A Study on Symbols Roles in Shaping Appearances and Forms in Hand-Wovens of Kurdistan Province, Iran

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Abstract

Kurdistan has been the birthplace and provider of myth and religion because of its ancient history, wondering nature and variety of religions. One of the best instances is Kurdish hand-wovens. Cultural examples such as myth can be understood and explained only in the cultural foundation of those people. The myth is understood in their integrity and their prominent element in myths is meaning. They are constant and variable in content. Origin Genesis of myth is also time, therefore, how mythological figures have made their way through Kurdish hand-wovens (carpet, rug, Carpet) depend on society conditions in accepting and adsorbing mythical stories. The research which is a field and theoretical research takes different hand-wovens in different museums including national carpet museum observations into consideration. Significant examples of symbolism have been presented which narrates history and intellectual, social and philosophical transitions by the people of this land.

Keywords: Mythical believes, Religious believes, Appearances, hand-wovens, Kurdistan.
Introduction:

Karl Gustav Yung, the founder of the school of analytical psychology says: word or image is a symbol when infer to something more than its clear and direct meaning. Symbol has a wider and unconscious aspect that can never precisely defined or fully described (Humenegar, 1366:20). Symbolism is the art or act of using symbols, principles of applying mysteries and symbols to express opinion or stated event, literary style in which many metaphors are used, and for every thought, imagination or description they represent a metaphor and a symbol (Amid: 1379: 227). Symbol has three features: it is in the nature, a contract and repeatable. Myth comply with functional specifications of symbol and so then when the man started his intelligent life, stepped into peoples life with symbolism, religion and other factors of social life. Since signs indicate the appearance of objects, usually in all cultures and civilizations state a common concept, but symbols have roots in culture and common mentality of a civilization consequently has specific meaning and conception. If some symbols are similar meaning in different cultures it is because such conceptions are mutual among the cultures. For instance, dragon is a symbol of devil and demon spirit and in Chinese culture is a sacred symbol which represents power and purity. Symbol is expressive language of each culture and civilization which drives from the history of that civilization (sureesrafil, 1386:146).

One of the intrinsic characteristics which influence the beauty of the carpet and attract the viewer are symbolic concepts and the myths of patterns and figures. Symbols are part of cultural values in each society. Symbols, myths and traditions should be evaluated as cultural values. Therefore, Kurdish carpets patterns are an illustration of the world in small sizes: sky in the top and earth in the bottom. Asian traditional thought about the whole world developed through observation step by step. Similarly, different symbols appeared in a variety of carpets woven in Kurdish culture (chitsazan, 1386:118). It can be noted explicitly that Kurdish art is symbolic and applying symbols in each of Kurdish art can be observed clearly. This aspect and feature of Kurdish art has been strengthened its relationship with myths and mythical concepts (Sureesrafil, 1386:59).

Considering such a treasure trove of symbols, signs and myths in Kurdish hand-woven art and lack of scientific investigations through them makes it crystal clear that studying it as a research project is necessary. This research tried to present and discuss briefly the most common symbols in Kurdish hand-wovens through ages and periods.

Research method: This is a field and theoretical research. Field research considers different hand-wovens in different museums including national carpet museum observations into consideration. Theoretical research has been considered variety of resources and opinions by experts and specialists about carpet weaving art, also the selection of figures and patterns have been noticed.

Research findings: The content of all hand-wovens (carpet, rug, Carpet) includes animal, plant and geometrical indicators which listed below:
Animal symbols:

1. **Fish**: Figure of fish usually had been used in all Iranian hand-wovens. In ancient Iran, this figure was common in north Caucasus, Samarkhand, Bokhara, Kharazm, Azerbaijan and Kurdistan to Oman sea beach and Ganaveh port (Vakili, 1383, 92)

In some artworks, a Mehr has been shown which is born in water and there are figures which demonstrate Mehr with her mother while she is nude. Mehr is born in water and placed on Lotus, and this is why water lily is popular in Kurdish carpets. In last period, it
has been called “Shah-abbasi” and has an important role in traditional appearances especially in carpet appearances. Regarding the importance of Mehr in Kurdistan, one mythical tale narrates that the old woman, the daughter of Kurdistan ruling got pregnant by water and the newborn called Mehr. Additionally, many of kings and elders in Kurdish known as Mehr-dad. “Mehr is name which is used even today among the kurds. According to them, the appearance of fish alone also uses in Kurdish wovens (Afrugh, 1392: 145)

2. **Water and Dragon**: the concept of this symbol can be find by looking at the relation between water and dragon. Decorative maps in Kurdish culture mixed with superstition, faith and worship of ancestors in ancient copyys and popular folklore (Jazayeri, 1370:96). Manichaeism tells a story about a dragon-killer god who called “Adams” and in Kurdish literature “Vahagan” is the god of dragon killer in Kurdish myths. Other Iranian myths also used dragon in their stories and in zoroastrian myths dragon-killing is the mission of heroes. Regarding water and snake importance in Kurdish Carpet, dragon or the abstract shape of it, snake present in its appearances. Snake is the symbol of earth and is related to the origin of life which started from the egg of snake in chaos and evolutionary primary universe. The snake-worshipping civilizations believe that snake is related to secret of life, longevity and immortality (Ershad, 1382: 67).

3. **Dragon**: Generally dragon is the symbol of devil and evil except in the case of nobles. Dragon is a symbol of power, goodness and wisdom in Kurdistan and points to the Kurdish myths. Similarly, in sanandaj areas, one head and two headed dragons are thought to be safe of harm. Additionally, dragon is a symbol of darkness in Kurdish culture. The conflict between the eagle and the dragon is a reflective of the world. One of the carpets keeping in Berlin imperial museum demonstrates the conflict between the eagle and the dragon in a yellow background (Afrugh, 1392:59). This carpet is a symbol of the war between the Kurdish people with Mongolian people. The eagle is the symbol of kingdom power and dragon is the symbol of conqueror. It is believed that dragon and the cloud in Kurdish carpet drives from Far East and china, but it is controversial. Dragon in east is a symbol of divine forces and is a good creature more than a devil one. Monotheistic religions considers dragon a devil concept totally. Dragon in Kurdish carpet-weaving art is known to be a devil force which fights against good. In Kurdish carpet, dragon is also pictured with these abstract appearances (Chitsazan, 1377: 109)

4. **The eagle**: Eagle, king of birds, is the only bird tha can stare to the sun. In mythological and ethnic believes which is a metaphor of despising the world’s greatness. The eagle is a version of storm god which inhabits on the tree of “keokern” in Kurdish culture. Eagle is also the symbol of the sun. The eagle was sacred in Kurdistan and is attributed to the gods. “Eagle is one the birds which embodied in the sacred with Ahura. Eagle-worshiping has a long history in Kurdistan and this huge bird is the symbol of power and sharpness that has a great respects even today. The appearance of eagle in Kurdish Carpet is a symbol of power and victory (Suresrafal, 1386:107).
Plant Symbols

1. Lotus: (in Persian “Niloofar”) in Iran ancient stories is the keeping place of seeds or Zaruastra splendor which kept in water, so lotus has a great connection with Mehr religion. Lotus has been appeared first in Mehr religion which is the symbol of life and creation, then make its way through Kurdish carpets with different shapes (Jazayeri, 1370:94).

2. Bush: Bush is one of the most common Iranian appearances. This appearance has been made into different shapes which the most popular one is paisley. Almost it is accepted that the bush was in fact a cedar. Cedar has a great status. As a sacred tree and a symbol of religious sign and symbol of fresh, evergreen and also masculinity. Bush in Kurdish Carpet sometimes is believed to be equal to tree of life and is the symbol of eternity (Ershad, 1382:83).

3. Sacred tree: almost in all the areas which Kurds inhabit especially in rural areas, there are trees which believed to be sacred. Generally, walnut, poplar, sycamore and willow are included in the group of sacred trees. These trees can respond to the needs and heal. Tree in the most primary image of it, is a giant universe tree that is the secret of creation (Dadgar, 1380:105). The tree of life is the secret of sacred force and anxiety. To reach its fruits which produce divine elixir that gives longevity, one should conflict with its keeper devils. Each person can conquer in this fight will transcend to the highest rank of human and will live forever as a young so he would be immortal. Tree appearance in Kurdish carpets, wall hanging and traditional east arts as a mandala in the form of shames or medalion emerges and is a symbol of linking between earth and the sky. Similar to this appearance can be seen in “chaharmahal-bakhtiari- province carpets especially in Kurdish hand-wovens group of this region which has been demonstrated beautifully in the diamond shapes of the carpets and with variety of linages waved in all areas of the province (Chitsazan, 1377:108).

4. Pot: This belief that human births from the earth are a universal one. This feeling of coming out of land and birth form earth is similar to earth irreducible fertility to enliven to life elements such as tree, flower, grass and river. Belief in the ground and the mysterious aspects of life in it has been present not only in people everyday activities but also in the history of their religions. The earth is a mother and nurturer of human even for his reliving and is not always the fertility element. Sometimes it is a symbol of death such as the black color in “Haji Firuz”, goes to the land and come back, but in this case it would be the symbol of greenery and flourishing because it’s like a seed which grows to become the source of creation. The role of pot has a 3000 years evolution. In such a role, the tree of cedar has planted in a pot which is a symbol of earth as a center of gravity. “In fact, the appearances used in the carpet maybe reflect the historical and myths stories in a way, in many cases, they are in accordance to definitions and concepts which used for the myth itself. Myths have two layers: Form and the meaning. Myth converts the nature to the history and the manning to the form. Myth is system of semiotics. Kurdish Carpets also has an appearance of pot” (Afrugh, 1392:83)
5. Pomegranate: Pomegranate is also one the important symbol in Kurdish carpets. According to Grishman, pomegranate is a symbol of abundance and Anahita- God of Water. Pomegranate arils among the peoples of the Mediterranean and the Near East, India and farther has become as a symbol of widespread fertility (Jazayeri, 1370:148).

6. Grapevine: this plant is a symbol of fertility and life and of course in some traditions has been known as the tree of knowledge and in other traditions has been sacred for mortal gods. Furthermore, grape is a symbol of autumn. Vine or grape crop in Kurdish carpets woven in Kurdistan region due to its abundance in sanandaj and the importance of using the fruit have been under considerations of people in the area. Therefore, its images can be seen in Kurdish carpets especially in diamond carpets. “This kind of tree has a special figure in each section, some depicted it with a lot of leaves and little branches and the others depicted it with a few leaves and many branches (Ershad, 1382:95).

Geometrical shapes

1. “s” figure/ the abstract design of dragon: this appearance called “hook” and similarly known from Bronze Age. There are two bronze models which one of them is the figure of a two-headed duck and the other is a two headed dragon. This figure has been found in every continents. Because of the simplicity of the figure has been used in various regions but do not have symbolic meaning in each of those regions. This pattern has been used as vertical and horizontal in Kurdish carpets. S is the first letter of a in ancient Kurdish language which means god, so this increases the importance of figure “s”. However, this belief that “s” is related to the word god in ancient Kurdish is unimaginable. “s” appearance changes to “z” in Persian carpets which comes from the symmetry of s (Vakili, 1383:57). Generally, designs of “water” and “water and dragon” utilized in most of Kurdish decorative arts. As mentioned before, this letter is also a symbol of water and small snake in Kurdish Carpet (Chitsazan, 1377:64).

2. Cross and swastika: it can be alleged that the history of “cross” figure is as long as the history of man. “Crosses are symbols of sun, 4 corners of the world, peace and equity for all the people. Sometimes the center of crosses has a ridge or knob-like which refers to the center of the world or unity or the earth. Researchers and weavers believe that cross appearance in Kurdish Carpet refers to the sun and is related to Mehr religion and is a symbol of eternity, on the other hand it points out to four elements of life (water, wind, fire and soil) (Naseri, 1393:92). Finally, the cross is a sacred symbol which refers to Christianity and crucifixion of Christ. This symbol with symmetry arms can be seen in Kurdish carpets. Swastika is used besides animal, plant and geometrical symbols such as pine tree, snakes, milk and celestial bodies like moon and stars (symbol of lightning). In kurdish hand-woven, the cross has been used alone and with medallion appearance. It should be noted that investigating on medallions seen in Kurdish carpets associate it in the mind of the audience that the influence of cross has prevailed in carpets strangely and medallions are similar to crosses morphologically. “But more investigations show that such structure present not only in Kurdish carpets but also in medallions which woven in other regions of Iran carpet-weaving. Kurds can see medallion similar to the cross on their
carpets (Jazayeri, 1370:58) which with the arrival of Aryans become more important. However, since Kurdish carpet medallion is consistent with Crux, Kurds seized the medallion carpet symmetry and similarity to make it more closer to the shape of Crux and sometimes instead of medallion, they have woven an adorned cross

3. Altar (Mehr-aab) design: it is one of the conceptual designs especially in Kurdish carpet. It is meaningful with the name of Merab in Kurdish carpet. Shape of Altar and on the other hand the religious concept of it has been widespread in other religions. “There is a place with similar name among the kurds for praying and bowing to Allah. There is some different perception of Altar: some refers to the literally means of Altar and believe that altar is sacred place with arch in mosques” (Afrugh, 1392:85) the others believe that the history of altar should be followed in ancient times and the name of this design (“Mehr-ab”) leads the audience to the source. They believe that Mehrab maps is related to the Mehr religion as it is similar letters in its name, so the origin of mehrab (altar) should be found in that history. Praying Mehr had been done in natural caves in Mitra religion and near the cave should be flow a river. Sometimes that requirements does not allow creating the temple which had to be in a natural cave, they built an artificial temple which was in the shape of a cave... cave is the symbol of sky, so temple room usually is convex and decorated with stars. Mehrab is also a mutual symbol between kurds and Iranian which can be seen in Kurdish carpet.

4. Triangle shape design: From ancient times and prehistoric times, triangle had been the symbol of mount in Iran plateau and Mesopotamia and connected triangles are symbol of mountains and highland has waters. “Streams and rivers come from the highland and the mount is sacred and praiseworthy in Zoroastrianism. Mount and Far (means splendor) are named together many times in Avesta and check mountains is a sign of added emphasis on the mountain which keeps water of rain. Additionally, mount is a universal element which is related to the tree (Ershad, 1382:102). In kurdish carpets, triangle design is a symbol of mount (meaning life and divine blessings: considering rivers flow from mountain and protection of the family) which is more used in margins of the carpet.

5. Other designs: finally, I should point to the positive and negative designs which are basically used in long margins and these are representatives of men and women according to Kurds. “This design is a combination of two paisley which in Kurdish carpet-weaving texts called men and women. It should be noted that some of Kurdish carpets symbols have other names in other regions of Iran carpets, like men and women symbol that is called “hook” or the figure of “s” in Kurdish carpets is called “dragon” and in others called “bird” (Dadgar, 1380:67)
<table>
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<th>Symbol name</th>
<th>Drawing the lines</th>
<th>symbol</th>
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**Discussion and Conclusion:**

Information about symbols in Kurdish carpets include: water and dragon or dragon design which represent goodness, wisdom, safeguard of heaven, guard of water and also darkness, a symbol of badness and devil. This figure sometimes uses as the “s” figure which is the first letter of word “god” in old Kurdish (zva in Kurdish with Avestian orthography) and in Kurdish carpets it is a symbol of small snake and water too. In and out fish or fish, Mehrabi and lotus (a sign of Mehr religion) cross design (symbol of sun, four elements of life, eternity, Arian Religion and also faithfulness), bush and the tree of life (symbol of tree of life, immortality and eternity), eagle (symbol of victory and power) and triangle design (symbol of mountain, divine blessings and as a
protector of family) are other symbols in Kurdish carpets. Pomegranate (symbol of fertility) and grape which is a sign for wine have important positions in Kurdish celebrations and traditions and pot design (symbol of creation) present in Kurdish carpet. Usually Kurds do not use ornamental aspects solely and by making each design, they consider a conception and a message. To explain these concepts which includes religious and mythical thoughts they utilized a symbolic language. These symbolic designs which are depicted abstractly and sometimes appear naturally can be divided into animal, plant and geometrical shapes. The artist sometimes targets a religious or mythical conception and sometimes usefulness of plant or animal. Regard that Kurdish carpets have other symbolic figures such as phoenix, the sacred bird, symbol of splendor and rising from the dead people and the fight between phoenix and dragon and the fight between rooster and bull is a symbol of creation and renovation of nature and gun, bow and sword is the symbol of defense against the devil, sheep head or horn is symbol of power and blossom is symbol of fertility. These mentioned figures are among the main figures with symbolic concept in Kurdish carpets, also in and out fish used in popular Kurdish carpets according to the sources and their original carpet is decorated with geometrical and broken figures which has its specific classification. So, symbol as mentioned is an essential part of Kurdish hand-wovens which narrates history, ages, culture and sometimes social textures of this land.

Further and widespread studies needed to discover more layers of symbol secrets in Kurdish hand-wovens to reach more truths. Therefore, researchers are invited to pick such subjects.
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