SALVAGE MYTHS AS SYMBOLS OF RESCUE AND PROMISED SEEKING OF NATIONS
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INTRODUCTION
Statement of the problem
There are a lot of disagreements among scholars in various fields, particularly anthropology, on the very subject of myth, so that they have offered conflicting definitions. In general, there are two major approaches in this area: Some believe that the word myth means distracted, ineffective and rootless discourse; that is, fictitious and false entities. However, some believe that it is a true and real discourse and they have asserted that myth reflects something that has actually happened. All in all and regarding the field of mythology, it can be said that every researcher has tried to define myth in accordance with his/her own knowledge background and they have attempted to reach their desired results. But it seems that one cannot give a comprehensive definition that is accepted by everyone. However, this does not mean that the possibility of understanding this subject is zero. In this paper, we have tried to prove that the true meaning of myth and the usual meaning of myth are different from each other. Then, we will try to achieve a common understanding and viewpoint via using a logical analysis of salvage myths and popular symbols. This message is Promised or Savior seeking message.

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A R T I C L E  I N F O
Article History:
Received 25th, March, 2014
Received in revised form 30th, March, 2014
Accepted 20th, April, 2014
Published online 28th, April, 2014

A B S T R A C T
There are some symbols among different nations that are resulted from common though different, viewpoints and ideals. These symbols include salvation, anti oppression, development of justice and the emergence of Savior in exigent desperation, etc. that are mentioned as myths in the nations’ literature. This paper an attempt to answer some of the major concerns of human kinds: How do mythologists look at myths and how they can define them? Is there a conflict between myths and revelatory teachings? Whether it is possible to infer a general an inbred message from these symbols for different nations and regardless of colour race, social class, etc.? It seems that the common message in all of these symbols at myths is the existence of a saving Savior in the darkest and most obscure part of t history of a nation, especially in the End Time. Therefore, it can be said that the aim of this paper is to examine and prove this hypothesis that “salvage myths are symbol of Promised seeking of nations”. The important point in this regard is that if the issue is proved, we can prove it alongside religion viewpoint as one of the justifications proposed for Promised seeking nature of human kinds.

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Etymology of the term “ostooreh” (myth)

Lexical etymology of the word “Ostoreh” (myth) in the Persian language results in to a conclusion that it has been derived from Arabic terms of “Al-ostorah” and “Al-asatirah”. However, this Arabic term is also derived from the Greek word “historia” means inquiry, research, information, explanation and history which has two elements: one the one hand, “histor” means a referee and, on the other hand, the suffix “ia”; this term is close to the term “rhisto” with a Greek infinitive “idein”, means observation. Latin word “videre” meaning observation, Greek word “eidenai” meaning know, Sanskrit word “vidya” and Avestan word “vaedya” meaning knowledge, and Persian word “navid” meaning good news and enunciation are cognates to the above-mentioned term. The primary Indo-European root of these cognates is “vid”.

In Arabic, the word “asatir” (myths) is the broken plural form of term “ostooreh” (myths). Although Persian language makes use of this plural making technique, it refers to achievement of a nation which differentiates them on the basis of religion. When we point to Iranian myths and Greek myths, we are not putting some irrelevant myths alongside each other, but we mean that these myths are included within a unique and integrated complex. However, this kind of meaning and conception about the term “asatir” is not very common in Persian language; it means that “asatir” only means putting together myths and, as such, it is just the broken plural form of word “ostooreh”.

The science of myths (Elm-al-Asatir) and mythology are two synonymous terms. The former term is very close to the term “asatir” and denotes an interwoven collection of myths of a nation or the study, examination and analysis of a nation or diverse nations. However, it only means a collection of myths that are put together in a complex. Meanwhile, there are not precise and comprehensive Persian definitions for these terms because Iranian researchers have mostly studied and translated the works of Western mythologists, who are considered as the founders of scientific study of myths (Bahar, 1975, pp. 343-344).

Regarding European languages, it can be said that English word “myth”, French word “myth”, and German word “mythe” are semantically equivalent to the term “ostooreh”. Furthermore, it can be argued that their plural forms are synonymous to “asatir” in Perdian language. Besides, the term “mythology” is equal to science of myths (Elm-al-Asatir) used by our researchers. In some encyclopedias and dictionaries, some varieties of myths are presented that refer to change, distraught, non-sense speech, and legend (Johari, 1997, p. 559; Ibn-al-Manzoor, 1987, p. 257).

Epistemic and idiomatic natures of myth

Having shed a quick review of the works and writings of contemporary researchers, who are known in the field of recognition of epistemic meaning of myth, it becomes evident that presenting a comprehensive and complete definition about myth is a difficult task. As such, different researchers have attempted to draw a vivid picture of myth based on their own diverse sociological, psychological, structuralistic viewpoints and interests as well as their mental differences and the extent of relationship between myth and categories such as religion, history, etc. The following viewpoints are a few among them:

Mircea Eliade, who is one of the most popular religion scholars, has delivered the following definition for myth

“Myth is the narrator of a sacred and divine destiny. Myth is the narrator of a dramatic event that has been taken in eternity and when everything happened first time. In other words, myth narrates the process of emergence of truth, either as whole or partly, that is the result of outstanding and prominent efforts of supernatural creatures. Therefore, it always involves narration of a creation. That is, myth tells us how things come into being and begin their existence. The myth speaks about the only things that have really happened and emerged. Mythological characters are supernatural creatures and are popular due to acts done by these superiors at the beginning of all things. Myths reflect the creative works done by them and explicit the sanctity (supernatural being) of their actions” (Eliade, 1996, p. 25).

John Russell Hinnells asserts the following viewpoint in this regard

“Myths can also play the role of advisors on a series of higher ethics that provide some exemplars for human kinds to build their life according to them. But myths are more important than sole symbolic narratives or stories because they narrate the activity of paranormal supernatural powers. Therefore, it is believed that reading out them in religious rituals would release these powers or reactive them. As Christians believe that the revitalization of the “Last Supper” at the Eucharist represents the Christ, adherents of other religions also believe that visualization of creation of myth or the myth of ultimate sacrifice savior would provide the same active force at the time of creation or at the end of the world for believers; that is, paying attention to myth and ritual leads to confidence in the presence of Saints” (Hinnells, 2006, p. 25).

Lévi-Strauss provides the following definition for myth

“An interlocking set of rituals that are thematically same and distributed within wide range of exemplum. Myths try to continuously put the two opposite sides close to each other in order to reasonably resolve the conflicts and oppositions” (Strauss, 1998, pp. 15-18).

Others have defined the myth differently: “Myth is a narrative or symbolic expression about the gods (God), angels, supernatural creatures and the whole cognition world of a nation. Myth is a right and holy destiny that has taken place in an eternal time and, symbolically, tells how it has emerged in the universe” (Esmael pour, 2008, pp. 13 & 14).

Since the exact meaning of myth is not clear cut, it seems that one cannot give a comprehensive definition about myth that is accepted by everyone. One can infer it via shedding a look at the majority of contemporary mythological books and research so that the majority of mythologists have pointed to this fact. It can be said that:

“On the one hand, it is difficult to understand the myth itself because it is dumb and silent and has many diverse
foundations, applications, links and associations that have not sometimes specific meanings and purposes. Thus, it is improbable for a myth to be placed and understood within a sole wise spirit that only accepts rational explanation and justifications. As such, it seems that myth seeks the more semi-conscious and unconscious elements of human nature”.

Therefore, it can be stated that the authors have one common point: They look at the myth from the windows of faith and trust. They’ve got to believe in not only the structure but also the miraculous function of myth in the society; that is, the power of myth to create ethnic and ideological solidarity. Therefore, they believe that live myths and symbols are more important than ancient myths and symbols. Examples of this approach can be found in the writings of Mircea Eliade who is one of most prominent American religion scholars. Thus, the myth is not limited to time and place, but he/she is the constant and continuous need of human kinds. The most important benefit of studying mythology is the rise and growth of human beings through adaptation to and replication of mythical heroes. Similarly, analyzing different myths of nations, which is based on the reception and understanding the truth, lead us to align our wishes, tendencies and inclinations. Developmental stages of myths in any territory are differentiated by factors such as the intellectual and cultural structure of society and its values and significance at any time in order to raise warrior morale, moral excellence and philosophical thought” (Hejazi, 2006, pp. 220 & 221).

Religion and myth

Is there any relationship between religions and myths? If yes, we must answer the following questions: What is the relationship between religions and myths? Whether religion has any priority over myth or vice versa? Were myths and religions formed at the same time? Some religion scholars have asserted the following viewpoints in this regard:

Mr. John Russell Hinnells presents the following statement regarding the role of myth and its relationship with religion

“The role of myths in religion distinguishes them from stories. Regarding religion, human beings try to achieve a proper understanding on himself as well as his nature and environment. However, myths, narrates the human thinking about the universe and are considered as fixed formats within which human beings try to express this knowledge and recognition”. 

Jung Antonio Moreno discusses on the subject of whether religion and myths are the same phenomenon and puts the following statement in this regard

“They both have similar roots in religious instinct. However, it is not possible to change the manifestations of the above-mentioned phenomena, though interwoven and interconnected. Myths are earlier, more emotional and more intuitive than religion, but are less rational than it. Myths are varieties of human psychology and attitude which is the main characteristic of the vision of primary humans. On the other hand, religions, as we know them today, are more rational and analyzable than myths, but are less intuitive, emotional and symbolic than them. Furthermore, religions are less influenced by mysticism originated under the influence of supernatural beings” (Antonio Moreno, 2001, p. 210).

Mehrdad Bahar states as follows

“Myths are those beliefs of primitive societies towards their gods that come into existence after religion. It means that there have firstly been some blessing religions and then, myths are created to justify them. Conversely, it is possible that myths and religions have been formed simultaneously and not the other way rounds” (Bahar, 1997, p. 296).

Another definition is as follow

“Asatir (myths) alongside with its singular, Ostooreh (myth) are those superstitious and semi-superstitious stories narrated about supernatural powers and gods which have successively been narrated from one generation to another. Myths are different from heroic human beings stories and fairy tales that are narrated to entertain people. Myths are closely associated with religious traditions and, in some religions, they have been mentioned repetitively” (Hadi, 1998, p. 42).

According to some mythologists, “and regarding the research conducted from the perspective of religious studies on the subject of myth, it can be argued that myths should be regarded as subsets of religion because the main argument of these researches is that religion does not deal primarily with the natural world- and is only dealing with supernatural subjects- and religion is kept exempt from any violence on behalf of science” (Segal, 2010, p. 85). So, it can be said that there is no conflict between science and religion.

Many documents indicate the temporal precedence of religion over myth, including the existence of a subtle and invisible relationship between the fertility of land and increased felicity and bliss resulted from performing religious rites and abstinence from sins. How did this mythical belief emerge and strengthen within primary human beings? “American Indians believe that the fertility of their farms is more depended on accurate performing of rites and rituals than how to plow, seed spraying, irrigation and so on” (Hadi, 1998, pp. 76 & 77). Undoubtedly, this heartfelt faith of Indians is not a coincidence. This rite must be rooted in their previous abolished religions or their subconscious temperament, which has been an occult inspiration nature (Hejazi, 2006, p. 225).

Quran and myth

What is the meaning of myth in the Holy Quran? This is another question to which this research bound to answer. The word “asatir” (myths) has been repeated 9 times in the Holy Quran. It is interesting to note that in all cases, this word has been used by infidels and pagans addressing the prophets in order to justify their oppositions. (Forqan (The Criterion), v. 5)

And they say: Fables of the men of old which he hath had written down so that they are dictated to him morn and evening”.

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Or: (Momenoon (The Believers), v. 83)

"We and our fathers were already promised this. Lo! This is naught but fables of the men of old".

This tradition has been observed throughout other verses (Anfal (The Spoils), An’am (The Cattle), Nahl (The Bee), Ahqaf (The Sandhills), Qalam (The Pen), Al-Mutaffifin (The Stinters)).

The above verses have been asserted by pagans addressing Quran. Typically, commentators have noted the viewpoint of pagans toward the Quran. Consequently, many commentators have firstly noted that the word “ostooreh” (myth) or “asatir” (myths) mean legend and lie. However, some commentators have pondered on the meanings of myth and myths and they have asserted that these terms mean writing, line or queue (Ghoreishi, 1999, p. 265).

Some other commentators have asserted: “Line has two meanings: queue and writing. Regarding the first meaning, it is composed of something. Regarding the second meaning, it is an infinitive”.

It seems that one should differentiate between what is intended by pagans and the conventional meaning of myth. Pagans made use of this word to make fake tales and useless legends and tried, based on their incorrect understanding, to attribute impossible to the Holy Quran. This erratic act should not falsify the true sense of word and should not hinder any incorrect use of it thereof.

However, this procedure is not inclusive of all interpretations.

For example, Allameh Tabatabai argues that the word “asatir” (myths) means written news but has mostly been used in superstitious news (Tabatabai, 2000, p. 149). This viewpoint has been used in Al-Mizan as well as other interpretations. The following example can illuminate this point:

“Asatir (myths) is the plural form of Ostooreh (myth) and is derived from “satr” (line) which originally means “Saf” (queue). As such, those words that have been placed within a row are called a line. Thus, the myth means writing lines that have been left by others. Since there had been some legends and superstitions in the ancient literature, this word usually refers to surreptitious and false anecdotes, stories, and tales (Makarem Shirazi et al. (1993, p. 297).

Thus, the very meaning of myth does not have any lie in it and myth is those writing and news that overcame the former. This word has already had usage for false stories, too. Furthermore, it is clear that pagans and opponents to Prophet of Islam (PBUH) have asserted that these lofty and revelatory concepts are narrated from false myths. In fact, pagans resorted to this pretext in order to justify their unwillingness toward religion. Pagans used the term “Asatir-al-Axvalin (ancient myths) to refer to the Holy Quran because they believed that the Holy Quran and the beliefs contained within it have always been non-divine and unreasonable. Given the context of the above verses, it can be said that pagans intended to reject two things:

Firstly, divinity. Secondly, Baath and getting out of the grave in the Day of Resurrection. Thus, it can be concluded that:

Firstly, what is narrated in the Quran as myths are in the language of pagans. Otherwise, the word myth is not a false one. So, this word means news and, like all other types of news, there are some probable true and false news. Meanwhile, this word has mostly been used in the meaning of legend and the majority of meanings found in today’s glossaries are only associated with surreptitious stories.

Secondly, we do not want to say that there are not any false or legendary myths. Furthermore, we do not seek to purify the myths and do not want to say that all of them are real news. Conversely, we must take psychological, sociological, and probably and specifically, anthropological approaches in this area. Regardless of what is said about myths in the Holy Quran and what interpretations has been directed toward them, we are going to find the answer to the following question: Can we find and receive a common message from the present myths among nations and races? In fact, we follow a series of common points within myths so that we can reach a common symbol.

Thirdly, some Muslim scholars have made use of some myths in their works including Sheikh Shahab-al-Dinn Suhrwardi who has distinguished the philosophical thought in the Islamic culture from Greek thoughts and established a School of Thought himself. His writings are full of symbolic language of myths and he has written some symbolic short stories.

Suhrwardi made proper use of these ideas in order to create his own cognitive system. Even, some of his symbolic stories have benefited from Shahnameh. She has tried to rebuild the heroes of Shahnameh based on his own perspective including Iranian ancient beliefs about king splendor which are considered cheating (Moein, 2009, pp. 242-412) or the story of Qumars (Shahrzoori, 2001, p. 35). In fact, the intuitive thoughts of Suhrwardi are a combination of Islamic and Iranian thoughts. He has made use of the myth language, which is a symbolic language, as well as religious teachings in his works.

Race, nation and myths

Having shed a glance at the ancient history of nations, one can find some pages full of historical, cultural, social and political symbols of nations. These symbols are always living within the historical layers of nations as myths and legends. Furthermore, as long as the history of a nation is older, these mythological symbols get more brilliant, such as Greek, Roman, Persian, Egyptian civilizations. Here we mention some myths of race and nations as examples:

“Some Iranians think that when Kai Khosrow reintegrated the country and set out the foundation of a strong nation and kingdom, he delivered the royal scepter to his son and went to the mountains and laid to rest there, so that he would finally reappear and drive evil from the world”.

It is several centuries that British are wishful and waiting for someone called "Arthur" to emerge from "Avalon" Island and dominate the Saxon race over the world and
bring them happiness and prosperity. It is interesting to note that many people think that Arthur is not just about the past era of England but also he still lives in Avalon and when the United Kingdom (UK) is placed in an enormous danger, he would go back and save his country from danger (Donna, p. 2000, V. 2, pp. 555-621).

Scandinavian people believe that when people are stricken by bales and scourges and World Wars destroy them, a person named "Odin" will emerge with divine power and will prevail over all (R.E. Peach, 2005, pp. 42-51).

Central American people believe that "Kutzkotele" is the world Savior and he will emerge after some happenings happened in the world and he will overcome others (Donna, 2000, pp. 945-854).

From the nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, more than a dozen heads of state of Maori people in New Zealand have claimed to be the Promised.

Nomads living in Central Asia think that when Steppe people leave their ancient gods, the white Burkhan will come and will revive all the races of human kinds (ibid).

Symbols of Promised seeking are not limited to these races and nations, but the Greek, Roman, Spanish and others have resorted to this source via using same or other names.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In the study of cultures, two phenomena should be noted: Firstly, there are some cultural issues that are common among all human groups, although some temporal as well as spatial differences are evident. They are the results of dominant nature of human kinds and they constitute the common physical and spiritual qualities of all human societies. Secondly, there are some cultural issues that pursue a variety of spiritual and physical relationships among peoples, ethnics or other groups and are formed in accordance with the new environment (Bahar, 1975, p. 352). Thus, we mention some points regarding these two phenomena:

Firstly, myths of nations have some common points and characteristics with each other:

The heroes of these myths have some universal characteristics such as courage, honor, loyalty and beauty. Furthermore, their births are often miraculous. Besides, a parent or both of them have a divine attribute (ibid, p. 371).

They construct a social reality that is not finite in any way. Myths are indefinite. As new myths come to explain the rapidly changing world, the old myths are obliged to either adjust themselves with new circumstances or disappear forever (Ferguson, 2004, p. 84).

There are similar and common characteristics in myths. Nations have some salvage myths that have some commonalities with each other. For example, he/she is very powerful, brave, courageous and skillful. He/she is self-confident and is disgusted with pride and battles against arrogance and conceit. Yet, he/she behaves the weak and needy person with complete love, kindness and understanding. He/she is the source of comfort for the commons. Conversely, he/she is severely against those who are doing injudicious or illegal behaviours. He/she is honourable, liberal, courteous, knowledgeable and wise. People love him/her and his/her kingdom will be universal (Donna, 2000, v. 2, p. 621 (with some summarizing and manipulations). However, there are some differences between these myths and this is a normal issue.

They have same intentions because the myths function as bridges between humans and the world around them and these myths mentally try to establish a link between human kinds and the outer world. Besides, this subject will be, externally and internally, reflected as a fundamental ideological link with the rituals, behaviours, ethics and rules of traditional social and familial system. So it can be said that the intentions of myths explain the world around us (Bahar, 1975, p. 372).

Secondly, it can be inferred from the above-mentioned materials that: Myth does not mean a false phenomenon, but it is a way to classify certain assumptions about the modern world. These assumptions are found in the fields of history, politics, economics, culture, communication and global environment.

Myths that have been narrated for us and we narrate them for others are stories that explain their reasons for adaptation to new circumstance, which is mostly due to change in circumstances, and try to adapt themselves. As expected, the myth has a close link with social reality and makes use of everything available in order to mix the real and ideal acts so that it can create a phenomenon close to ideal that may go beyond the present evidence.

Myths guide our decision making processes and justify the events and help us to achieve a proper understanding about our dependency to a specific culture, which is also a part of our "whole world" (Ferguson, 2004, pp. 83-84).

Thirdly, the foundation of myth is salvation including cultural, social, economic, political, etc. For example, saving the earth from environmental crisis is one of the smallest examples of these myths’ concerns. Implicit utopian ideas of this act indicate its intercultural and synchrony nature. Furthermore, this act reflects his/her ability to recreate him/herself within the spectrum of time and space. In fact, saving the world from all physical and spiritual blights stems from an ancient and sacred belief about the close relationship between man and God and his interaction with nature (ibid).

CONCLUSION

All in all and regarding the vast range of viewpoints and perspectives of scholars and mythologists, it can be concluded that myths are functioning as the history of prehistoric man and as full view mirrors reflecting all intellectual, social, political, economic, and religious characteristics of him. Besides, myths symbolically reflect cosmological worldview, concerns, aspirations and wishes of human beings. This is why the introduction into the mysterious world of myths can familiarize us to major concerns of human beings, regardless of race, color and nationality, throughout the history. It can be claimed that the most important concern of human beings is Promised seeking because some of the myths are always and solely dealing with saving the human beings and the world, and
this represents the fact that myths of nations have always been hoped for final salvation and victory of forces of good and truth over the falsehood. If we put issues discussed about the myths of nations alongside Promise of the Savior of religions, we face the following divine irreversible tradition: Eventually, the world will not end in oppression and injustice and that the earth is never empty of the divine sign (Imam) and righteous believers with the help of the promised Savior will dominate over Satanic mass and this is a divine promise.

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