

TRANSFORMATION OF MYTHICAL MOUNTS IN MYSTICS' SYMBOLISMS

Nooshafarin Kalantar^{*}, Tahereh Sadeghi Tahsili^{**},
Mohammadreza Hasani Jalilian^{***} and Ali Heydari^{***}

Abstract: The mountain is one of the basic and symbolic elements in mythology. Although it has a salient role in Mythology, has maintained its sacredness and mysteriousness in religions as well. The mountain in the myths has been considered as the tomb and location of gods and their education place; some mountains have been the dwelling of gods. In ancient religions and rituals also the mountain has been sacred and the center of attention and the rituals have been performed over the mountains. The prophets went on mountains also often for isolation and contemplation and on it they were sent as a prophet. In mysticism, the mountain, particularly the mount Qaf, has been regarded symbolically as the place for the connection with the spiritual world and union. The mystics have pointed in their works to the mount Qaf in the sense of God's place and union with Him. In addition, they have used it as a symbol for the body, soul and its components. Some mystical interpretations also have interpreted the mountain in various verses as the human body. In this research using descriptive-analytical method, the steps of transformation of the myth of mountain have been studied in mysticism. The findings of research suggest that the symbolic functions of mountain in mystical works originate in the ancient myths.

Keywords: Myth, transformation, religion, mysticism, mount.

INTRODUCTION

The mountain has been for a long time very important in Mythology, epic, rites and monotheistic and non-monotheistic religions and has always been throughout history for the people mysterious and sacred. The mount like any other mythological element has been exposed to the semantic and symbolic transformations parallel to the evolution of human intellect. Maybe once upon a time the mountain has been God own and in a period a symbol for God and in other a place for educating God and Gods and Godlike heroes. Since the concept that occurs to human from the sky, mountain, peak and every other kind of height, has a close connection with the concept of being superior and transcendence, God's position has always been thought up in human belief. Sometimes, the sky has been his dwelling and sometimes on the height of mountains the humans have sacrificed something for Him" (Lajavardi & Talsh Babayi, 2001:107). So since the old time, the mountain has been sacred by civilized and primitive people. In most myths the mountain is considered as the center of world. Indians, Ural Altai people, Iranians, Japanese, Buddhists, Germans, Finnish, Mesopotamian people and many other peoples have believed in a heavenly mountain which has been symbolized as the Center and a

* Ph.D. Student in Persian Literature

** Corresponding author, Assistant Professor in Lorestan University

*** Associate Professor in Lorestan University

connection point with the sky. In the ideal pattern it is in the center of the world that the spiritual world joins with the terrestrial one. Generally, the symbol of “Center” can be summarized in the following places:

1. the sacred mountain that joins the sky and Earth together and is in the center of the world.
2. any Temple and any Palace and any sacred city is itself the sacred mountain as a “Center”.
3. the city and the sacred precinct are regarded as the “navel of the universe”, the meeting point of Sky and Earth and hell (Eliade, 2001: 26-28).

On this basis, the pyramids and temples that have been constructed in the form of the mountain and considered as a spiritual place were also conceived as symbols of the mountain and the center of the universe. The mountain during the history and in recent period has been regarded an appointed place of God and the prophets and later in addition to the prophets the saints and mystics also have appealed to the mountain for self-purification. The mountain is sacred in mysticism as well and some mystics went to the mountain for isolation and the pious retreat. In addition, the symbol of the mountain has been used to explain some concepts. This research has been conducted for explaining the relation of mystical and mythical functions of mountain with the steps of its transformation.

Research background: So far the various books and articles have been written about the mountain and its significance. Fatima Jafari Kamangar and M. Modaberi have investigated the mountain and its manifestation in Shahnameh. (Jafari Kamangar & Modaberi, 2003, 63-72). The article “manifestation of mountain in ancient Persia and a look at the symbolic aspects in Persian literature” has reviewed the poets’ symbolizations of mountain. (H. Rashed Mohassel et. al., 2002: 119-146) Behnamfar and Zamanipour in an article entitled “mountain and its symbolic meaning in expression of mystical and amorous emotions of Rumi” have discussed the various meanings of mount in the works of Rumi. (Behnamfar & Zamanipour, 2011: 33-54). The articles “importance and place of sacred and spiritual mount” (Nosrati, 2001:102-107) and “manifestation of the sacredness of mountain” from M. Nosrati, (Nosrati, 2005:112-117) and “symbolization of height in the religious thought” (Lajavardi & Talesh Babayi, 2010:87-108) have dealt as well to express the position of mountain in Mythology or religion, but so far no research has discussed this subject from the authors’ point of view.

MOUNTAIN IN MYSTICISM

The theme of mountain in the mysticism has a long history and since ancient times it has a special and nearly equal role in various schools; so it has always been a place to communicate with the spiritual world and climbing out of it has caused to reach the gnosis. The sacredness of mountain by mystical schools has been emerged because

of regarding gods that they have been conceived to be dwelled in the sky from the era of patriarchy. Among these rites it can be included the Gnosticism in which we witness the turning to the sky. "For Gnostics, the world is not merely an error and is a consequence of descent from and separation of the divinity (Eliade, 1994, 16). So in Gnosticism and the rites influenced by it, the principal position of man, is sky; the spirit which is the main part of the human existence is considered celestial and loved and the Earth and the body hated; the consequence of this thought is a search for a way toward the sky. In most of the mystical sects, the relation with the sky is possible through the mountain and it is conceived as the gate to the other world. In such rites, ascending is a special concept that is used not only for the mountain, but also for climbing any height that makes the person to be closed to the sky. Since the mountain is a way that leads to sky, it is the shelter of Taoists; after renunciation of the world, they go to the mountain that is a method for getting the union with the sky (Chevalier & Guerbran, 2005: 641). The doctrines of Islamic mysticism approach to the mount symbolically. In the narrative world and in real world as well and the biography of saints and wayfarers, the mountain is associated with sacredness and the presence of the sacred. The narrators and authors of narrations know the mountain as the place of the presence of the sacred, ascension and the religious experience. Since the mountain is a mediation between the Earth and the sky, the wayfarer, with dwelling in it, becomes close to the gateways of religious experience, the sacred and its attributes. In the mystics' works the concepts of mountain have been often mentioned according to what is taken in the Qur'an and other religions. However, some mystics have had different perspectives in relation to mountain element and used it as a symbol for the expression of mystical experiences and concepts. The two functions that is associated with the myths by the authors are the symbolization of truth and body. The mystics have expressed the symbolism of truth rather with the mount Qaf. One of the mystics' symbolization in relation with mountain is the symbolism of body.

Symbolism of Body and Worldly Attachments

The body and the soul are reproachable in mysticism and always disregarding it has been stressed. Since the soul's weakening and educating is not a simple task and associated with the hardships and the instances, the mystics have used some terrible symbols for. One of those concepts is mountain. In many mystic texts, the mountain is a symbol of the wayfarer's body and existence. Attar:

With an allusion to the story of Saleh's camel has taken the mountain as a symbol of human existence that if the wayfarer is able to split it, the spirit ascends. In the language of birds which is the adventure of seekers of Truth, the fiery mountains are on the way of wayfarers passing them is very difficult, but only by passing them they can reach the purpose. These fiery mountains are the symbol of sensuality and physical attachments.

Rumi also, inspired by the story of Moses and manifestation of Allah on Mount Sinai, has regarded the mountain as a wayfarer who for getting rid of darkness, breaks up the body to find clarity his spirit:

He, in other place, knows also the mountain as a symbol of mystic's existence that is annihilated in front of revelation of Truth:

In following distich the mountain is a symbol of body and existence:

Carving out a mountain with adze is difficult; the following distich it has been used to express the intensity of the hardship and suffering. The mountain is a symbol of body; the wayfarer must pass it for reaching the purpose, so with grief adze he splits the mountain body:

So the symbolization can be seen in the mystic interpretations. The mystics in the symbolical interpretations of some verses have known the mountain as a symbol of the human body, soul and existence. Ibn Arabi in the interpretation of verse 143 of Al-a'raf that refers to Moses' appointed place, considers the mount Sinai as a symbol of the human existence that against the manifestation of the Truth is annihilated: look at the mountain: namely the mountain of your existence that if it finds its place your observation becomes possible and it is impossible (Ibn Arabi, vol. 1, 240). Also in verse «كُلَّ جَبَلٍ مِنْهُنَّ عَلَى اجْعَلْ ثُمَّ «جُزْءاً» he interprets the mountain as body (ibid: 87). Rouzbehan Baghli in his Arays Al-bayan considers the mountain and the man in the same traits, and believes the mountain like human being is the place of self-revelation of Truth and the mirror of Divine acts (Rouzbehan Baghli, 2008, vol. 1,465).

Based on such evidences and like that, the mountain is one of the symbols that express the theme of the body and wayfarer's existence. In mysticism, the wayfarer's existence and body is the veil of vision of Truth and it should be removed. In Indian mythology, the sky is over the Himalayan mountains and the Meru, the largest peak of these mountains, is regarded the position of the gods (Evans, 2002: 200-202). In Greek mythology the Olympus is the dwelling of the greatest gods of Athens. In the cult of Mithraism, the mountain Hera Hera was the place to God. Some primitive tribes knew the grave of God over the mountain. "A tribe in Isles of the Philippines, the creator's grave was considered to be over Mount Kobonian". The body of Egypt's great gods was buried under the course sands of mountain" (Frazer, 2008: 292). Later that mummifying the bodies of Pharaohs was took into consideration, over their grave some pyramids were built. In Iran also the tomb of Achaemenid kings has been on top of the mountain.

Some mythological beliefs knew the heaven or sky to be over the mountain. In the myths of Mesopotamia, the mountain is the gateway to the entrance to the sky (heaven) (Gilgamesh, 2004: 72-76). In Chinese mythology the heaven is located over mount Coon-Loon and elixir of immortality just there can be found. This is the location of the climbing of Shmans who are in search of the herb of immortality

(McCall et. al., 2006: 296). So the mountain in some periods was considered as the place of ascension of spirits of the dead. In Mithraist beliefs that is one of the most ancient rites of initiation, the spirit of dead person goes to the top of Mountain from there to join the sky. In the period of Assyria, “to die” is meant “to take severely the mountain”. In the Ural-Altai beliefs the road of the dead leads to the top of the mountain. The legendary King of the Mongols, through the hard test of initiation, enters from a cave in the peak of mountain to the supersensible world; the Shaman’s falling into hell is begun from the cave. (Eliade, 2002: 53). Based on this the thought of climbing a mountain to meet God took shape. The mountain climb has a spiritual nature and is a symbol of achieving knowledge. For this reason, the knowledge rites the attempts are observed for spiritual Ascension over the mountain, and the one who passes over it gains the knowledge of God. Standing monasteries and temples on top of the mountain, the Shamans’ ritual climbs, pious retreat in the mountain to achieve mystical stations witness the claim. In Gnostic beliefs the man must be constantly in search of a way to reach to the sky, because the sky is his origin and the earth is the human descent and hated; hence the body is earthen and the source of troubles of spirit. In Islamic mysticism is also the spirit high and the body earthen and for its ascension and emancipation the body must be emancipated. Maybe the body accordingly has replaced with mountain, their common denominator also is disregarding and climbing. This change and evolution has been resulted from the human thought and knowledge progress and esotericism of ways to relation with God. So it can be claimed that the symbolism of body is the same mythological function of the mountain that is the mediation of reaching the sky and spirituality and pure truth and by passing it the Salvation becomes possible.

Mount Qaf and Symbolism of Truth

The mount “Qaf” is an important one in mystical works and has a symbolic form and is a place to meet with God and a place for nearness to God. One of the mystic versified works in which it is used in a symbolic way, is Attar’s language of birds. In this work that is the adventure of wayfaring of seekers of God, the Qaf is the place God-King (Phoenix) and wayfarers’ dwelling.

To reach this mountain and visit the King, it should pass from the seven difficult valleys and at the end only remain those who can attain the truth and the station of annihilation.

Suhrawardi has introduced in the story “the red intellect” the tenth intellect place, as well as the origin and destination of the human spirit as to be the mount Qaf; that has navigated round the world, and is eleven mountains and if you are emancipated from the string, you will go there, because you have been brought from there” (Suhrawardi, 2535: 265). In the treatise of “on the childhood condition” the Phoenix (Light of Light/Gabriel/active intellect) nest on Mount Qaf and a tree

(lote-tree) is over the Qaf, eating from its fruit (appearing the love of Light of Light) treats the heart disease. One who reaches this station, then he does not need any physician, he is physician himself" (ibid: 294). Rumi as well in his symbolizations has interpreted the Qaf as the origin and dwelling of human being, namely the divine world.

In the above distich, the Qaf is the location of proximity and the union and also the dwelling of the human spirit. He also has known the Qaf as the position of Phoenix:

Phoenix is a symbol for wayfarer the favorite of God and the Qaf the one for divine truth and spiritual world. In the following distich Rumi has used the Qaf in the meaning of the meeting place of meeting God and Phoenix is a symbol of mystic who has reached truth and his origin house is the mount Qaf:

In Persian literature Homa is the bird of good fortune and sometimes has been confused with Phoenix. Rumi has regarded Shams as Homa who dwells in the mount Qaf.

In this distich the Qaf is a symbol for the truth world and the favorite of God station. In terms of the mystics, the heart is the temple and the House of the Beloved and if it reaches to mirror, it will be the Truth manifestation place. Hence the heart as the Qaf: in the mythological beliefs and the Farthest Mosque in Islamic beliefs is the point of Ascension and connection to the Truth. In the above distich, the heart that is decorated with love of God, has been interpreted as Phoenix, Qaf and the farthest mosque. In this distich the Qaf is the symbol of the divine truth that manifests on the heart. This function in mysticism is similar to the mountain mythological functions and particularly the mount Qaf; based on this we embark upon the analysis of its mythological roots.

One of the most important functions of the mountain in Myths is centrality and the connection with the spiritual world. In Iranian myths this function is dedicated to the mount Qaf. The Qaf is one mythical mountain of the Iranians that has been tied with spirituality and religious experience. This mountain is deeply associated with the light that for Iranians is one symbol and manifestation of God, because they know it the place of the Sun. In addition, the Qaf is the dwelling of Phoenix (legendary sacred bird) that is associated with symbolization of God and sun. Iranians believe that the heroes who have ascended in the mountain (Kay Khosrow, Bijan, Giv and Bahram) will emerge from this mountain and follow Saoshyant. (Hynels, 2006: 436). In Islamic cosmology, the Qaf dominates on the earthen universe. The ancient Arabs thought that the earth is a flat page and the mount Qaf with an unpassable region is separated from the earth's circular page. The Qaf was considered as the fulcrum of earth. It is known as the end of the world; it is the border between the visible and invisible world and is not available (Chevalier & Guerbran, 2006: 644-645). In traditions, the fountain of the water of life is behind

this mountain and everyone who drink it, he does not die. Dhul Qarnayn is the only one who has reached the Qaf to achieve the water of life, but he did not reach the water. (Nishabouri, 2007: 330). In the mythology the Qaf has been considered equivalent with Alborz and Chinvat Bridge that in last day the spirits have to pass it is located in Alborz (Faranbagh Dadagi, 2011: 129). Kazzazi believes that the mount Alborz is a ritual mountain and an equivalent to Olympus in Greece (Kazzazi, 2001: 24). In *Shahnameh* Faranak brings Fereydoun to Mount Alborz and entrusts him to a religious man for educating him (religious education). Indeed, Fereydoun, like prophet, knows Alborz as the location of the prophetic mission:

Qaf in the Iranian mythology is the symbol of the center and equivalent with the central mountain in the other Nations' mythology, including Ziggurat, Indian Meru, Chinese Coon-Loon and the Greek Olymps. Spirituality and centrality of mountain was continued in historical period and the rise of monotheistic religions as well. In most of religions, the mountain is a symbol for conjunction with God and the prophetic Mission was associated with the mountain. Traditionally, Zoroaster also was inspired on top of the mountain and in accordance to Chapter 22 of *Vendidad* article 19 AHURA Mazda and Zoroaster conversed on the top of the mountain with together (Vendidad, 2009: 108). In the adventure of Saint Sacrifice also Abraham (PBUH) went to the top of a mountain and was ready for sacrificing the son (Torah, Genesis: 19). The Angel was revealed on Sinai, Jews' Holy Mount (Exodus 3: 1-4). On the basis of the texts attributed to the Prophet Musa (PBUH) the Creator gave him the Torah on the mountain (Exodus: 21). The birth and life of Jesus (PBUH) is also associated with the mountain. Mary when became pregnant the Jesus had gone into the mountain for retreat and Jesus (PBUH) ascended to the heaven in Mount Olive (R. K. Merghes, 9:1). Based on the Prophet's traditions he was sent to prophecy in the mount light and the Holy Quran was revealed to him. His ascension has been also on the holy house on hard rock. So the mountain that in mythology is the place of gods, is very important in religions also; it is considered as the location of Ascension and relationship with God; the difference is that the sacred position of mountain is tangible and concrete, but in religions is abstract and interpretable.

Based on such evidences and so on, the Qaf is a symbol of the divine world, the meeting point of Earth and sky, the gateway to the sky and "the eternal truth of human being that looks like the complete symbol of divine truth, because the Truth is revealed through Divine Names and Attributes (Chevalier & Guerbran: *ibid*: 646). In Persian myths, the Qaf is the gateway into the sky, the dwelling of Sun and Phoenix (the symbol of Sun). Ziggurat (and Mountain in general) in the myths of Mesopotamia, Coon-Loon in China, Meru in India and the Olympus in Greece have the functions similar to Qaf; that is, they are the symbol of the Center and the world's entry gateway. Mountain Hera in Mithraism, Sabalan in Zoroastrianism, Sinai in Judaism, mount Olive in Christianity and the Mount light in Islam represent

the same position of the Qaf in the beliefs and convictions of various Nations. The mythical sacredness of the mountain, as dwelling of Truth, has been preserved in mysticism also. Although the downward trend of the mountain role in human life represents a gradual fade of its sacredness, but thanks to the symbolic language it has survived in mysticism.

CONCLUSION

The symbolic functions of the mountain in mysticism that has the mythological origin are as follows: attaining truth that has been manifested in the mount Qaf and the body that has been revealed in the mountain in general.

1. Mountain in the monotheistic and non-monotheistic religions and myths has been the place of ascension. For some people ascending a mountain has been considered to achieve spiritual stations and the mountain climbing as an attempt to get to the truth. In mysticism for ascending and reaching the truth it should be passed the mountain body and disregarding the material body and soul is one principle of wayfaring. It can be said that in myths one of the functions of the mountain that has been one means of ascension and entrance to the spiritual world has evolved in mysticism and with internalization of climbing it has been replaced with the body. The use of the symbol of mountain for body strengthens the claim that the above mentioned function in mysticism is the transformed form of that of mountain in Myths and is rooted in ritual and mythical beliefs.
2. Mount Qaf that in the myths is a mysterious, spiritual mountain and a meeting point the upper world, in mysticism it is a joining point with the sky and divine realm and spiritual truth. So it can be said that being aware of the importance and sacredness of mountain in mythology and religion the mystics have found it a good symbol for expressing the mystical and sublime the concepts; since the Qaf in Mythology has had a great importance, ambiguity and spirituality, they have used it as a symbol for the unknown spiritual world and the place for union. On this basis, the symbolic function of the mount Qaf in mysticism has had its origin in myths and the religion has strengthened this approach as a strong point.

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