The instable web of spider (a review in myths and literature)

Kamran Pashaei Fakhri, Rogaye Mahmudivand Bakhtiyari, Parvaneh Adelzadeh

ABSTRACT

In some poetical and literary works, myths and legends and spoken and written piece a creature called “spider” can be traced. We annihilate this wonderful and small creature indifferently while in a surah, Quran refers to hesitation on this wonderful creature for believers and scholars. Although it is considered for its weak webs and architecture of its nest in this surah, but God offers details for solving problems and achieving holistic conclusion for believers. God wants to attract believers’ attention to his magnificence in creation of this small creature. We studied many poetical, literary and mythical works and miracles about spider web and concluded that this creature appears sometimes negatively and deceitful and sometimes positively and acceptable in some myths. This article aims to investigate the positive and negative aspects of spider in myths and Persian literature.

Key words: spider in Persian literature, spider in myths, spider in Quran.

Introduction

In Persian literature, spider sometimes represents devil temptation, greed, and weak natured and sometimes narrow minded humans. The weak web of spider has been interwoven in Persian poetry and literature and this representation has been accompanied by spirituality and religiosity. In attractive speech, God likens those who worship other goddesses instead of divine God to spider that builds unstable house. This resemblance has been manifested well in Muslim poets’ works. Of course God refers to his power and magnificence in creation of this creature. We encounter with positive aspects of this insect in religious texts, tales and narratives: by its weak and unstable web spider prevented the enemy to entering in holy place of Prophet Hazrate Mohammad (peace be upon him) by order of God by weaving web on the cave opening in order to protect him and arriving him to Medina. Because of threatening appearance, spider was considered source of superstitions and like two sides of a coin these superstitions are sometimes positive and sometimes negative and dreadful. In the past a cross was placed for spiders in the garden to prevent to hostility of spider with human. In some cultures spider was considered like a golden coin that leads to wealth and abundance.

In Naoran myths spider is creator of world as god of Anap that creates sky, earth, sun and moon from seashell by triton horn. In African myths spider is called Anansi as a lazy, smart, sensual, self concieved, deceitful, rich and metamorphosis creature. In general spider has positive and negative aspects in all myths. These myths and legends are rooted in people beliefs. This article tries to respond to following questions:

1-what is the appearance of spider in holy Quran and miracles?
2-How spider is interpreted in Persian literature?
3-What stories and narratives refer to spider?
4-How is spider represented in nations myths?

By considering beautiful web of spider according to Quran, Persian literature and myth causes that we pay attention to the creature. In order to study the concepts about this sly creature we investigated myths.

Spider in dictionary:

Spider is “gods” in Arabic, “cartineh”, “shirmagas”and “caroton” in Persian, ”and “Adkhon” in Greek and “kovaeri” in Syrian and “ormjack” in Turkish, “Arjan” in Hebrew and “makarei” in India. There are different types of spider with special names. Some of them are found in corners of houses .They are cold and dry natured and some of them are hot since their white tissue called “aberkiya” in Greek is mixed with flower oil and pressed in ear to relive pain and its tissue is placed on a cotton textile and put it on the forehead to relive fever [1,2].

Corresponding Author

Dr. Kamran Pashaei Fakhri; Department of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran.
Spider in Quran:

Spider in Quran is symbol of announcing people about avoiding superstition of idolatry. God likens them to home of spider:

“The example of those who take allies other than Allah is like that of the spider who takes a home. And indeed, the weakest of homes is the home of the spider, if they only knew” [2]

This surah is called “Ankabout” referring to miracle 41 that God likens idolaters who found their houses on unstable foundation as spider that establishes weak and unstable web [3].

Instable supports like spider web:

In preceding miracles of miracle 41, the painful fate of who do not believe in God, tyrant, unjust and selfish people are expressed by expressive examples. These miracles invite us to think about unstable supports and find more concepts; the example of those who take allies other than Allah is like that of the spider who takes a home. And indeed, the weakest of homes is the home of the spider, if they only knew.

Interesting example and expressive and exact simile:

Every animal has own nest but spider home is weak and unstable.

Basically every house should have wall and ceiling and protect the owner and meets his needs. Although some houses do not have ceiling but they have walls but spider house lacks wall and ceiling and support in one hand and it is so unstable that it could not resist on trivial incidents and it collapse by insignificant pressure. The false goddesses of these people could not solve any problems and they could not aid them.

Although it is true that spider rests in its web and it is a place for trapping of the prey but it is unstable compared to nest of other animals and insects. Those who do not rely on God their support is unstable like spider web. Pharos thorns and Croesus treasure and kings’ palaces and treasures are like unstable web of spider. The history shows that human could not rely on unstable supports but human could reach perfection by rely on God.

It is necessary to point that although spider web is unstable but it is one of the wonders in creation that indicates God magnificence. Architecture, material and its engineering is wonderful. By attention to structure of a web we see a wonderful view like sun with its rays on the the web. This web is ideal for a spider but in general it is unstable and it is considered as home of who does not rely on God.

According to this fact that there are different kinds of spider and the scientists have discovered twenty thousand spiders by different characteristics so the splendid of God is becomes obvious [3].

Spider in Persian literature:

Terms and compounds used for spider:

Resemblance to spider: in this couplet the poet points to individuals that oppress to their subordinates in one hand and they consider themselves superior individuals in other hand. As it is obvious the poet refers to the spider that weaves web on the cave opening by order of God for protecting the prophet:

You tear the skin of a fox like a dog
Where you weave the web like a spider [4],

Astrolabe spider: (a web of astrolabe that name of months and stars are written on it). Sometimes some instruments are called spider due to physical appearance.

But it is not seen like a spider
That it looks like a spider astrolabe [5]

My face is pale like astrolabe
Because of wound of nail like astrolabe spider [6]

It reflects inseparable parts [7]

Devil spider:

It means demon temptation:
Devil spider tempt you
Not partridge and eagle [8]

Fly trap spider:
It is irony for greedy:
Alas those greedy people who are like a spider
Trap flies like vulture seeking dead corpus [4].

(Professor Rahim Afifi,Farhang namehe sheri [9].

Spider in the poetry:

The poet refers to instability of of spider web and considers all creatures weak against eternal existence of God like a spider web:

In the place that there is possibility of demonstration
The world is like spider web [4].

In this couplet the poet points to greatness and splendid of creation and weveing web on the Soor cave opening for protection of the prophet:

He makes a sward from fly beating
Like a spider that makes a web [4].

In the following couplet the poet by referring to miracle 41 points to this fact that the spider should not be threatened as a symbol of weak and lazy and mean human. The real enemy is the bee as symbol of meanness and hostility:

In the world why you fear the spider
Where there is infidel bee [7].

The poet refers to magnificence of God in creation of spider:

The weak spider does not know that
When it goes to hunting like wild animals
Its share is a web
That the prey is trapped in it helplessly [10];
In this couplet, spider is symbol of ugly and apparently weak persons that in case of necessity and peril disobey all rules:
One day a fly said a spider
Your leg is long and thin
Spider said if you trap in my web
That time the world will be dark for you [10].

Spider is symbol of devil and fly is symbol of lazy and weak people in this couplet:
You are spider and trap fly
I am not fly do not put me in trouble [8];

Spider is symbol of narrow minded people and human is symbol of pious myst:
The human knows that this world is not eternal
The spider builds its home on unstable web
In the poet opinion spider is symbol of worldly people:
You consider that spider has phoenix nature
Where a tent is camped by gossamer

Human is astrolabe of truth sun and everything reflected in human existence representing manifestation of God .The poet believes that spider body is symbol of complexity of human existence:
There are spider drawings on the astrolabe
That demonstrates eternal traits
Spider represents facts about eternality and world
Spider and astrolabe predict without fortuneteller
The poet likens reason to spider in offering weak and instable thoughts:
When the phoenix finds trap near the prey
Spider of reason whenever weaves this web

Shams Tabrizi Divan [11]:

In referring to this fact that the only way to rescue is rely on God the poet points to weaving web on the Soor cave opening; so that the spider with its weak web rescues the prophet and for this reason spider is represented positively:
Khaghani ran away from events trouble
He ran away from shelter
Like an ant that ran away from fly sting and bee
Like a spider that weaved web on the cave opening for protect from elephant
He ran away from Kiblah of creator of elephant

Khaghani Shervani Divan, [7]:

In this couplet the poet believes that there is no shelter except rely on God and she advises human to weave a web around his divine soul to protect it from sensuality, meanness and tyranny like a spider that weaved a web around Soor cave to protect the prophet:
Learn from spider web on the ceiling and door of existence

Parvin Etesami Divan, [12]:

According to the poet spider in this couplet likens to humans that rely on insignificant and meaningless affairs instead of rely on God and prophet family since the web of spider is weak and unstable.
Rely on prophet, Ali and his family
Do not follow insignificant and useless affairs
Do not weave foolishness web around yourself

Sanaei Ghaznavi Divan, [13]:

Spider from psychologists view point:

In psychologists opinion the spider that sits in middle of its web and it is threatening in some viewpoint is an extraordinary symbol of introversion and egotism and it is sign of self centered and self-conceit [14].

Spider in mystical viewpoint:

In mystical perspective spider web resembles to naval that a strip connects creature to creator and the creature tries to ascent toward creator. This concept was suggested by Plato and it was mentioned by Dionysius Aryopagosi: let ascent toward divinity by our prayers like that we hold a holy strip hanging from sky by our hands and suppose that we lower this light strip but our effort is aimless since this string is between upper and lower and we ascend toward top [14].

Spider in nations’ myths:

Spider in myths:

Spider has dual figures in folklore and myths. Some naive individuals believe that spider causes to hostility, trouble and even wealth. Some people dislike spider and do not touch it although it is devil, treacherous and mean creature but it is paradigm of rationality. It is assumed that theme of spider curved on gemstone is a talisman that offers power of fortunetelling. Indeed, there are different viewpoints about spider. In traditional European culture spider weaves a web to conceal Jesus. Spider saved life of Hazrate Mohammad and great Fredrick. The story of Robert Brass and spider indicates this moral point that belief and resistance cause to victory .Spider web is considered as imaginations. Spider weaves web and traps insects and it creates and kills so it is symbol of forces change that dependent on life. The cross hanged in the gardens caused to friendship between human and spider .Like tadpole spider plays an important role in medicine in folklore culture since it was believed that both of them have fine stones in their bodies with healing properties. Ishmael the expert in antiquates treated fever with placing three spiders on his neck. In the past a spider was placed on the raisin, butter or walnut and by
dying of spider the patient suffering whooping cough was treated. Spider web was used for covering wound and it was believed that it cured wart. Golden spider was symbol of gold and when sits on a person body brings him wealth and if it is place in the pocket it changes to coin or the person is offered new clothes. In Norfok it was believed that if a golden spider hangs on a person head he will win in soccer on the water [15].

Spider is symbol of device for weaving and spinning. Spider web remembers Parka (fate goddesses). There is consensus about instability and weakness of spider web in Quran and Bible: He builds his home like spider. Like a field watchman who builds a shelter. He sleeps like rich man but he will not be buried. He opens his eyes and he does not see anything [Job (27:18)] [14].

Spider in Polonezy and Micronezy:

Creation of earth and sky:

In polonezy and Micronezy myths spider creates sky and earth. He created sky and earth from sea shell. In Micronezy islands (Gilber islands) Naro the god of spider is superior creature: Nauruan myth from Areop-Anap and creation of sky and earth from seashell exemplify theme of “creator of sky” that this myth is common in Polonezy and east of Polonezy. At first there was only air, ocean and Areop-Anap old spider wandered in endless space. One day it found a circle object called seashell and it could open it by small triton shell horn and it put the creature in the shell in the west part of the seashell and moon was created from it. It could see silkworm by light of moon. It demanded butterfly to open its shell and the butterfly threw salty sweat on the ground and it changed to sea and the butterfly died and the sky was created then Areonap-Anap placed big triton horn in east and the sun was created.

The close narrative to this myth is a story from Gilbert Islands that Nareau removed sky and earth by light of moon. It demanded butterfly to open its shell and the butterfly threw salty sweat on the ground and it changed to sea and the butterfly died and the sky was created then Areonap-Anap placed big triton horn in east and the sun was created.

The female spider wanted to go to the field. The lazy spider rested beside a brook under a tree in its way to field. The spider drank some water and ate the peanuts and slept and it woke up in the evening and soaked on mud and went to its home and it was repeated several days until harvesting time. The female spider wanted to go to the field. The spider went to the neighbors’ fields and stole their peanuts. After awhile it was inspected and the neighbors put a trap in its way. They built a sculpture of a girl with rubber and put it in the field. Next morning the spider saw a beautiful girl with long neck and big breasts and it went to touch it and said it is obvious you love me and it trapped there and the neighbors came and hit it and removed its skin[15].

In other myth it is said that one day Anansi wanted maize from god and it promised that it returns hundred salvages. God gave it and it could give hundred slaves to god by deceits and the god became content and appointed it as commander of sky army and then it was called Anansi [16].

About shortening of Anansi it is said that one day a king had a big and beautiful ram. He liked it and the ram could go everywhere it wanted and who bothered it was put in death. A farmer called Anansi in territory of this king. He had a big farm and planted maize there. He harvested many products. One day Anansi went to his farm and saw that the farm was destroyed by the ram. He became angry and took a big stone and killed the ram and the king hit him and broke his bones and after that day Anansi changed to broken legs spider that lives in corner of houses and avoids people [16].

About fraud of spider it is said that one day god chose spider as commander of his army and it was so proud that it said it is wise than god and the god became angry and said it to bring something and since it was unaware of god intent collected different feathers and pasted them to its body so that the god could not recognize it and then by this trick it knew god purpose and deceived it [16].

Spider in Inca myth:

In the ancient Inca emperor divination was common by spider; the fortuneteller placed a spider in his bowl. When the spider did not move its legs the person was unlucky (ROWL) [14].

Spider in Japanese myth:
In Japanese myth spider is mean, the devil creator that attacks on heroes and leaders of a nation.

Raiko, Yayuri Mitso:

Four heroes protected Raiko the leader of Minamoto. Raiko attacked on Oeni giants that attacked on women in the mountains. The leader of giants ate human blood and he was skilled in fencing. Raiko and his heroes killed them bravely. Raiko lived in a magnificent palace in Kyoto and he had many servants. He was sick and his servants protected him. One night a strange man brought drug to his room and Raiko suspected him and attacked him suddenly and he became wounded and changed to a spider and threw a strip toward Raiko and he cut it by his sward and one of the soldiers entered to the room and followed the spider to a cave and killed it and by killing of the spider Raiko improved and they released from viscous web of spider [17].

Kintaro:

Kintaro the golden boy has extraordinary power. According to some narratives he was one of the servants of Youri Mistso that killed spider monster by removing a tree from its root [17].

Tibet myths:

In Tibet myths spider is not mean creature but it is a creature that in mind of a hero called Ge sar it aids to his people. Indeed, it was a deceit to protect people that the king became alone and people rescued from oppressed king. In Hor that demons lived there a boy was born from a god and snake goddess. He was called Ge sar. He was exiled by his mother to remote land. The goddesses mentioned his mission and he returned to Ling and he was selected as king due to success in horse riding battle. After six years he found that his country was destroyed by Hor mean rulers and many people were killed. At first he sat on the horse and changed to a vulture and flied to India and went to Hor to find different drugs and end his mission. In Hor a girl found him as a small boy in Dordchaei. Ge sar worked near the girl’s father and the people found him with extraordinary power. He changed to a magician and predicted early death of king then he changed to god supporting the king and said him in order to live long he should be alone in the palace. That time the people and worriers went to watch dancing of “seven spiders” converted into human figure. Then Ge sar announced his identity and attacked on the palace and killed the king [15].

In North America West Indian myths spider is seen as a guide and it is positive; since it directs people toward secure places. In a Pobei myth people consider different styles of planting and growth of plants and field is their main challenges. According to Hopi myth the man lived in the underground heaven before. The successful people were happy until they were unrestrained and water filled lower world for punishment of them. The people following a woman, spider that climbed up a reed reached to upper world by climbing up big pine tree and sunflower. When they arrived to a secure place the singing bird was tired and it did not sing and those who were late fell down on lower world the place that all dead were buried there and others went to seek sunrise. The white people went to south, Poelobs remained in the center and other West Indians went to north. They agreed to stay there by observing sunrise. The white people who created horse helped them and they were the first group that arrived to destination then others encountered with big stars. So, Poelbes and other West Indians settled in their present places. Spider is called woman and maiden of corn and goddess of growth [15].

Greece and Rome myths:

In Greece and Rome myths Araachne the skilled weaver changed into a spider because of anger of Athena. Spider is symbol of ambition and fight with God:

Araachne:

She was Leiden and daughter of Iidomon Colofoni the skilled weaver that fought with Athena the goddess of weaving and Athena went to her like an old woman and warned her but Araachne did not pay attention and Athena returned to her first position and accepted to fight. Athena weaved a web representing fate of proud men and Araachne weaved an image of disgrace of gods. Since the weavings were in the same rank Athena got angry and tore Araachne weaving and hit her with weaving shuttle and Araachne hanged herself and Athena converted her to a spider and the spider preserved her weaving skill [14-15]. Spider in its web is symbol of a creature who wanted to fight with god and it is symbol of mortal human ambition so it was punished in this way (like story of Athena and Araachne) [14].

Aztec and Mayan myths:

In these myths spider is considered as companion of goddesses. There were goddesses in lower world where Aztecs called there place of dead people. The god of death and dead was Miktalan Tokoteli that his wife Miklan Sivatel was beside him. In images the body of this god is covered with
human bone and he wears a mask like skull. His hair is wavy and dark and his eyes are shining like stars; since he lives in darkness. He has paper like flowers with two cones on his neck and forehead and also a white folded flag like baldric on his chest. Dead persons, owls, spiders and bats are his assistants [18]. In addition spider is symbol of god of hell. Vietnames navies believe that when a soul leaves a body it converts to a spider and killing spider is dangerous for slept person [14].

Spider in Colombian myths:

It is probable that spider is not the soul in Colombian myth but the souls are on the boat made of web that sail on the river to reach to hell [14].

Spider in Altai myths:

Among central Asia Altai’s particularly in Siberia spider is symbol of a soul that leaves the body [14].

Conclusion:

By survey on miracle 41 on “Ankbout” surah it is concluded that although spider web is symbol of instability and weakness but it is considered as wonder of creation. God does not only refer to instability of spider web but also he refers to uniqueness of God in creation of an apparently ugly creature. In immigration from Mecca to Medina the spider achieved so status that it protected Soor cave by its weak web.

Persian literature has been affected by religious consideration of spider and sometimes spider is used for referring to the event of Soor cave and miracle 41 of “Ankbout” surah. In some poems instable web of spider and its ugliness have been referred as symbol of greedy and weak people and sometimes as attractiveness of evil temptation. In most cases, web shape and placing the spider in its center have point to devices like astrolobe.

Psychologists believe that web is an extraordinary symbol of introversion and egotism. In mystical perspective web is symbol of naval that connects creature to creator and the creature tries to ascent toward creator.

In Japanese myth spider is symbol of mean and oppressed and devil creature that shows oneself honest. This issue is considered in Raiko myth. In story of Kintaro it is seen as a demon with ugly and unpleasant status. In Greece and Rome myths Araachne as a skilled weaver fought with Athena as goddess of weaving and she was converted into spider. It seems that Araachne was converted into a spider because of her proud. It is probable that spider is symbol of proud and prejudice in Greece and Rome myths. In Aztec and Mayan myths spider is companion of goddess and it is symbol of hell. In Colombian myth the spiders are watchdogs of people that guide mean souls toward hell. In North America West Indians myths spider is a goddess of growth and in Altai myths the spiders removes soul from body. In Tibet myths spider is imagination of Ge sar that moves in front of naive people and kills the tyrant king. Divination with spider was common in ancient Incans emperors. In Polonezy and Micronezy myths spider creates earth, sky, moon and sun by triton horn from a seashell. In west African myths spider sets day and night and it is positive and it is called Anansi as smart, deceitful and even winner creature and it is selfish ,sensual and lazy in some stories. The people believe that Anasi was not in recent shape but it was converted into a spider with broken legs due to lying to king that runs away from people.

All these qualities lead to symbol of mysticism as divinity, divination, guiding souls, intermediate between earthly and heavenly worlds. Sometimes spider is represented as creator of world and god. Different interpretations are offered among nations. According to the results it seems that the positive aspects of this animal are more representative than its negative dimensions.

References

1. Holey Quran, Islamic Text.