A Survey of the Cultural Status and Social Role of Women in Dramatic Rituals of Komijan - Iran

ABSTRACT: The present study was aimed to survey the different cultural aspects and social roles of women, in the seventy-eight performing and non-performing ceremonies of Komijan, Milajerd and 67 other subordinate villages (Markazi, Iran), through a field survey method during the years 1383 – 1389. Results indicate that in addition to the traditional position of komijan women as “Kad-Banu” (Dame, Queen of the House) which has been inherited from ancient times, they have an authorized presence in many social activities such as agriculture, animal husbandry and administration of outdoor affairs. In the cultural entities of Komijan villages, there has been a division of tasks between men and women from long time ago. Furthermore, women as a part of rural society have always played a pivotal role in social contribution. Therefore, it can be said that more than eighty percent of traditional dramatic performances are allocated to women, and man has no official right to participate in them. This study was designed as a participant observation research, carried out by use of interviews and filming technique in the research field.

Keywords: Ritual, Drama, Performing women, Komijan, Culture, Queen of the House

One of the features of humans being is their intention to identify themselves. Development-oriented humans by creating different levels of culture in history distinguish themselves from other creatures and have been able to create different conditions for their survival and security. Early anthropologists believed that humans being relied on supernatural forces to secure their physical and spiritual needs and also their survival. They considered this supposition as the only reasonable way to achieve their aspirations and problems.

Tylor in the theory of Animism (considering non-human entities as spiritual beings) in his rational approach to culture, indicated that the primitive human, had a magical spirit in nature and believed that the spirits of the dead remain in this world and support the good jobs of livings and are involved in the spread of diseases and problems that humans cannot resolve them. Humans being were not able to face natural dangers for his comfort, cheer and fear, thus they replaced the rational matters with magical rituals. Furthermore, arts have been showed off as dances, rituals, colors and artistic works in the emergence of forms and isms. In light of the functioning of these fundamental elements in the form of culture, humans could meet their mental, emotional, aesthetic, behavioral aspects and external activities in the context of physiological needs. Rituals, because of the reflect a kind of cognition and belief, and as an educational way, as well as unifying, entertaining factors and also overcoming elements over the forces which are beyond the human control, have been always effective and flowing within the culture. Julian Steward and Leslie White with a development-oriented doctrine believed that environmental phenomena play a crucial role in daily life of people. According to the cultural ecology viewpoint, proposed by Steward, the multiline development is looking for factors in the parallel areas of a specific evolution, and its objective is seeking for reasons of creating similar sequences.

The statistics show that there has been no divorce in Komijan during the year 2010. But in the Arak, as an industrial region, about 1,116 men and women have been divorced.

One of the most important tools in the identification of different cultures is to understand the gender relations and their functions in social entities and levels of life. Investigation of cultural beliefs and social attitudes of women require collecting, recording and understanding of those rituals which play significant roles in conveying thoughts, believes and cultures that are close to oblivion. Komijan is very old in history and culture of Iran, and therefore identifying its popular expressions is very necessary. To identify the individual and popular position of women in culture of Komijan for future decision-makings is the practical purposes of this article. The researcher has been tried to review by collecting indigenous dramatic rituals of Komijan.

Methodology: In the methodology of anthropology, interviews with local experts should be accompanied by participant observation, to be applied more efficiently. Therefore, the present study was designed was designed as a participant observation research, carried out by use of interviews and filming technique in the research field. However, the dramatic rituals are rooted in past experiences and some of them have been forgotten or have been changed so much, thus the reviewing method was used. Tanhaei has wrote, this can be helpful when the study method of the research is related to the past, and the researcher could meet with people at the present time to obtain information through interviews and corporate
As a complementary for this method, the library research with note-taking technique and field method with interviews by video and photographic camera were used.

**Study Area**: Komijan city in Markazi province (Iran), according to history, has been a host of tribes such as Scythians, Gut, Urartu, Kasies, Tats, Lulubians, Assyrians, Medes and Persians, with three thousand years old. Komijan has 206 villages. About half of 40,000 people population of Komijan is women. Based on the divisions in 1389, Komijan with an area of 1,548 Km² is equal to 6% of the overall area of Markazi Province.

**Findings**: Origin of most of Iranian’s rituals is very old. 47 out of 89 under study performing rituals, are designed in the form of performance (about 50%) and the others are non-performing. 32 out of 89 rituals are very feminine (two-thirds of the total data). Participation rate of men is 12 percent (about a tenth of the total), childish rituals are 6 percent (about one-twentieth of the total), and public rituals are 14 percent (about one-seventh of the total) (Fig. 1). In other rituals women as side partners, are working alongside men and children. Performing dances, songs using colors and female dramatic rituals are considered the main effects of popular culture in Komijan.

Approximately 90 percent of rituals are performed in fields, plains, hills and farms, which states the close relationship between fertility of the nature and the creation of women. Human needs depend on biological existence such as breeding, feeding, etc.

One of feminin traditional rituals is the performing ritual of Ghara Iskurmeh (Black-cough). In a near past (the last recorded performance in 1970) the ritual of Black Cough was performing for preventing disasters in Eisa-Abad village. Rural women during the outbreak and public death captured a sinful, dirty, ugly person as the sacrifice, putting a halter on his neck, dressing him with old clothes, turning him barefoot around the alleys of the village with the sound of drums and sorna tragic whimpers, and finally cursed him out of the village. No man has the right to participate or intervene in this ritual.

Another ritual that women are seriously involved in is Eghabeh Diyonarmak (Reversing the shoes). In this ritual, women put the shoes of family members, upside-down in front of the house and read Hamd verse for preventing any attack of jackals. They believe that this may cause stomachache in jackals and escape the village. Women are the major managers of traditional ritual of Sueit Asheh (Dessert soap). The magic plant, Varak, which can be found near the Komijan, is very useful. Women use this plant as the winter fuel, for baking bread, food of animals, pharmaceutical usage etc. In the 60th day of spring all inhabitants of Komijan set up Soap Eating Ceremony in nature for further amusement and watching the Varak blossoms. Another common religious ritual performance is Ghale Kasmak (Cutting carpet). According to the ancient customs in the culture of Komijan, when weaving a carpet is finished, women pour water on its roots and then cut it down. Women should do this by saluting to Imam Hossein (PBUH). Women have found a way to be away from evil eye. With their belief to magical thinking and using an egg, a coin, and some salt and esfand, they try to remove the illness from the patient. Performing women draw a sing on the egg and call the name of persons who are likely to have an evil eye and put the egg between the coin and esfand; then they put the egg in the dress of the patient and call the name of the defendants one by one. When the egg is broken in the name of a person, he or she might be considered as the evil eye. So the dress of the patient will be burned against him/her to remove the evil eye. Another quite feminine affair is the ritual of Mashk-zani (milking). Women have the key role to participate in milking (Mashk-zani) and selling it as a source of household income. They sing a folk song for economic activities while pouring the yogurt in the Mashk and hang it from the ceiling. Over the mashk they put pants with snake skin, a prayer to dispense the magic and some esfand to overcome the evil eye, and may the contents of the mashk be riled better and give a better

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**Fig. 1.** Gender composition of native performing rituals in Komijan.
product. Nakhor Getirmag (cattle stealing) is one of the main rituals that performs during droughts. In some villages of Iran and even in countries such as Iraq and Turkey this tradition is called Chemche-Galin or Chemche-Ghashogh. People of Komijan believe girls and women are the cleanest livings and the closest creatures to God.

Before the Islamic Revolution, the needed water of families was supplied from sources of around the villages and young girls were responsible to carry it. Because of this, water sources were always a good place for making love or choosing spouse by young boys and girls. Whenever a girl was loved by a boy, the lover broke the girl’s jar by throwing sand every day as a sign of masculinity, power and love. People of Fath-Abad village believe that as much as the love of the boy is more, the jar would be broken as its voice of love will be heard all around the village. The performing ritual Bulagh (springhead) indicates the outer-group marriage. The ritual of Tiyukh Ghorkhord Mak means to scare a hen. This ritual is for a hen which does not hatch.

The woman, whose chicken does not hatch, gets the chicken and goes out of the house to bring it to mill and put its head under the mill stone to be crushed and die. Other women in the roles of the guarantors, ask the owner of the chicken to give it an opportunity. Conversation between the woman and performing women and poultry goes on until the owner accepts their guarantee and left the chicken in lane, as long as it hatches. In this ritual the homeowner woman as hero and the chicken as the anti-hero and other women are as the helpful forces of anti-hero. This ritual indicates the cultural status of women in using the “dialogue” and reconciliation (comedy), instead of “Revolution” and counter (tragedy) in their social life. Samuel Huntington calls this royal woman ceremony as the village democracy. In this ritual, all of feeding women of the village wear shepherds and men’s clothing; wear belt of bullets and pass through the people with a lot of anger, sing mass songs and with a female protest attack the nearby village and steal their lactating cows and bring them to the village.

If a murder does occur, and the murderer escaped, women of the village according to a ritual called Ghan Joshordemak (blood boiling), set a fire in the yard of the victim’s house or the neighbors, and put a pot full of water to boil. Then they will put the victim’s clothes in the boiling water and wait until its color is dissolved in water. They believe the victim’s blood is boiling and the killer magically will be trapped or will surround him/herself. This ritual has a peaceful and palliative function. When a child started in the teeth, the village women cook a soup called Dandan-Pelle. This soup has all of the cereals and grains. The soup will be distributed between people. The person who receives it should put some candy, green leaves of tree, sugar or eggs in the dish. This means they wished the child good fortune. In some villages the child will be sat on a surface and put a tray containing tools like pen, switch machines, barber scissors, needles, etc. Each tool will be picked by the child will be considered as a future career; and the child’s parents will support and guide him or her for the future career. Armenians have a ritual with the same form as Adamnahadik.

**Discussion:** Our findings demonstrate that women are directors of the majority of performing rituals, in addition to acting, playing music, designing, movement and utilization of individual and collective capacities.

- The dialogue-style in performances is often improvising. Aspirations of women are often material-spiritual. Most of the performances are done in the night. Location of performances is mostly in the deserts and plains. The native materials are mostly used as scene facilities. Characters of the performances are mostly young women and girls, trusted women and Sadat. Objectives and content of the feminine rituals are related to the future; ward off ghosts, fertility, entertainment, productivity and human reconciliation with nature. They are necessarily considered as wishes for security blessing, cooperation and future knowledge. Statistics for aged single girls and divorced women is much smaller than the industrial city of Arak. Aged single girls and divorced women and notorious women have no place in the rituals. These signs indicate the health and culture of marriage in popular culture of Komijan. Young women and girls, trusted women and Sadat has a key status in performing rituals; Therefore, their role in resolving social conflicts and complaints is very prominent, and there is no need to court and rulings and administrative laws. Using the magic power of women is not just to resolve feminine problems. But sometimes rural women act as savior to relief problems of people. Women have a pivotal role in the livelihoods and household income; but never are considered as the superior power.

Due to the fast rhythm of life, new technology and increased social awareness and various human sciences, many of these behaviors, rituals and traditions have been forgotten today.

People of Komijan know the reason for choosing women and girls for performing rituals, the belief to their innocence, feelings and emotions. They considered women and girls as God’s mercy.
Women in Komijan have a fundamental role in economic society. They weave carpet and participate in harvesting and milking (Mashk-zani) and sell it as a source of household income. Also women have the key role to participate in Chemche-Galin or Chemche-Ghashogh ritual. Samuel Huntington calls this royal woman ceremony as the village democracy 8. Hamilton called it an institutionalized protest of subordinates, and believes this performance would express hidden frustrations and would cause to discharge feminine stresses 10. Events and incidents caused by the ritual should be beyond the conscious control of their producers 11. This ritual is performed in villages of Komijan in seven different dramatic forms. Women role-players of Komijan in some villages milk the domestic animals and shed the milk from the downpipes of mosque and make the sound of rain with their mouth, to stimulate the sky. Sir James Frizer introduced a scientific name for this action and called it “law of similarity”. Women have different roles, such as directing rituals, acting, playing Sorna and performing as shepherds that it is mentioned as a balancing role. Smith wrote women have two-part awareness in the daily life, like a fault line that divides life into two parts. In one part they move forward based on personal experience, and in the other part based on facts established in the stock of society knowledge 12.

The ritual of Tiyukh Ghorkhord Mak ritual indicates the cultural status of women in using the “dialogue” and reconciliation (comedy), instead of “Revolution” and counter (tragedy) in their social life. Women believe communicate and talk to the animals is a way to encourage and invite the nature to cooperate with human. This characteristic in a social network always helps women to overcome anxieties, fears and problems 13.

Harvest is men’s job, but women of Komijan beside their key role to bring happiness, by making soup and prayers ask for bless from God. They even make the young calves that are brought to farm for the first time to eat some sap and oil as a sign for thanks. Sap in the culture of Komijan embodies the strength and ability. They also perform the ritual of eating sap for their young sons who are going to farm for the first time. In fact the young calf is like a young man. Maghsudi writes that the ritual of joining the young people to the group of elders of the tribe is based on the Totem Spirit. (Maghsudi, 1386: 238). In the context of matriarchic communities, status of women preferred and women for their membership in family and ancestry have the right of political succession, land inheritance and social identity. Although the social or public power may be in hands of men, but senior women have a key role in power and it division 14.

Presence of cultural patterns that are often performed by women reflects the fact that Komijan has a long old and ancient culture. A culture that its layers are remaining until today and has been retained its evolutionary process.

According to Tyler, whenever we are faced with developed arts and complicated organization in human society, this indicated the comprehensiveness of the society form knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, habits and any other abilities that have been obtained by human as an element of the society. Since, human culture is an old heritage which has been passed through ages from one generation to other generation and has become more completed 15. Iran in historical periods has not changed much and the same circumstances that were specified the way of people life in ancient times in this plateau are still remains 14. Richard Frye has considered the key role and position of royal woman in the home rooted in ancient Iran and in its matriarchic system. About 80 percent of the rituals’ performing roles are allocated to the women, thus, it can be claimed that using the two-part self-consciousness in everyday life, women established their position in the social networks, and are trying to improve the gender division of the society in their own favor. In one third of performances, a belief in ghosts, the paranormal and animism is obvious. It seems that the path of cultural solution in women social network is associated with the prayer, hardwork and role playing in dramatic rituals. While in industrialized societies, women have become cheap labors, and by the feminization of poverty, the number of poor women has increased than poor men, the highlighted presence of the Komijan women indicates the division of tasks and their managerial positions at home and outdoors. Unlike many of the bordering regions to Komijan that have an unsociable or office view on women, the role of Komijan women in social layers is very high. They communicate with the environment easily, and have the power of analysis to solve or justify problems for themselves and their families. The above graph shows the statistics for divorce in 1389 which was approximately zero, and represents the cultural and social status of women is Komijan.
2. E.B. Tylor, Primitive societies (Harper, New York, 1871) P.