the daughter of the King of the Fairies. The bald man obtains great wealth and eventually marries the King's daughter. The King, being aged, decides to follow a life of devotion and gives the kingdom to the bald man, who is now his son-in-law. (Enjavi, 2015a, pp. 97–103)

In the tale of "*Pir-e- Aghaji*," a man has a corrupt and immoral wife who betrays him. He has a nephew who is bald. In this story, this bald young boy also has no specific name. The bald boy decides to help his uncle; through his own cunning, he uncovers the wife's wrongdoing and saves his uncle. As this is a famous and widespread tale in Iran, Enjavi collected four distinct versions of it (Enjavi, 2015b, pp. 86–93).

Dwarfism (Achondroplasia)

Achondroplasia is a type of genetic disorder and is considered one of the primary causes of dwarfism. The characteristic of this condition is short limb length. The main problem in affected individuals lies in the conversion of cartilage to bone at the growth plates, particularly in the long bones of the limbs. In the past, the cause of this disorder was not properly understood. And hence, because of their different physical appearance, these individuals—especially children—were often mocked or were looked upon with contempt. Yet, short stature was their only flaw; intellectually and mentally, they were not different from other people, and many of them were wise, clever, and even hardworking. In Iranian

tales, the dwarf is often portrayed as a clever and problem-solving figure; These tales are instrumental in changing people's, including children's, perspectives, beliefs, and attitudes towards dwarfism.

In the story of *One-Span-Tall Boy* (*Yek-Vajabi*), there is a boy who has just a single span of height. In the tale, he is called *Yek-Vajabi*. One day, he was up in a date palm tree and was eating dates when a *div* arrived and ordered him, "*Eat the unripe dates, and throw the ripe ones down to me*." However, *Yek-Vajabi* threw the unripe dates down to the *div* and ate the ripe ones himself. The *div* became very angry and shook the tree, causing *Yek-Vajabi* to fall. The *div* then put *Yek-Vajabi* into a bag and headed toward his home. On the way, *Yek-Vajabi* climbed out of the bag and put a stone instead. Consequently, when the *div* arrived home, instead of the boy, he found a stone inside. This was repeated three times; eventually, the *div* captured the One-Span boy and told his mother to throw the boy into a pot so they could eat him. While the *div*'s mother was busy baking bread, *Yek-Vajabi* pushed her into the fire and then into the pot. He gathered a large quantity of thorns and climbed up onto a ledge. When the demon returned home and discovered what had happened, he spotted the *Yek-Vajabi* on the ledge. As the *div* attempted to catch him, *Yek-Vajabi* set the thorns on fire and burned the *div* and obtained his wealth. (Enjavi, 2015b, pp. 117-119)

In this story, the *Yek-Vajabi*, or dwarf, is portrayed as a clever and sharp-witted boy.

***Kuseh* (Shark)**

People's view of the Shark (*kuseh*, figuratively referring to a man with little or no beard) was similar to that of a bald person; people did not respect such individuals. It should be remembered that, since ancient times, certain illnesses were attributed to the penetration of evil spirits into the body or to magic. Although such beliefs are fading, they remained in the public consciousness until a few decades ago; for instance, individuals with vitiligo were often regarded as ill-natured or untrustworthy. Another issue concerning the *kuseh* relates to the common perception that a beard and mustache are signs of masculinity; consequently, because *kusehs* typically lack a beard—or have very sparse facial hair—people have often viewed them unfavorably. Storytelling is an instrumental and effective method for challenging these misconceptions. In Iranian folktales, *The Kuseh*, like *The Bald Man*, is mostly a clever, brave, problem-solving, and saving figure.

In the tale of *The Merchant's Son and the Shark*, there was a merchant who had only one son; his son was reluctant to work. Knowing that his son would waste his wealth after his death, the merchant gave him some advice and left a final instruction: "*If, in your youth, you lose your fortune and decide to sell your house, first destroy one of the steps of the terrace and rebuild it—only then can you proceed with the sale. In addition, whenever you wish to have a companion, choose a 'shark' as your friend*."

As the father predicted, the son lost his wealth and decided to sell the house; however, remembering his father's final words, he demolished a step on the house's terrace. He found it extremely hard to rebuild the step, and then he realized how difficult it would be to construct a house. Finally, he decided not to sell the house. Following his father's second piece of advice, he chose a shark (*kuseh*) as his companion. Thanks to the shrewdness of his shark friend, the merchant's son achieved great success. (Enjavi, 2015b, pp. 207–209)

Vitiligo (Leukoderma)

Vitiligo is a chronic autoimmune skin disorder characterized by the loss or destruction

of skin pigments (melanocytes), which is often diagnosed by the presence of milky-white patches. Although the underlying cause of this disorder is unknown, its potential pathogenic factors involve genetic, neural, viral, and autoimmune mechanisms. (Zare and Jaladat, 2017, p. 63)

Vitiligo, referred to as pis by Akhawayni, is a chronic, non-contagious skin disorder that manifests as soft, relatively large white patches on different parts of the human body, and sometimes spreads to cover the entire body.

Since ancient times, vitiligo was incorrectly and unfairly equated with leprosy—or considered a precursor to it—and for this reason, a person suffering from vitiligo was despised and ostracized like a leper.

Mazda intended to bestow kingship over the world upon Jamshid; Jamshid made several requests of Ahura Mazda —among them, that there be no disease in his land; among the ailments he sought to exclude was vitiligo. Consequently, it can thus be inferred that this ailment was known as early as that era and regarded by the Iranians as a malicious affliction. Furthermore, when Jamshid sought to transport the virtuous people to the Varjamkard—a sanctuary where they would be safe from snow and blizzards—Ahura Mazda asks him not to take persons with vitiligo there. (Avesta, 2006, p. 673) In Jewish culture, vitiligo (*pisi* / *baras*) was condemned; among the ancient Hebrews, it was even believed that contracting *pisi* was due to a sin that a person committed. The Book of *Numbers* recounts that God instantly afflicted Miriam—the sister of Moses—with leprosy because she had spoken ill of him. (Hawks, 1998, p. 749) In the Quran, baras is considered, like congenital blindness, an ailment that physicians are incapable of curing; the healing of these two diseases, like raising of the dead, is counted among the miracles of Jesus (peace be upon him). (Quran, Al-Imran, v. 49)

Even in the juridical rulings and the law of marriage and divorce, it is stated that if, following the marriage contract, it is discovered that the woman was afflicted with vitiligo and did not inform the man, and the man feels he has been deceived (*ghabn*) by this, he has the right to annul the marriage. (Ghorbani, 1991, p. 284)

In Iranian tales, stories with the theme of the person with vitiligo (*pisi*) are less common than those involving a bald or beardless character.

In the tale of *Ali Piso and Charkh*, it is recounted that a traveler on a cold night goes to Ali Piso's house and asks his wife for permission to spend the night there. The woman let the man go inside. Shortly thereafter, Ali Piso arrived home; it happened that he had slaughtered a lamb that day—the meat was hanging, and the head and trotters were in a pot for dinner. Ali got upset by the arrival of this uninvited guest. Time passed, and dinner was ready, but because Ali considered the guest undeserving of a meal, he did not serve the food. The guest became hungry and said to Ali, "*I have some bread with me; if you could just give me some stew, that would be enough*." Ali answered, "*We have no food*." The guest asked, "*Then what is boiling in the pot*?" Ali replied, "*It is a crow, and it takes a long time to be cooked*." The guest then asked, "*And what is that hanging there*?" Ali replied, "*That is my charkh* (*traditional leather footwear*)." Ali's children also became hungry and asked their parents for food, but Ali and his wife told them, "*This food is for the morning; go to sleep*." The children went to sleep hungry.

Then Ali told the guest, "*Dear guest, go to sleep; these crows won't be cooked anytime soon*." Everyone went to sleep, but in the middle of the night, the guest woke up, ate the kalleh-pacheh (a kind of food made of sheep's head and trotters), threw his charokh into the pot, and took the meat. Then he put Ali's hen and rooster into his bag, took the bread

too, put pieces of leather in their place, and prepared to leave. The guest thanked Ali and said he had to go. Ali told him to stay so they could eat together, but the guest replied that he had already eaten. Ali suggested, "*At least stay until the rooster crows, then you can go*." The guest responded, "*No problem—the rooster is with me*." Then Ali accompanied him to the edge of the village. Then he hurried home and told his wife to wake the children so they could have dinner. He then asked his wife to fetch some bread. The children tried hard to bite into the bread, but they saw that the bread was too tough to break into pieces. "*Mother*," they said, "*this bread is very hard*." The mother went to bring them some broth from the *kalleh-pacheh* but found it full of mud. She told her husband that she could not separate the meat from the bone. Ali replied that perhaps it was not cooked completely. However, as soon as they took out the *kalleh-pacheh*, they found a pair of filthy, foul-smelling charokh. The man said that the guest had done that and suggested they could roast the meat instead. But there was no meat. The wife told Ali to go look for it; Ali replied that he would go after sunrise when the rooster crowed, but the rooster never crowed. They went to see what had happened, and they discovered that there was no rooster at all. The wife told Ali, "*If you had brought the food and the guest had eaten with us, none of these misfortunes would have happened*."

This is a didactic tale which aims to emphasize the importance of showing respect to a guest; In addition, in the story, a man afflicted with vitiligo is portrayed as one who is devoid of compassion and tolerance. (Enjavi, 2014a, pp. 81–84)

Medicinal Plants

It is commonplace to use medicinal plants in folktales. In some stories, the medicinal plants used are real and well-known, whereas in others, they are completely fictional and are far from reality.

The tale of *Malek Mohammad and the One-Legged Demon,* is a well-known story. Malek Mohammad's brothers do not like him, and one day they betray him, abandoning him in a well. Upon returning home, they tell their father that a leopard has attacked and eaten him. Malek Mohammad manages to escape. Malek Mohammad, on the way back home, while sitting under a tree, hears the conversation between two birds sitting on the tree branches. One bird says to the other that if humans knew the medicinal properties of the tree's fruit, there would be no fruit left on the tree by now. The second bird asks what the fruit is good for; the bird replies that if a blind person crushes the fruit of this tree and applies it to their eyes, their sight will be restored. The adventures of Malek Mohammad continue until he returns to his own land, where his father—who had gone blind from the sorrow of his son's absence—is healed by the fruit of the tree that Malek Mohammad has brought back with him. (Enjavi, 2014a, p. 184)

In this tale, we know neither the name of the tree nor its fruit. The story, which is influenced by the account of Prophet Joseph (PBUH), introduces the tree and its fruit for the healing of the blind father; Medically speaking, however, the story is of little value.

In the tale *The Daisy Leaf*, it is said that the governor of a city had three sons, each born to a different mother; however, due to his destiny, the governor himself was blind. One day, a dervish came to the ruler's house and said, "*I know a cure for your blindness. There is a plant called Daisy, and its leaves can heal your blindness*." If your sons are eager, they may go and retrieve it.

To obtain the "*Daisy Leaf*" (*Barg-e Morvarid*), the boys must cross three castles, each inhabited by a *div* (demon). They must wrestle the *divs*; Having defeated them, the *divs* will

tell the boys how to obtain the daisy leaf (Enjavi, 2014a, p. 191). It is likely that a tree with leaves or fruit resembling pearls once existed; however, in this tale, the medicinal properties of the tree's leaves serve the plot of the story.

The tale of *Yarrow* (*Gol-e Bumadaran*) recounts the story of a woman who works hard to make a living. She would spin cotton into thread, weave the thread into fabric, and sew that fabric into clothing. Furthermore, as she was familiar with the properties of plants, she would go into the mountains and wilderness to collect different herbs; she would bring the herbs home, dry them, and prepare herbal remedies from them. This woman had a daughter. As she grew old and sensed that her death was approaching, she told her daughter, "*I shall soon turn into a flower*." The mother passed away, and after some time, a flower grew beside her grave. When the daughter smelled the flower, it gave off the scent of her mother. From that day on, the flower became known as *Gol-e Bumadaran* (*Yarrow*) in the village. (Enjavi, 2015a, pp. 27–29)

In the tale of *The Three Cunning Women*, one of the women gives her husband some flatulence-inducing plants. The man's belly swells, and he asks his wife for a remedy; the cunning woman, however, gives him more of the same plant. The man's belly grows so large that he resembles a pregnant woman. The wife tells him, "*You are pregnant*." The man is shocked, asking, "*Can a man become pregnant*?" The wife answers, "*I am giving you an herbal remedy; if the gas in your belly does not subside, then you are certainly pregnant*." She then gives him more of the flatulence-inducing plant, causing his belly to grow even more. The rest of the story portrays the woman's cunning nature, as well as her acquaintance with medicinal plants and, to some extent, the practice of medicine. (Enjavi, 2015a, pp. 212–214)

Medicines

In Iranian folktales, it is observed that the use of medicines is common. Most frequently, they are employed to render one unconscious. On the other hand, in these stories, remedies are sometimes administered to patients. Some of these prescriptions are medically correct, while others are completely fictional; finally, there are instances where the use of medicine is in a form of mockery or ridicule.

Anesthetic Drugs

A common theme in Iranian folktales is to render unconscious the vulnerable character—typically a king or a king's daughter by a demon or a villain. To revive the victim, the hero or other characters in the story often use specific substances. The use of vinegar, rosewater, or kahgel (a traditional mixture of mud and straw) is particularly frequent in these tales. The strong odor of vinegar, the fragrance of rosewater, and the distinct scent of kahgel seem to be effective in restoring the characters to consciousness.

In the story "*The Garden of the Yellow Flower and the Garden of...*," a prince falls in love with the daughter of an old cobbler; however, a maid acts wickedly to prevent the prince from marrying the girl. Although the prince has married the girl, he keeps away from her because of the maid's deception, which renders a negative picture of her. However, the prince's mother devises a plan to reunite the girl with the prince. Following her plan, one day, while the prince is in a garden, he meets a girl. Unaware of the girl's true identity, the prince asks her to climb down off the horse and share a sharbat with him; the girl puts a sleeping potion in the drink, rendering the prince unconscious. That night, upon regain-

ing consciousness, the prince realizes his mistake and recognizes the girl as his wife. The prince decides to severely punish the maid, but the girl pardons her. (Enjavi, 2014a, p. 356)

In the tale *The Girl from the City of China*, the hero is an orphaned boy who is frequently mocked by other children. The boy's father used to catch birds, like falcons, and give them to the prince; now, the orphaned boy likes to follow in his father's footsteps. However, he lacks the necessary experience. In this story, a pious old man appears and helps the boy in achieving his goals. Once, the king's son, incited by those around him to ruin the boy, asks the boy to bring him a dancing cat. The boy once again turns to the pious old man for help. The old man instructs him to place some sweets and a sedative under a tree and hides himself. When the dancing cat arrives, it begins to dance; as it does so, it eats the sweets, falls unconscious, and then the boy can capture the cat. (Enjavi, 2014b, p. 183)

In the tale *The Dervish's Trick*, a dervish is sitting in a teahouse that a young man—a messenger of the King—enters. Curious to read the king's letter, the dervish pours a little sleeping potion into water and gives it to the young man; he then takes the letter from the messenger's pocket and reads it. (Enjavi, 2014a, p. 295)

This motif is repeated in the tale of "*Agha Hasanak*" as well: the king's daughter is rendered unconscious by a *div* (demon). The *div* opens a bottle and keeps it under the girl's nose, causing her to faint (Enjavi, 2015a, p. 110). Elsewhere, when the king loses consciousness, rosewater is sprinkled on his head and face; subsequently, kahgel (a mixture of mud and straw moistened with water) is held under his nose, and he regains consciousness. (Enjavi, 2015a, p. 114)

In the tale *The Three Cunning Women*, the same motif of rendering the king unconscious recurs. The king regains consciousness by dripping a drop of vinegar into his nose in the morning (Enjavi, 2015a, p. 208). In the same tale, it is said that kahgel (a mixture of mud and straw) is held under the person's nose to bring him back to consciousness (Enjavi, 2015a, p. 210).

In the famous tale *Delaram and the Prince of the Demons*, Delaram is kidnapped and forced to serve as a cupbearer (*saqi*) for the demons (*divs*). The prince and the vizier's son set out to save her and finally reach the cave where Delaram is held captive. Delaram makes her way to the cave entrance and informs them that there are twelve *divs*, telling them to wait until she signals them. She then returns inside the cave, pours a sleeping potion into the *div*'s wine, and renders them unconscious. The prince and the vizier's son kill the *divs* and save Delaram. (Enjavi, 2015b, p. 157)

Honey as Medicine

In the intriguing tale, *The Wolf and the Village Headman*, a representative of the wolves comes to the village's headman (*kadkhoda*) in winter to ask for his assistance. The kadkhoda agrees to help the wolves in exchange for money, but the wolves do not have the amount of money the kadkhoda demands. The wolves hold a meeting and decide to steal a honeycomb, take it to the kadkhoda's mother, and ask her to encourage her son to help them. One of the wolves gives the honeycomb to the old woman; she accepts the gift and brings the honey to her son, the kadkhoda. The old woman asks her son to help the wolves and says they have brought us honey. The kadkhoda says, "*But mother, what good is honey*?" Her mother says that honey is the cure for seventy diseases. She recounts the Mashhadi Avaz's ailment, who suffered from back pain for so long that he couldn't walk even with a cane. He visited a traditional healer several times but didn't get better; yet once he consumed

about 300 grams (four sir) of honey mixed with 37 grams (eight *mesghal*) of coconut, he recovered completely. When the kadkhoda asks how this was done, his mother explains that he crushed the coconut, mixed it with honey, and ate it every morning, and he got better. Finally, the kadkhoda agrees to help the wolves. (Enjavi, 2015a, p. 164)

The Snake and Medicine

In the tale of *The Snake and the Farmer*, it is recounted that there were three dervishes whose trade was charming snakes and vipers. They would charm the snakes, confine them in sacks or wooden chests, and use them to prepare medicines. One day, the dervishes were in pursuit of a snake. The snake fled and reached a farmer in his field. It said to the farmer, "*Hide me somewhere so the dervishes do not find me, and I shall repay your kindness*." The farmer asked, "*But where am I to hide you*?" The snake replied, "*Let me enter your belly*." The farmer says, "*I will agree on one condition: that Hazrat Abbas* (*a sacred man*) *be a witness between us, and whenever the dervishes move away, you will come out*." The snake agrees. The dervishes arrived and asked about the snake. The farmer denied seeing the snake. The dervishes said, "*You have made a mistake—you have hidden the snake in your belly, and the snake will not keep its promise*." The dervishes went away, and the farmer asked the snake to come out. The snake hesitated; when the farmer insisted—reminding it of its oath—the snake threatened the farmer and said, "*If you persist, I shall eat your liver*." The farmer called upon Hazrat Abbas for help. A radiant figure appeared and taught the farmer to crush some leaves of the *sidr* (*konar*) tree and eat them. The farmer followed these instructions; the snake, torn into pieces, came out of his belly, and the farmer was saved (Enjavi, 2014b, pp. 251–253).

In this tale, although it is unclear how the dervishes extract medicine from the snake, we know that a highly valuable vaccine is currently produced from snake venom, which is why the venom itself is so valuable. Considering the removal of a snake from the farmer's stomach, it is possible that the text actually refers to the presence of a worm in the body. While it is theoretically possible for a snake to enter a person's body, it seems more likely that the reference is to an intestinal worm rather than a snake.

Medicine for Sores

In the intriguing tale, *Prince Ibrahim and Prince Ismail*, Prince Ismail applies a black oil, a remedy for sores, onto Prince Ibrahim's injuries. His wound heals immediately. (Enjavi, 2015b, p. 181)

In the past and up to the present, in folk medicine and traditional medicine, mummy oil has been used to treat joint pain and bone fractures. This medicine is in the form of a black oil, but this medicine has not been used to treat wounds; therefore, it is unclear what medicine is meant by the black oil in this story.

Pathogenic agent

In Iranian folklore, including traditional tales, we encounter cases in which an antagonist or anti-hero (often a woman who is hostile to the story's innocent heroine) uses a special potion to harm her. This potion makes the girl ill or ill-fated. In popular belief, this is called chiz-khor kardan (feeding her something harmful).

In the well-known story *The Smiling Flower* (*Gol-e Khandan*), an aunt is jealous of her niece—who has become the prince's wife. She inspires her own daughter to marry the prince. On the way to the prince's palace, the aunt gives the bride a potion and tells her,

"*If you wish to remain forever fortunate, drink this*." The potion has the effect of inducing an intense thirst. As the story unfolds, the bride becomes so thirsty that she gives one of her eyes in exchange for a bowl of water. Through this trick, the aunt manages to deprive the bride of both her eyes (Enjavi, 2014b, p. 25). The rest of the story, like most Iranian folktales, ends with a favorable outcome for the niece, the victim of the tale. The aunt, who plays the role of the villain, however, is severely punished.

In these tales, while the property or effect of the medicine is explained, its name is not mentioned. This is likely associated with the didactic function of the tale: the storyteller does not want the child to develop a negative attitude toward a particular medicine, or toward medicine and physicians in general.

Conclusion

Generally speaking, folk medicine, traditional healers, illnesses, patients, remedies, medicinal plants, and their therapeutic properties do not constitute main elements of Iranian folktales; However, owing to the significant role that the practice of medicine played in the past, such elements are clearly reflected within these stories. For instance, people viewed certain ailments negatively; the tale often portrays the character suffering from such an illness as a transgressor, a negligent person, a miser, a malicious individual, or someone possessing ill intent. Vitiligo (*leukoderma*), for instance, is classified under this category. Certain conditions—which negatively affect appearance and make it deviate from the norm—often evoke sympathy, pity, or compassion in the general public. In folktales, an effort is made to change the public's perception of such individuals by highlighting their other attributes like intelligence, courage, dignity, love for humanity, and self-sacrifice; this also aims to discourage people, including children, from mocking them. Examples of such figures include the bald man, the beardless man, and the dwarf. Of course, in Iranian tales, the bald man typically appears as a clever and brave man, whereas the beardless man and the dwarf are portrayed as clever individuals whose wit is often accompanied by mischief and cunning.

In Iranian tales, the value and importance of wisdom and rational thinking are often taught to children. It is understood that when the bald man, despite an unfavorable appearance, demonstrates wisdom in confronting problems, he is more respectable than a handsome prince who seeks to kill his own brother or father and only thinks of the crown and throne. The inclusion of characters suffering from ailments—who nonetheless act with wisdom, triumph over demons and beasts, and are saviors of their people—manifests a beautiful fusion of folk medicine and storytelling; yet, ultimately, it is wisdom that remains the fundamental and superior virtue.

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