

Days in Popular Culture (Case study: Gerash, Fars Province, Iran)

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Abstract

Days in themselves are reckoned not to have any influence on the human beings but as it is believed by the general public they have been determined to have specifications and the same as many other beliefs people have been urged to obey them. Such vulgar beliefs with a great deal of diversity are very common among the people living in the city of Gerash. In the present study the vulgar beliefs in relation to the days being infelicitous and felicitous have been surveyed. Along with presenting a description of the various kinds of the beliefs regarding the days we have also dealt with the comparisons between the beliefs the people have in the city of Gerash with some of the other cities corresponding to the study backgrounds.

Keywords: Days, folk beliefs, popular culture, Gerash city

Introduction

The topic of some of the days being felicitous or infelicitous is very common and ordinary among many people; and it is in such a manner that it brings about a collective and general reaction among the people. Of course, the very superstitious beliefs have been indicated to have changed the fate of a community and they are showcased in the people's lives very similar to the human rules and regulations and they are found to be interlaced in a folkloric manner in the people's lives within a society. Folklore is realized as the beliefs and the actions performed by a group of people which do not allegedly seem to be corresponding to the scientific and rational rules of the society and these beliefs are mostly practiced through imitation and vying and of course amusement (Ruholamini, 1998).

Regarding the time when an action should be carried out, Mahyar (2004) believes that the choice of the hour, i.e. pinpointing the most appropriate timing that an action or a job should be commenced is regarded as a favorable and intended issue (Sarfi and Afazel, 2010). The general public's beliefs and thoughts can, in a respect, be divided into two groups: the first are the thoughts and the beliefs that have been gained by the rational and good-natured people through experience and they, instead, have tried to distribute and broadcast such thoughts and beliefs through inventing myths and anecdotes and they have encased their ethical instructions and social guidelines to guide and educate the people within these legends and anecdotes. The other type of the thoughts and the beliefs are those which are based on superstitions and irrational thoughts which have been deliberately or unintentionally coined and promoted among the people by the malevolent and failed individuals of the society, such as heinous tendencies related to voodoo or some of the strange and peculiar prays and abracadabra magical words (She'rbafiyani, 2004).

But, the people usually are thoughtless of the goodness or the badness of the beliefs. It can be stated that the people are seeking to find a solution to resolve their problems and to favorably advance their goals and intentions and they sometime move well beyond resorting to anything and any phenomenon. But, can it be claimed that such beliefs are exclusive of the general public? Ruholamini points out that "folklores are very customary and common among the entire groups and the families within a society including the general public and the elites or particular groups".

In the present study, the customary vernacular and obsolete beliefs related to the days of the week and their state of being felicitous or infelicitous have been gathered somehow in advance and

it has been attempted to analyze and compare such beliefs with the beliefs people have in the city of Sirjan in Kerman Province, the city of Bastak in Hormozgan Province and the city of Sangsar in Kashan. The beliefs possessed by the people living in the city of Gerash are deeply rooted in the heart of the history. These beliefs may have been of an applied use in the past and they have been determined to have clear-cut and vivid reasons and goals but they are still carrying on, in the majority of the cases regardless of such beliefs roots and origins and as a result of being only derived from the society's customs and traditions. The culture of the people from Gerash (one of the Larestan's cities) is very rich in terms of the vernacular beliefs and of course these beliefs and credence are not identical for everyone, rather they are common among the different social group in varying degrees.

The objectives of the study

1. The survey of the general culture common among the general public regarding the days of the week in the city of Gerash and the respective classifications;
2. Descriptions on the days of the week being felicitous and infelicitous in the culture of the general public in the city of Gerash.

The survey of the vernacular culture history

Focusing on and paying attention to the traditions and customs and the language of the general public and the interesting and fascinating topics worthy to be heard have always been considered as one of the writers and authors' entertaining and favorable issues. In the anthropology books, Herodotus, the Greek historian, is usually named as the first individual who has written materials on the nations' traditions and customs in his book, "History". Among the Muslims, some of the writers have dealt with some of the issues and the subject matters regarding the general public's culture (Fazeli, 2007). Of course, it is worth mentioning that it is not fair to say that paying attention and concentrating on the culture and the general public's literature is specifically unique to the contemporary era. Some of the specimens of the rituals and traditions can be found in the previous works, as well (Ghojagh, 2004).

According to Abolghasem Anjavi Shirazi, the first individual who compiled and authored folkloric topics in Iran is Mr. Jamal Khansari (Fazeli, 2007). Folklore has a more prolonged history in Europe as compared to Iran and the Europeans began to see things beforehand and therefore they gathered and compiled the general public's knowledge before it suffers any harm or being totally destroyed upon bearing witness to the machine civilization influence and the effect it might have on the beliefs, traditions and customs (Mo'ayyed Mohseni, 2002).

A review of the study background

Hedayat (1931) in his work "the legend" has expressed his primitive comments on the culture of the people and dealt with its territory (Dalvand, 2006).

Hedayat (1933) in his work "witchcraft" deals with the study of the felicity and infelicity of the days along with the survey of the various issues (Aryanpoor, 2001). Sadeq Hedayat (1944-1945) gradually published his long and valuable article named "folklore or the mass culture" and the people's culture was for the first time investigated as an integrated whole (Dalvand, 2006).

Jamalzadeh (1951) published his massive work called "there was one, and there was not another" and his massive and huge work named "the slang dictionary" was published in 1962 (Ekrami, 2006).

A'azami Sangsari (1970) collected the vulgar and vernacular beliefs of the people from Sangsar in the city of Kashan and it has been published in several parts including different sections containing vulgar beliefs which have been gathered and compiled in a case study and observatory format incorporating topics regarding the sky and its sceneries, the snow and the rain, children,

dullness, funeral, animals, poultry, sparrow and partridge, insects, plants and trees, etc. (A'azami Sangsari, 1970).

Ahmad Shamloo (1978) published his researches in a collection of writings called "the alley" and he has tried to collect and gather the entire words and renderings and the expressions which were used by the people in the streets and markets from a literary standpoint along with the words' roots and derivatives within the context of the literature texts (Ekrami, 2006).

Mahmoudi (1995) in the local journal which is published in the city of Gerash and called "the neighbor" has made references to the belief in curing a disease called "Tabsiyak" in the section entitled "Khamoo narrations".

Mo'ayyed Mohseni (2002) published his massive work of art regarding the culture of the people in the city of Sirjan and it is considered as a comprehensive work on the culture and the traditions and rituals people have in the city of Sirjan and it has been based on field and observation studies methods. He realizes folklore as a collection of the knowledge which encompasses rituals and traditions and superstitions and feelings related to the individuals' corporeal and spiritual lives with which the human beings are connected from the time they are born till the time they die (Mo'ayyed Mohseni, 2002: 1).

She'rbafiyani (2004) has published his work entitled "the vulgar beliefs in Iran as reported by the western tourists" and he has tried to make use of the writings and articles presented by the tourists and voyagers and the itineraries. He has divided the general public's thoughts and opinions into two kinds: one is the thoughts and the beliefs which have been compiled by the reasonable and good-natured people through experience and they have in return invented legends and anecdotes to promote and distribute such thoughts and opinions and the other is the unreasonable and superstitious beliefs which have been forged and promoted intentionally or inadvertently by the malevolent and the defeated individuals. In this literary work, there has been made references to some of the good hours and the infelicitous and felicitous days for instance when it is better to take a bath, when it is more appropriate to get married, take a shower and so forth (She'rbafiyani, 2004).

Aghajanzadeh (2007) in an article called "a glance at the vulgar beliefs" meanwhile expressing that the general public literature or the people mass culture or the folklore jargon and the general public knowledge is an amalgamation of the traditions and rituals, legends, proverbs, songs, dilemmas, myths, superstitions, magic and voodoo, vernacular medicine attempted to study and evaluate their beliefs and traditions regarding birth, death, marriage, agriculture, prophecy, dances and things alike in Mahmoud Abad County Persian literature department website.

Sarfi and Afazel (2010) dealt with the survey of the astronomical rules and the relevant beliefs.

Goldstein Kenneth S. (1992) in article called "the continuation of the folklore ethnography strategy" makes references to the religious rituals in the form of the traditions and customs. For example, in a specific area in the US if a person plants a knife or something of the like beneath the bed it means that s/he is attempting to eliminate the pain and the agony incurred after birth.

Robert Georges (1995) states that the traditions and the customs as the body of the culture are effective and meaningful and they include adventures, music, dance, languages, and oral history and so on. Sometimes, the study of the culture is termed the scientific study of the races from the perspective of the folkloristic traditions and customs. Traditions can be divided into four study areas, and they are: fabricated or artificial, descriptive, culture and behavior (rituals) and it is also asserted that the study of any of these areas cannot be fulfilled in separation or apart from the others.

Sterinati (2001) in his work, named “an introduction to the general public culture theories”, approaches the general public culture from the perspective of the mass cultures and Gramsci, Marxism and feminism.

Yelena (2006) Weekdays were seen as positive (easy) or negative (difficult). The positive or negative nature of the day may have influenced the outcome of the work undertaken. The yearly system was based on the change of seasons.

A review of the extant theories

There exists this possibility to divide superstitions into two groups: one sort is the superstitious thoughts which are individualistic and the behavioral harms originating from holding such beliefs are directly intended to be directed to the individuals themselves, and the other one are the superstitions which tend to encompass the social aspects, common thoughts and irrational feelings to which many of the people are found bounding and believing in.

In a general look, we can consider two types of superstitions: one is the superstitions which are rooted in our very own land and territory and the other are the superstitions which have infiltrated from the people from the other lands to our culture and beliefs.

The superstitions can be classified into the following divisions in terms of their nature and emergence:

- a) Inductive superstitions: which are the aforementioned individualistic superstitions and they are figured out to be invented and inculcated by the individuals themselves.
- b) Defensive superstitions.
- c) Projective superstitions which are envisaged to fabricate fake culprits.
- d) Verve-driven superstitions
- e) Pacifying superstitions
- f) Haunt superstitions such as believing in the ghosts and ogres
- g) Spurious superstitions (She’rbafiyān, 2004).

In order for the traditions and the rituals to be incorporated in the realm of the vulgar knowledge (folklore), they have to be having three characteristics:

- a) They have to be common in the society and be practiced by a great majority of the people.
- b) They have to be continuously exercised and they are required to have transferred from at least one generation to the other.
- c) The individuals have to spontaneously and normally practice them without being propelled by any other external force (Ruholamini, 1998).

The collection of the cultural paradigm which possesses the following features can be recounted as being incorporated in the folkloric studies: the cultural patterns which are commonly practiced by a great majority of the people and the people have come to accept them. The cultural paradigms the acceptance and practicing of which has been turned into a “social habit” and that are considered as certain and true by the people and that are needless of the intellectual and reasonable justification and affirmation. The cultural patents which have been collectively generated in and as a result of the social and group life and the society is their generator and in cases that they are made by an individual they are deemed unknown and their application and use is considered as not important by the people (Fazeli, 2007).

Clinberg expresses five factors as the underlying reasons behind the mental causes for the emergence of the superstitious thoughts from the sociological perspectives: 1- the human astonishment upon bearing witness to the nature, 2- ignorance and lack of knowledge, 3- fearfulness, 4- wishes and dreams, 5- imitation (Clinberg, 1983).

The great philosopher and interpreter of the Islam world, Allameh Tabataba'ee, in his "Al-Mizan explication" offers utterances regarding the days being felicitous or infelicitous a summary of the translation of which is as below:

"The infelicity of a day or part of a day means in that specific period of time nothing would be resulting other than evil and badness and the human actions, or at least a special type of action, for the doer of the action would be resulting in nothing but non-prosperity and disadvantage. The felicity of the day is quite opposite. We can never provide proofs for claiming the felicity of a day or a specific period of time or their infelicity. Thus, through having a careful look at the time we can confirm that there is no difference between this day or that one in order to be able to recognize a day as being bad and infelicitous and the other day as good and felicitous; but there are factors and reasons influencing the occurrences and incidents and affect the fulfillment and accomplishment of the acts of which we are not aware and have no concrete and decisive knowledge about it and we cannot assess parts of time with the factors which interact and are accordingly operative in specific periods of time and subsequently we cannot understand that what functions do these factors serve in that specific period of time and is their function in a manner that it renders specific periods of time felicitous or infelicitous? (Al-Mizan)

Avicenna writes "the time can never be regarded as the subjective reason for anything's happening; rather it is the container within which something takes place, and it is for the same reason that, if anything as a result of its unclear and thus unknown cause, within a specific and given time, bring about the conditions for something to emerge or vanish, because the real and original cause is unclear and unknown, then the people would have no other choice but to relate the very incident to its container which is the time or a specific period of time and consequently if the event is a good and lucky one then they praise the time it has been actualized and if it is found bad and infelicitous then the event and the time are denounced and accused (Ayat Allah Mar'ashi Najafi, 1985).

The study methodology and the study population

The research methodology is based on a field and observatory study, in some of the cases observation accompanied with participation and the interview methods have also been taken advantage of to gather information. Documentary methods have also been applied to compare some corners of the cultures. The study population includes the city of Gerash which is situated in the southern section of Fars Province and it is located in a 355-kilometer distance in the southern part of the city of Shiraz. The city is the capital of Gerash. The study city population is 47000 people according to the statistical calculations obtained from the census which was carried out in 2011, out of which 30000 people are living in the city and 17000 people live in the villages. The people in Gerash speak with Ajami dialect (Wikipedia).

Study findings

A glance at the days of the week

Saturday

1. Saturday is an ominous and unlucky day and there is this belief that if anything takes place on Saturday then it will continue till the last day of the week and thus it is tried not to go for a visit or for mourning and it is in such a manner that mourning on Saturdays has been turned into something taboo and banned. No one mourns and goes to funerals on Saturdays and the night before till Saturday afternoons, no one participates in mourning or funeral ceremonies and no one is commiserated on this day.

2. No one pays debts on Saturdays, because it is believed that the individual will be continuing paying and spending money till the end of the week.

3. It is believed that if a new cloth is sewed on Saturdays and if a new cloth is put on it will not be lasting long.

4. No one should wear black clothes on Saturdays.

5. Haircut, cutting fingernails and combing the hair are not deemed as appropriate and allowed on Saturdays and it is regarded as the reason for ones decrease in the sustenance and aliment. It is customary among the people in Sirjan that no one should manicure or cut their fingernails because it is believed that they would lose a dear person and they do not take part in mourning ceremonies on Saturdays because they believe that they will be having such ceremonies up to the end of the week (Mo'ayyed Mohseni, 2002).

Sunday

6. They consider the Sundays as the "one and enough" day on which they can accomplish whatever they wish for and it is believed that it will not be continuous. For instance, one can go for expressing condolence and so forth.

Monday

7. If the person sets out on a journey on Monday s/he will be having troubles; but, there is this belief among the people in Sirjan that the best day for taking a trip is Monday and the worst day for travelling is Tuesday and they believe that Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays are good for commencing a journey and Saturdays, Tuesdays and Thursdays are considered as not fitting and appropriate for taking a trip (Mo'ayyed Mohseni).

8. Cutting one's fingernails on Mondays is envisaged as being good for one's eyesight.

Tuesday

9. If a person happens to cut his or her fingernail on Tuesday s/he will get sick. In the general public's idea in Sirjan there is this belief that Tuesdays and Wednesdays are not good for cutting fingernails and it is said that the individual doing so will be defamed and slandered and as it is so-called the individual will be surprised (Mo'ayyed Mohseni, 2002).

10. Sewing chador is not regarded as being appropriate and good on Tuesdays- there is this belief among the people in Sangsar that cutting and tailoring clothes on Tuesdays will end in the cloth being burnt (A'azami Sangsari, 1970).

11. One should not wash his or her head on Tuesdays to the maximum extent it is possible.

12. On Tuesdays it is not good to comb the hair because the doer of such an action will be spoken about by the people (the individual will be disgracefully defamed before everyone).

13. It is said that the people are usually backbitten and slurred and libeled on Tuesdays.

Wednesdays

14. One should not take a bath on Wednesday nights because the individual will be haunted by sprites and the individual will be found to have head shivers. There is this belief among the people living in Sangsar that it is ordered by the Great Apostle of Islam (peace be upon him) not to take a shower or bath on Wednesdays (A'azami Sangsari, 1970).

Thursdays and Friday

15. The Thursdays and Fridays are the great Islam's tradition and they are considered as auspicious and felicitous days.

Unlucky and infelicitous days

1. The last Wednesday in Safar: one of the beliefs and opinions which is still exercised by Gerash families and they are still bound to it is the ritual which is held on the last Wednesday in

Safar. Wednesday is infelicitous and Safar is also inauspicious and ominous. The parents paint the children's stomachs indigo (in the form of four Cs) and in case the children resist and are stubborn they are told that if you do not paint indigo the old woman will come and take you with herself. Anyhow, there is this belief that the last Tuesday in Safar no one should broom the house because the house will be crawling with ants (merogeraa).

Master Poordavood writes "setting on fire by the Iranians on the day before Nowrooz is one of the ancient rituals and ceremonies. There is no doubt that holding the ceremony of setting fire on the night before the last Wednesday had become customary before Islam. That is because the Iranians did not have Saturdays and Fridays and Wednesday or the fourth Saturday was considered as ominous and unlucky by Arabs". Jahez has written in his 'benefits and paradoxes' that "the fourth Saturday is infelicitous and unfortunate". In the vulgar beliefs Wednesday is an unlucky day. One should not take a trip on Wednesday, one should not go to visit patients on this day and it is said by Manoochehri Damqani that: "Wednesday is the day of disasters and catastrophes, drink wine, drink with big glasses of wine in order to pass it safely and immunity".

Some attribute the setting of the fire on the last Wednesday night of the year or the last Wednesday in Safar to the rise of Mokhtar. The famous Arab commander ordered the Shi'ites to set fire on their rooftops upon getting freed of the prison and rising for the vengeance of the martyrs in Karbala in order to distinguish the proponents from the opponents and start a raid on the Kaffirs and this very night coincided with the last Wednesday of the year and it became customary from that they on. in some of the cities in Iran including Ilam (Nowrooz Abad), Toyserkan, Kashan, Zahedan (Ghasabeh Mavad) and so many other cities the ceremony of Chaharshanbeh Souri (setting fire on the last Wednesday of the year before the new year's arrival) is held on the last Wednesday of Safar and setting on the last fire is also considered as an old tradition. Based on Safavid biography of the city of Kerman, Chaharshanbeh Souri was held in Safar. The infelicitous nature of the Wednesdays in the vulgar and general public's opinions is the reason behind not going for a visit to a patient on Tuesdays' afternoons (Wednesday nights) (Tebian, 2004).

2. Thirteenth of Safar is also considered as an ominous and infelicitous day in a way that almost everyone usually donate alms on this day in order to stay immune of the ominousness and infelicity of the day.

3. The thirteenth day in Nowrooz (New Year) is also considered as ominous and unlucky and in order to repel the infelicity of the day people usually leave their houses and take a short trip to the nature and wilderness. Phillip Waring has also mentioned that in Iran the superstitious people consider 13 as an unlucky number and there are two 13s among the Iranians which are regarded as the most infelicitous and the most ominous ones, one of them is the thirteenth of Farvardin (April) on which staying at home and working are not allowed and the people should get themselves busy with recreation and happiness and the second one is the thirteenth of Safar which is said that whoever who takes a trip on this day will not return healthy or on foot (Waring, 2004).

Discussion and conclusion

The current study deals with the survey of the vulgar beliefs regarding the days of the week which were classified in two areas of weekdays and the ominous days. Along with describing some of the beliefs, the similar cases from the other cities have also been presented. Similarities can be easily pointed out between the customary and common beliefs from various cities.

These beliefs can allegedly be traced, as put by Cline Berg, firstly into the people's fears and their astonishment of the region, secondly these beliefs are rooted in ignorance and lack of

knowledge in some of the simple-minded people and thirdly it is envisaged that such vulgar beliefs have stemmed from the individuals' imitations from one another. Speaking from a gender perspective it can be clearly stated that the prevalence of such beliefs is high in both of the genders, but the same as many of the other superstitious beliefs and according to the fact that the women are in charge of the families and their responsibilities regarding the family member health and maintaining the family properties, it seems that women are more prone to such superstitious beliefs. According to the ideas and notions opined by the Holy Quran the beliefs regarding the unfortunateness and infelicity of the days of the week are superstitious and cannot be attributable and this is the individuals' actions and deeds that render days of the week ominous or felicitous.

In the anthropological studies the survey of the general public's beliefs may turn out as the most superstitious topics but can they really be considered as superstitions. The beliefs held by every ethnicity are born out of their needs and requirements. Such beliefs are very popular among the entire population in Gerash, they have been retained and passed down from generation to generation and the people normally practice them. Have people preserved their own beliefs in the current modern world? In the present study which has been carried out based on observation and interview, the prevalence and the exercising of such vulgar beliefs regarding the days of the week and the forbiddance of some of the works on special days and certain occasions are clearly observable and tangible.

Exercising such beliefs is intertwined with the people's lives and the individuals who do not observe them are considered as violators and the consequences resulting from ignoring such ideas and beliefs in the daily lives of the people may engage a family or even a kinship group, specially not performing the ominous and infelicitous works on Saturdays is highly emphasized and stressed.

The classification of the superstitious thoughts pointed out by She'rbafiyani can be observed in the various kinds of the vulgar beliefs regarding the days of the weeks studied in the current research in the city of Gerash.

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