

Representation of Family in the Narratives of *Smiling Flower (Gol-e Khandān)*

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The development of a child's personality is profoundly influenced by the environmental stimuli after their formation. Within this context, lullabies and childhood stories assume significant roles in this formative process. The familial environment serves as the primary locus from which individuals acquire their beliefs and personalities. This research investigates the portrayal of family dynamics within the narrative framework of the Persian story *Smiling Flower (Gol-e Khandān)*. In the majority of narratives of this story, featuring the Laughing Flower, a magical agency is bestowed upon an infant girl, thereby shaping her future. The analysis of this narrative's themes prioritizes the familial element, particularly the central figures of parents, who play pivotal roles in the cultivation of the child's personality. Examination of parental representation within this narrative elucidates the prominence of the maternal figure, albeit acknowledging the undeniable influence exerted by the father's demeanor and character on the child's trajectory.

Keywords: Gol-e Khandān, family, father, mother, wife

Introduction

Given the foundational role of the family in shaping our existence from the earliest stages of development, even before we enter into the world, its influence on various dimensions of individual and societal attributes remains indisputable. While contemporary society presents diverse manifestations of familial structures, a broad definition of family can be posited as follows: "Family is a collective comprising individuals who are interconnected through marriage, blood ties, and mutual acceptance as spouses, parents, siblings, and offspring, coalescing around shared cultural norms and residing within a distinct social unit" (Sarukhani, 1997, p. 187).

Despite the prevalence of geographical separation resulting from divorces and separations, the familial bond with offspring persists. Furthermore, the emergence of same-sex marriages has expanded the concept of family, wherein individuals may have two mothers or two fathers, bound not by blood ties but by mutual agreement. According to this conceptualization, the family embodies the convergence of three fundamental relationships: parental bonds (nurturing kinship), blood ties (kinship by descent), and marital unions (affiliated kinship).

In virtually all human societies, every normative adult is affiliated with at least two nuclear families: the family of origin, encompassing one's upbringing and comprising parents and siblings, and the family formed through marriage, comprising oneself, a spouse, and offspring (Behnam, 1994, pp. 19-21).

The initial exposure to literary works typically occurs within the familial context, where lullabies, poems, and stories are often recited by parents, grandparents, and caregivers to infants and children. Consequently, literature, particularly fictional narratives, possesses the potential to contribute significantly to a child's upbringing through its inherent capacity for interaction with life and society. This assertion finds substantiation in the enduring recollection of childhood lullabies, stories, and poems by many adults, underscoring the enduring impact of early literary experiences. Hence, the critical examination of the literary content that nourishes a child's intellectual development assumes paramount importance.

One such example is the narrative of *Smiling Flower (Gol-e Khandān)* within Iranian folklore, which has undergone multiple reinterpretations by various authors across different epochs. Despite variations in its retelling, the core elements of the story remain largely consistent. A smiling flower (Gol-e Khandān) is a girl whose laughter emits perfume and flowers and whose tears turn into pearls. This book is about her and her bad aunt. Central to these narratives is the tale of a virtuous man Gol-e Khandān's father, characterized by his honesty and integrity, who undergoes a period of impoverishment or destitution, accompanied by his pregnant wife. Seeking refuge from their plight, the couple seeks shelter in a dilapidated structure, where the wife eventually gives birth. It is at this juncture that the story takes a fantastical turn, as benevolent entities, often depicted as dove-woman, bestow upon the newborn child enduring attributes. These include the ability to conjure pearls in moments of distress, the receipt of fragrant flowers upon laughter, and the presence of precious metals beneath their footsteps.

As the narrative progresses, Gol-e Khandān, having reached marriageable age, becomes betrothed to a prince. However, the machinations of a malevolent acquaintance lead to her being blinded and imprisoned within a well, while her deceitful counterpart assumes her identity. Through the protagonist's resilience and a series of trials, she ultimately communicates her plight to the prince, leading to their eventual reunion and the punishment of the malevolent antagonist.

In summary, the narrative of *Gol-e Khandān* encapsulates the transformative potential of literature within the familial context, wherein fantastical elements intertwine with moral lessons to impart enduring values to its audience.

Literature Review

With increasing scrutiny and discourse surrounding the role of women in society, literary scholarship has witnessed a surge in research dedicated to exploring this thematic terrain. A plethora of articles and books have emerged, delving into the portrayal of women within novels, short stories, and poetry, analyzing both the quantity and quality of their representation. However, the examination of familial dynamics, wherein both men and women assume roles as mothers, fathers, and spouses, remains a comparatively understudied area within this discourse.

Within this context, several notable works warrant mention. "Analysis of Family Relationships in War Fiction" by Maryam Ameli Rezaei, "The Importance of Family Rights in Traditional Persian Literature With the Approach of Spouses' Rights" by Mohammad-Amin Shamsnia, Mohammad-Amir Obaidinia, and Mohammad-Hossein Khan-Mohammadi, "Review and Analysis of the Historical Course: The Image of the Family in the Persian Novel From the Beginning to the 50s" by Maryam Ameli Rezaei, and "A Comparative and Analytical Study of the Family Element in the Contemporary Novel of Iran and Senegal With an Emphasis on the Two Novels 'Shohar-e Ahu Khanum' and 'Very Long Names'" by Swado Lee, Naser Nikubakht, Saeed Bozor g-Bigdeli, and Hossein-Ali Ghobadi represent significant contributions to this understudied area of inquiry.

Recognizing the pivotal role of literary texts in shaping a child's cognitive landscape from early developmental stages, particularly upon their emergence into a world outside the maternal body, this research endeavors to assess the quality of familial representation through an examination of various renditions of the *Smiling Flower* narrative.

Men and Women, Gender Stereotypes in Literature

The exploration of gender stereotypes in literature, particularly within works targeted at children and adolescents, has long been intertwined with discussions concerning the significance of literary exposure for young readers. Recent research underscores the prevalence of traditional gender norms perpetuated within children's literature, wherein narratives often reinforce patriarchal views and present an idealized yet unrealistic depiction of societal dynamics. Fairy tales, exemplified by classics such as "Sleeping Beauty" and "Cinderella", typify this trend, portraying women and girls as dependent and passive victims, juxtaposed against male characters depicted as heroic and resourceful problem-solvers. Notably, the central protagonists in such tales are predominantly male (Garrett, 2004, p. 42).

Moreover, scholarly inquiries into the portrayal of gender within children's and adolescent literature have highlighted the profound influence of these texts in perpetuating sex-based discrimination. UNESCO's 1981 compilation of national surveys revealed pervasive gender stereotypes in children's books and textbooks across diverse cultural contexts, affirming the global prevalence of such biases (Michel, 1998, pp. 38-39).

International perspectives underscore the alignment of children's and adolescent literature with prevailing societal norms, wherein the representation and influence of women appear to be subordinated to those of men. However, the discourse surrounding gender portrayal in Iranian literature presents a nuanced perspective. Iranian literary tradition is often dichotomized into two distinct categories: official literary works, particularly classical Persian literature, and street literature. Within classical Persian literature, women are often depicted in an idealized or denigrated manner, either as ethereal embodiments of perfection confined to the poetic imagination or as marginalized figures responsible for men's moral lapses (Hosseini, 2010, p. 12).

Moreover, some scholars assert that women hold a significant presence in Iranian folk literature, contrasting with their portrayal in classical works where they are often depicted as lacking agency and decision-making power. However, this disparity is less pronounced in folk tales (Samini, 2001, pp. 226-228).

The authors of the article "Image and Position of Women in Folk Tales" argue that women in folk tales are occasionally subjected to derogatory treatment or overlooked entirely. Nevertheless, their representation in these narratives tends to reflect a more realistic spectrum, devoid of extreme positivity or negativity. Notably, women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds play active roles in daily life activities, garnering recognition from their male counterparts who acknowledge their contributions beyond mere beauty and luxury. The inclusion of women in folk tales is attributed to their indispensable skills and assistance, emphasizing the necessity of their presence beyond ornamental purposes (Karami & Hesampour, 2006, pp. 125-136). However, it should be noted that such observations may not be universally applicable to all folk stories.

The Representation of Gender in Narrative Structure

The quantity and quality of female and male characters within a story hold significance in various contexts. This analysis considers both the presence and impact of women and men within narratives, highlighting instances where their representation is pivotal. Female characters may be numerically scarce but wield substantial influence,

while in other cases, their presence and impact may be limited. It is evident that the prominence of female characters, both in terms of quantity and influence, contributes significantly to the narrative.

In the context of lullabies and folk tales, particularly those recounted to children during their formative years, the predominance of female-centric themes can be attributed to maternal influence. Mothers often utilized such stories as a means to soothe or entertain their children, thereby addressing relatable issues such as friendship, love, loss, and separation. The narratives thus reflect the lived experiences and emotional landscapes of women, resonating with maternal figures who draw from their encounters. Consequently, female characters in these stories emerge as embodiments of maternal identity or idealized representations of womanhood.

Within the narratives of the Gol-e Khandān tale, male characters encompass Gol-e Khandān's father, the prince or cousin, the uncle, the gardener or thistle-gatherer, and in some iterations, the king himself. Female characters include Gol-e Khandān, her mother, her aunt or cousin's aunt, her cousin, and in some versions, the prince's mother, aunt's daughter, the gardener's wife, an old woman, and magical entities such as doves who transform into women or women capable of performing miraculous deeds.

In terms of quantity, women outnumber men within the narrative. However, from a qualitative perspective—considering the significance of both primary and secondary characters—Gol-e Khandān, the miraculous woman, Gol-e Khandān's mother, and her aunt emerge as pivotal figures, thereby establishing a stronger presence for women in the story. It is noteworthy that Gol-e Khandān, after whom the story is named, predominantly serves as a vessel for the blessings bestowed upon him in most renditions of the narrative. His active role is primarily evident in narratives where he exhibits kindness and compassion. Despite the prevalence of prominent female characters, men assume a background role within the narrative. For instance, in some stories, Gol-e Khandān's exceptional qualities are attributed to his father's integrity and generosity, exemplified by his willingness to sacrifice his wealth to settle debts. Conversely, in another iteration, Gol-e Khandān's uncle's actions lead to the family's impoverishment, prompting Gol-e Khandān's father to distance himself from his brother to spare his daughter from harboring resentment.

Thus, while miraculous women or doves endow Gol-e Khandān with defining characteristics that propel the story forward, the underlying rationale for these blessings appears to stem from the inherent goodness and integrity of Gol-e Khandān's father. Nevertheless, in certain narratives, the smiling flower emerges as a servant within the household or resides with a stepmother, characterized as a compassionate and benevolent individual. Through acts of generosity, such as sharing food with an elderly woman, she earns the merit of acquiring specific attributes.

Exploring the Role of Mother-Wife

Within this anthology of narratives, the presence of mothers, namely smiling flower's mother and aunt, assumes significance and warrants examination:

1. Across most narratives, the mother emerges as a steadfast companion to the father, subordinating her desires for the collective well-being of the family. This portrayal reflects the societal dynamics wherein women's identities are often defined within the confines of patriarchal traditions. Despite occasional suggestions to leave their current circumstances, the mother demonstrates resilience and unwavering support for her husband, even as they navigate the uncertainties of their journey. Notably, in Mohammadreza Yousefi's narrative, the mother assumes a pivotal role in the development of the caravan.

2. The depiction of maternal figures within these narratives delineates between “good” and “bad” mothers. However, it is imperative to note that all mothers are depicted as inherently concerned for their children’s welfare. Therefore, it may be more productive to analyze the portrayal of women as either positive or negative characters.

Among the positive representations are the doves, symbolic figures who aid the mother during childbirth and bestow invaluable gifts upon the newborn, ensuring a prosperous future. Additionally, narratives wherein *Smiling Flower* is depicted as a maid or living with a stepmother underscore the benevolent nature of women within the story, exemplified by acts of compassion towards others, such as providing food to an elderly woman. In another narrative, when Gol-e Khandān’s marriage plans are thwarted by the hostility of his uncle’s wife, Gol-e Khandān’s mother advocates for forgiveness and moving beyond past grievances, thereby exemplifying maternal wisdom and compassion.

In contrast to the positive portrayals of women, the narrative also presents negative characterizations, primarily embodied by Gol-e Khandān’s aunt, who in one instance serves as the protagonist’s paternal aunt. Motivated by envy towards her niece’s beauty and romantic prospects, she commits a heinous act by gouging out the smiling flower’s eyes and casting her into a well. This portrayal aligns with the longstanding trope of sacrificing or harming close relatives to attain personal goals, whether political, social, or romantic, as observed throughout history and mythology (Bagheri, 2014, p. 126).

Moreover, in most iterations of the narrative, Gol-e Khandān’s aunt exhibits not only cruelty towards her niece but also fails to fulfill her duties as a supportive sister to Gol Khandan’s mother. She displays opportunistic behavior, consistently visiting her sister’s household when she is affluent but withdrawing support when her sister faces hardship, even during her pregnancy. Additionally, recurring instances in the narrative underscore the negative influence of the aunt on her daughter, who learns deceitful tactics from her mother, perpetuating a cycle of negative behavior within the family.

Another negative figure is the stepmother, as depicted in certain renditions of the narrative, who subjects her stepdaughter to mistreatment, assigning her arduous tasks, withholding adequate sustenance, and resorting to physical abuse. Furthermore, certain versions introduce malevolent witches, such as Ajozeh, who collaborate with the aunt in her nefarious scheme to harm the smiling flower.

Furthermore, the narrative introduces Jari, the sister-in-law, portrayed negatively in some iterations, whose malicious conduct leads to unjustified violence against Gol-e Khandān’s pregnant and impoverished sister-in-law. Although such antagonistic relationships may be normalized within societal contexts, they lack pedagogical value for young audiences.

3. Representation of active and passive female characters: Women such as the aunt and mother, who exert considerable influence within the narratives, are depicted as either passive, akin to the mother in most instances, or active and malicious, like the aunt. These portrayals often draw upon recurring themes of female cunning and jealousy, prevalent throughout classical literature. The only instances where women exhibit positive agency within the narratives of the smiling flower are the benevolent figures, whether women or pigeons, who assist in the protagonist’s birth and endow her with favorable attributes. However, even these attributes often manifest as material possessions. Notably, in Mohammed Reza Yousefi’s rendition, the smiling flower is endowed with exceptional intelligence, illustrating a departure from conventional representations. The fluctuating nature of the smiling flower’s characteristics, wherein they contribute to prosperity in certain contexts but diminish elsewhere, serves as a commendable and instructive motif for young audiences.

4. The narrative focus on beauty and wealth: In the majority of narratives, Gol-e Khandān is portrayed as inherently beautiful from birth, whereas characters associated with the antagonist, whether the aunt's daughter or the daughter of the landowner employing Gol-e Khandān, are depicted as unattractive. This ugliness often aligns with their morally reprehensible actions, such as the landowner's daughter's callous treatment of a hungry old woman or her complicity in the malicious actions of her mother. Narratives insinuating a correlation between outer beauty and inner virtue perpetuate a problematic ideology. Throughout the narratives of the smiling flower, the conventionally beautiful girl ultimately enjoys a prosperous marriage. However, in iterations where Gol-e Khandān serves as a household servant or resides with a stepmother, her positive attributes emerge from acts of kindness, such as sharing her food with an elderly woman and garnering attention and praise.

In a society where external beauty has historically served as the primary and paramount criterion for value assessment—manifesting in notions such as societal acceptance and suitability for marriage—the perpetuation of this theme within children's stories can foster its perpetuation and internalization among young audiences. The smiling flower, revered within her family for her ability to generate wealth through unique manifestations (such as tears producing pearls, laughter yielding distinctive flowers, and the appearance of gold and silver clay beneath her feet), exemplifies this phenomenon. While her beauty undoubtedly plays a role, it is her affluence that truly garners attention and admiration. In a pivotal moment within the narrative, the aunt, driven by envy, casts the smiling flower into a well and substituted her daughter in the princess's stead. Initially disconcerted by the substitution, the prince eventually finds contentment in the lavish gifts bestowed upon him, including gold and silver clay, pearls, and flowers, mollifying his initial dissatisfaction.

Representation of Father-Husband Presence

A cursory examination of Gol-e Khandān's narratives reveals a limited involvement of fathers, with mothers assuming the predominant role. This discrepancy may be attributed to the significant role mothers historically played in storytelling for children. The portrayal of fathers and husbands within Gol-e Khandān's narratives can be delineated as follows:

1. He absents himself from his wife's side during her pregnancy.
2. Upon the birth of the baby, he returns empty-handed, having left his wife alone in destitution during her pregnancy. Even in one narrative (Darvishian), when he ventures to the city to procure a midwife and lamp oil, he succumbs to slumber, only to awaken after the child's birth, having been inspired in his sleep to return and witness his offspring.
3. His sorrow over missing the childbirth experience is not rooted in the absence of support for his wife or witnessing the miraculous birth, but rather in his failure to behold the miraculous women or doves: "The man lamented: 'Oh, terrible, you sent me away for nothing. If only I had been present, I could have witnessed them'".
4. He finds joy in having a child who generates wealth: "The man gathered the bag and began to count. Meanwhile, the child began to cry, tears yielding pearls. As the woman moved to pacify the child, the man interjected, 'Let her cry. It would be useful'" (Darvishian).
5. After his daughter departs for marriage with the prince, he fades into the background, playing no significant role in the events of her life. Even upon learning of his daughter's blindness and the subsequent hardships she endures, his response is merely one of astonishment: "They were shocked by what happened to her and when the prince reunites with Gol-e Khandān and "returns her to her parents, her mother hugged her and started to cry", yet there is no mention of the father or his response" (Darvishian).

Endowing parents with identity, a process crucial for the audience's child's identification stands as one of the pivotal functions of fictional literature. Reflecting on the evolution of Iranian literature and culture underscores the centrality of language and literature in shaping Iranian identity. Literature, more than any other cultural or human element, serves as the conduit for continuity and crystallization of ideals and expression of thought. Consequently, given literature's profound impact on identity formation and personality development, meticulous attention must be paid to the representation of pivotal roles, particularly those of mother, father, and spouse. Indeed, the portrayal of fictional parents as flawed role models or the mischaracterization of their formation can exert a detrimental influence on the modeling and character development of the child.

6. Another male figure in the narrative assumes the role of a gardener, aiding the smiling flower and extricating her from the well. He assumes responsibility for her well-being and ultimately facilitates her recovery of sight, concurrently amassing considerable wealth and property. However, akin to other characters, the gardener exhibits an initial reluctance to assist the girl (as depicted in most renditions), only relenting upon her plea, "Help me out of the well, and I'll give you all of fortune in the world". In this instance as well, the act of assistance is motivated by the pursuit of wealth, with altruistic intentions notably absent.

7. In one narrative iteration, the father is portrayed as a bigamist, who, upon learning of the miraculous attributes of the smiling flower, visits his pregnant first wife—whom he had previously expelled from the household while cleaning the house—and subsequently attains prosperity through the wealth derived from his child's attributes.

8. Regarding the portrayal of the wife, noteworthy observations pertain to the prince's actions. Firstly, the prince fails to recognize Gol-e Khandān's cousin from Gol-e Khandān herself, which is perplexing considering his purported love for her and their intimate encounter. Secondly, in one narrative, even when the groom—presumed to be Gol-e Khandān's cousin—entertains doubts about the aunt's deception and the substitution of her daughter for Gol-e Khandān, he refrains from taking decisive action to locate the girl he purportedly loves.

In summary, the fathers and husbands depicted in this narrative exhibit positive attributes and contribute to the storyline, albeit with the caveat that they were once esteemed and upright individuals. However, when analyzing folk tales through the lens of symbolism and archetypes, one must exercise caution when integrating such narratives into children's and adolescent literature, considering their potentially complex themes and implications.

Conclusion

As delineated throughout the analysis, the narrative of Gol-e Khandān prominently features women in various roles, surpassing the visibility of men both quantitatively and qualitatively. Mothers emerge as self-sacrificing figures, willing to go to extreme lengths for the well-being of their daughters and sons, even if it entails committing acts of cruelty such as blinding their niece and casting her into a well. Young girls bestow wealth and prosperity upon their families, while the gardener emerges as a pivotal figure, rescuing the protagonist and aiding in her eventual recovery. Additionally, the intervention of benevolent figures such as the pigeon-women, serving as godmothers to the smiling flower and endowing her with enduring gifts, further underscores the significant presence of women within the narrative.

Conversely, the portrayal of husbands within the story is characterized by faint and at times unkind presence, marked by their regret over missing childbirth experiences solely for the absence of witnessing miraculous occurrences and not being there as a caring husband or dad. Furthermore, post-marriage, these fathers exhibit a

palpable disengagement from their daughters' lives, demonstrating a lack of emotional investment beyond expressions of surprise in response to hardships. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the magical progression from the birth of the smiling flower, orchestrated with the aid of pigeon-women, to the felicitous denouement replete with wealth and happiness, owes its fruition to the presence of trustworthy and dependable fathers. In times of adversity and destitution, these men exhibited profound humanity, underscoring their pivotal role within the narrative.

Thus, the narrative of Gol-e Khandān distinctly highlights the indispensable role of fathers, wherein their steadfastness and reliability serve as foundational pillars shaping the trajectory of events and ultimately contributing to the story's resolution.

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