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Gender Metamorphosis of Dives in the Qajar Era Illustrations: A Mythological and Sociological Analysis

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There have been extensive studies on the gender metamorphosis of divs, monstrous creatures of widespread presence in Persian lore. An interpretation of the evolution of nature, supernatural beings (including div), and the feminine presence within a historical backdrop indicate that humanity once perceived these as mysterious and menacing entities, believing their lives to be influenced by the will and intervention of sinister divs. However, over time, these entities have been emancipated from their ethereal, inscrutable realms and become subjected, instead, to the faculties of contemplation and judicious reasoning. Iranian society, as a longstanding part of the human tapestry, has also experienced this reassessment. The present study is an attempt to scrutinise the causality behind the manifestation of gender shifts in depictions of divs during the Qajar era. The Qajar era is widely regarded as the historical turning point in which the last remnants of Iran's traditional societal structure began to fade, marking the dawn of a new world. Artworks from this key period attest to a profound transformation of the view toward nature, supernatural beings, and women. Div, as an epitome of the horrors of nature – and woman, as a symbol of the beauty and tenderness of nature, underwent a fusion. Divs, once petrifying entities, assumed more benign and distinctly feminine forms. We argue that this metamorphosis signifies a tendency to demythologise nature and the secularisation of feminine social life.

KEYWORDS: Qajar, gender, metamorphosis, mythological, div, illustration

O spolni metamorfozi divov, pošastnih bitij, ki so v perzijskem izročilu zelo razširjena, so bile opravljene obsežne študije. Razlaga razvoja narave, nadnaravnih bitij (vključno z divi) in ženske prisotnosti v zgodovinskem ozadju kaže, da jih je človeštvo nekoč dojemalo kot skrivnostne in grozeče entitete ter verjelo, da na njihova življenja vplivata volja in posredovanje zloveščih divov. Vendar so se te entitete sčasoma osvobodile iz eteričnih, nedoumljivih področij in postale podvržene sposobnostim kontemplacije in razsodnega razmišljanja. Tudi iranska družba je kot dolgoletni del človeške tapiserije doživela to ponovno vrednotenje. Pričujoča študija poskuša raziskati vzroke za pojavne spremembe med spoloma v upodobitvah bogov v obdobju Kadžarja. Kadžarsko obdobje na splošno velja za zgodovinsko prelomnico, v kateri so začeli izginjati zadnji ostanki tradicionalne družbene strukture v Iranu, kar je pomenilo začetek novega sveta. Umetniška dela iz tega ključnega obdobja pričajo o globoki preobrazbi pogleda na naravo, nadnaravna bitja in ženske. Div kot utelešenje grozot narave in ženska kot simbol lepote in nežnosti narave sta se združila. Divi, nekoč okamenela bitja, so prevzeli blagodejne in izrazito ženske oblike. Trdimo, da ta metamorfoza pomeni težnjo po demitologizaciji narave in sekularizaciji ženskega družbenega življenja.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Kadžar, spol, metamorfoza, mitološki, div, ilustracija

INTRODUCTION

The term "Metamorphosis" and its practical application in mythology originate from Ovid's seminal work titled *Metamorphoses*, which delves into the transmutation and transfiguration of one entity into another. In Eastern cultures, this term encompasses broader and somewhat different notions and is expressed by terms such as *Maskh* (human transformation into animals), *Faskh* (human transformation into plants), and *Raskh* (human transformation into inanimate objects) among others (Ovidius Naso, 2010).

Traditionally, human societies formed their opinion regarding all entities – be they living beings, objects, or phenomena – in terms of their potential utility or detriment. Nature, perceived as the backdrop and stage for all entities known to humans, has always been teeming with creatures and concepts to which humans would assign evaluative labels. Each entity possessed mysterious aspects, which humans tended to simplify according to more straightforward criteria. All entities deemed as harmful and perilous were considered to represent unknown forces that were ostensibly insidious, menacing, and cunning – in brief, forces capable of negatively impacting human life. Our ancestors associated these entities with and felt their presence in such phenomena as darkness, pain, death, natural disasters, predatory animals, and even human "enemies". This invisible realm was thought to house mythical evil creatures such as divs, aals, bakhtaks, and jinns.

On the opposite side were concepts, entities, and phenomena that were viewed as virtuous, fruitful, beneficial, and reassuring. Beauty, shelter, fruit trees, flowers, herbs, livestock, and hunting animals contributed to human survival and enhanced the pleasures of life. Maternal and feminine qualities, inherent within constrained human communities of ancient times, were synonymous with the above-mentioned positive aspects. This world-view and understanding of life and nature, although continuously evolving and becoming more sophisticated, were largely shared across all cultures. Although numerous religions and ideologies have emerged and faded away through millennia, the original perceptions of our ancestors remained remarkably stable and are distinctly present in contemporary cultures. This research focuses on Iranian society during a specific historical period and the way it experienced a gradual metamorphosis and transition, without delving into a meticulous investigation of the subject from a broad perspective.

The Qajar era was a period of significant social transformations within Iranian society, one of which involved people's belief in the supernatural. Divs were once considered as supreme omnipresent beings capable of influencing all aspects of daily life; entities that could not be explained in terms of human logic nor governed by human laws and mores. However, in this particular era, even the imperious div underwent a substantial shift in identity. No longer considered invincible, divs began to be reimagined either as abject beings or ones whose monstrous qualities were largely tamed. Numerous artworks attest to the profound mythological metamorphosis in the nature of supernatural beings, especially divs, during the Qajar era. This research will explore this very metamorphosis and its broader implications.

Throughout history, the cultural spectrum of Iran has not only witnessed conflicts between significant social forces and ethnicities but also served as the stage for the dawn, decline,

and transformation of supernatural forces. Political unrest and the lack of security often accompanied intellectual upheavals, further aggravating clashes of ideas. Although Iranians, for large parts of their history, have believed in the existence of an omnipotent deity as the creator of all and the one sovereign of all, the parallel belief that supernatural forces such as divs, jinns, aals, and bakhtaks exert an influence on their lives has never ceased to exist. These oft ominous forces, however, have undergone various transformations in form, nature, and function themselves, closely mirroring the social transformations of the time. Supernatural forces, then, have served as reflections of social forces and events. Documenting artworks as reliable records for historical examinations, especially in cases with limited written resources and historical reports, was therefore a necessity in this research.

This research is not concerned with any specific form, background, or manner of presentation; rather, it is focused on a particular notion of artworks and the term used in this paper for this purpose will henceforth be *illustrative arts*. To these authors, illustration encompasses all arts that involve visualisation, painting, engraving, and embodiment, which share the common goal of representing, imitating, or freely interpreting the forms existing in nature. In brief, the objective of this study is to discover why the divs portrayed in The Qajar era paintings underwent a gender metamorphosis. The authors seek to answer the question of whether these changes reflect intellectual and ideological transformations within society or merely signify transition toward a novel artistic experience. Evidently, addressing this question necessitates an in-depth study of the social and historical background of this transformation, as well as an artistic investigation to understand the context within which the works in question were produced.

The lack of independent and comprehensive studies in this field, the continued relevance of the Qajar era today, and transference of the legacy and tribulations of Iranian society of the Qajar era to modern-day Iran, underscore the importance of such research projects. Establishing a meaningful connection between contemporary society and its final phase of traditionality during the Qajar era may assist us in developing a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of ourselves.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Evaluating an artwork from historical and cultural perspectives also requires a full examination of its sociological and mythological aspects, and this research is grounded in these considerations. By delving into the mythological and sociological background of the subject matter, the authors present their evaluation of the artistic and aesthetic aspects of the works and present their conclusions.

Within theoretical focus of this study, the Qajar era may be viewed as the stage for profound transformation in three aspects that mutually influenced one another: *nature* came under the unprecedented dominance of humankind, *women* were prepared to come out of the confinement of domestic spaces where they had been virtually imprisoned

for centuries, and the belief in the absolute power of mysterious supernatural beings was fading away under the influence of the age of enlightenment and the advent of modernity.

This period marked the final stage of Iranians' struggles with nature. With the exception of indomitable major events such as earthquakes and droughts, nature was all but conquered by humans. The transition toward the use of sophisticated methods, tools, and firearms in place of their increasingly obsolete counterparts rendered humanity more adept at dealing with predatory creatures in nature, leading to the unfortunate extinction of important indigenous species in Iran, such as lions and tigers. Prior to the Qajar era, hunting was almost exclusively considered as a skill and art belonging to the wealthy nobility, and the upbringing of future kings involved training in hunting and athleticism (Adinehvand, 2016). Whereas aristocrats, princes, and even kings showcased their prowess and resourcefulness by participating in royal hunting parties, the increasing ease with which animals could now be trapped and killed almost stripped hunting of its epic glory and heroic elements, turning it into an easily accessible and widespread pastime for the masses.

Visual arts like painting, illustration, and engraving served as advertising tools during the Qajar era, depicting heroic scenes of royal hunts. Sculpture, relief, and tilework would also frequently portray these scenes (Heidari Babakamal et al., 2016). Artists of the era found portrayals of hunting grounds to be a suitable platform for their artistic expression (Adinehvand et al., 2016). No significant artwork remains of the hunting exploits of the lower classes who were of no interest to the artists of the time; however, hunting was undertaken with increased interest among the people. Certain sections of society saw hunting as a means of sustenance, providing for their families and, at times, relatives and neighbors. The triumph over nature eradicated any mythical elements associated with hunting. Nature, once considered a sacred realm in the rituals of Mehr, Zoroastrianism, and Islam, was quick to lose its mystery, with modern science creating increasingly accurate maps and accounts of all its components and characteristics, while facilitating the utilisation of its resources. Therefore, sites of formerly mythical repute, such as valleys, caves, and wells, which were once regarded as the dwelling places of mythical creatures like divs and jinns lost much of their aura, no longer able to capture anyone's imagination.

The Qajar era society was intensely religious. The leading figures of the time were not scholars or even religious intellectuals, but the superficial clergy who insisted on the ritualistic aspects of religion. The incessant impasses and failures, in addition to confrontations with the incomparably advanced foreign world over a prolonged period had instilled in the people the belief that many aspects of life were beyond human reach, that supernatural forces and metaphysical beings held the reins of world affairs. While the Qajar era left us with more reliable historical accounts for use as study resources compared to previous eras, it was nonetheless characterised by overwhelming belief in the occult, superstition, pseudoscience, and supernatural beings (Hatami, 2019). Notably, this backward attitude did not only plague ordinary people. Political figures and decision-makers shared such beliefs and practiced the same rituals. For instance, Zahir-al-Dawlah (1983) a prominent military leader and the governor of Kerman under Fatḥ Ali Shah, reported the use of talismans by Nāyeb-al-Saltana, Mohammad Ali Shah's father-in-law.

A conflicting trend, however, was also instigated during the Qajar era, where intellectuals began to desacralise and demystify supernatural beings. This widespread belief contributed to the ultimate defiance and revolt against imaginary supernatural beings. In an era where invisible forces were widely thought to play a significant role in determining individuals' actions and fates, artworks were being created that criticised these prevailing beliefs. Artists now depicted demonic entities as stripped of their powers and sinister attributes, giving them dejected, ineffectual, and passive appearances. Continued victories of humanity against nature, therefore, led to the demystification and demythologisation of nature itself. Once considered sacred, all-powerful, and frightening, nature now could no longer be represented by the harsh symbols of the past.

In the Qajar era, women were condemned to confined spaces. These constraints arose, primarily, from religious beliefs, and also the strong influence of centuries-old misconceptions, fantasies, customs, and rituals. It must be noted, however, that women were neither alien to these concepts nor their sole victims; rather, in most cases, women were willing agents and executors of these internalised norms. In addition to the spiritual constraints imposed by the prevailing culture and religion, the Qajar woman also had to endure frequent physical punishment – a common, widely accepted practice at the time (Zarrinsky, 1992). Any doubts regarding the miserable conditions under which lower-class women lived would be quashed if one also considered the unimaginable duress and humiliation that they suffered as maids in aristocratic households. Guidelines crafted by a prominent landowner to govern the conduct of his servants depicts a clear picture of the prevailing circumstances of women:

> The maid shall not speak with [male] servants. She shall not raise her voice or cause disputes. She shall not climb to the roof or go outside the yard to have a break, eat fruits, and so forth. If she fails to follow the rules and does anything other than her duty, a valet is authorised to strike her with a wooden bat. If the valet fails in this, my honourable brother, Mirza Ali Khan, will scalp him to establish the strict order I intend to have in my house. When maids set out to visit the holy shrine or visit the bathhouse, they must always be accompanied by several servants. They should never, under any circumstances, be left on their own. Even when maids have gone for pilgrimage or bathing, the house should never be left untended or unguarded, be it day or night. At night, two babas [elderly servants] shall sleep under the same roof [lest the maids leave the premises]. A valet and a gardener, by turn, shall sleep outside behind the door until the morning prayer, at which time they are allowed to return to their chambers (Naqdi, 1979).

The narrow enclosure around the female human, which originated in primitive rituals, had become established as cultural norms. The threads that bound her to the supernatural world were still very much in place. Even Naser al-Din Shah, the one Qajar king who claimed to be an advocate for modernisation and sought to emulate the Western way

of life, remained a proponent of these norms and quite superstitious. According to some accounts, a number of women were expelled from his harem as "inauspicious", having been blamed for some unfortunate incidents (Polak, 1989). It was this type of environment where The Qajar era women were molded.

In the unending list of supernatural entities in which Iranians (like other Eastern cultures) believed, there was another fearsome entity known as *aal*, whose sole function was to torment and harm women and their offspring (Rice, 2004; Churchill, 1891). Apparently, women managed to reach a sort of understanding and compromise with these imaginary beings, either driving them away by force or getting them to fulfill their wishes. For instance, some women would plead to Satan through aal to resolve their infertility (Knanishu, 1899) or, alternately, sought help from the Queen of Fairies (Sykes, 1910).

Women's emotional and sexual relationships, fertility, and reproductive prowess during this period significantly relied on bizarre beliefs deposited from prehistoric times. A piece of monkey liver or the vulva of hyenas and rabbits were used in specific ways as to create or enhance love. Alternately, oil extracted from the skin of wolves or wild hogs was applied to the garments of a husband and wife with the intent to diminish their sexual attraction to one another, ultimately leading to discord and the deterioration of their marriage (Amanat, 2004; Afzal al-Mulk, 1982). In traditional societies, fertility and reproduction are essential feminine traits and decisive in a woman's fortunes. If a women exhibited any shortcoming in this regard, she risked losing her social or familial status. Therefore, adhering to the role ostensibly dictated by nature, which required her, to reproduce as all females should, was an archetypal and obligatory duty. According to various accounts, in the quest to become fertile, women would pass under an elephant's belly (Morier, 1999), gathered under the statue of a tiger or slept beneath it (Yate, 1900), and used the gallbladder of wolves (Amanat, 2004; Morier, 1999). Additionally, in instances where a woman endured intense childbirth pain and had difficulty delivering the baby, her husband resorted to placing feed on her bare breasts and having a horse eat from it (Dieulafoy, 1976).

In contrast, certain methods were also popular as contraceptive solutions. For instance, women who wished to avoid pregnancy, placed a piece of a wolf's body in their clothes prior to intercourse (Serena, 1983). This method was even practiced in royal circles. In one notorious case, the court jester of Naser al-Din Shah exposed a conspiracy involving some of the King's wives who sought to render him sterile by slipping in some bear liver into his food (Etemad al-Saltaneh, 1966).

In all, historical data indicate that Qajar women's upbringing, personality patterns, and code of social behavior practically directed them toward superstition and the occult. Not only were the majority of common women preoccupied with such beliefs and so-called methods, but society at large, even at its highest level, namely the royal court, caused them to resort to supernatural solutions. On this basis, artists' inclination to portray supernatural beings in the form of female humans could not be considered offensive or a violation of norms.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a theoretical exploration based on documentary studies whose statistical population consists of Iranian artworks featuring depictions of divs. By selecting 16 Qajar era artworks, the authors draw the readers' attention to certain details in the artworks of that period. These details point to a significant change in the form, style, and function of the motifs of divs compared to past works. Through the course of this research, the data extracted from credible sources were ultimately developed into documented information by means of a qualitative method based on descriptive-historical analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bibliographic analyses indicate that no research has thus far been conducted on this particular subject matter. However, sources can be found that have addressed certain aspects of it, with some focusing on depictions of divs and others exploring the role and social status of women during the Qajar era.

According to Rice (2004), Iranian women during the Qajar era profoundly believed in supernatural forces, viewing them as active participants in their daily lives.

With a particularly keen eye for nuances of everyday life, D'Allemagne (1956) provided a detailed account of the social life of Iranians during the Qajar era. Primarily focused on Iranian women, this source has been particularly useful in shaping the current understanding of the social situation of women in the Qajar era.

Elm and Dinari (2019) worked on providing a clearer picture of the clothing of Qajar women by going through the field works of Western explorers. A valuable study based on eye observations and critical views from non-Iranian individuals looking in from the outside, this report sheds light on the social fabric of the era.

Mehrpooya et al. (2017) delved into the evolution of the div motif during the Qajar era. Aside from having a half-human half-animal body, the being was, for the first time in Qajar paintings, depicted as having four eyes.

Nategh (1979) referred to a code of conduct devised by the head of an aristocratic family. The document makes frequent use of imperative verbs to determine the behavioural boundaries of a family, thereby providing an accurate reflection of the institutionalised moral values of its era.

Hosseini-Nia (2021) posited that the composite beings illustrated in the Qajar era, although shaped in the imagination of the artists, were heavily inspired by the beliefs prevalent in pre-Zoroastrian Persia. This interpretation speaks of two groups of supernatural forces descending on earth from another world: malevolent entities that engage in battles with humans and forces of good; and benevolent entities that support humans and other creatures on earth.

Mohammadi-Pour (2020) analysed div motifs in terms of form, structure, perspective, elements breaking out of the frame, proportional changes, circumvention, and composition with other elements in five prints of *Chapsangi Shahnameh*.

Rashidi (2012) examined the mythical beings depicted in illustrations as surrounding the figure of Imam Ali, the first Imam of Shia Muslims, in terms of form and composition.

Radmehr (2011) investigated the perception of jinn in the collective consciousness of the people, as well as the role of these beings in the Quran and Islamic narratives. The author cites Islamic narratives and pop culture as the primary sources of this study.

Zakariayi (2006) argued that in addition to the mythical quality and inherent duality of nature in terms of good and evil, benevolent and malevolent forces, by extension, originate in human nature. According to the author, this duality has been manifested in diverse forms during different historical periods, including the Qajar era.

What distinguishes the present research from the studies reviewed in this section is its reliance on scientific studies within the framework of socio-cultural and mythological perspectives regarding the value of Qajar era artworks. Moreover, this investigation places the emphasis on the historical background of three key components: nature, supernatural beings, and women.

THE CONCEPT OF DIV IN SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

The cosmos and what human beings comprehend through their five senses have undergone continuous transformation, diversification, and reinterpretations throughout history. Although characterised by obscurity, secrecy, and complexity, unpleasant concepts have not been exceptions to this rule. Divs, as a highly diverse group of malevolent beings, have symbolised unpleasant forces of nature. This section investigates how natural forces are manifest in divs as symbolic entities and the transformation divs have undergone throughout history. In this context, particularly in ancient times, the term *Div* generally refers to imaginary supernatural entities, often portrayed as anthropomorphic beings that function as deities, that are responsible for overseeing various aspects of life, able to determine or alter the destinies of individuals, and create or affect natural phenomena. However, it is important to acknowledge that the contemporary perception of divs has evolved over the centuries and differs from the ancient understanding of these beings.

A) Belief in Divs in Prehistoric Times

The history of religion is one of the most complex aspects of human life. It is very difficult to find something that the humankind has not worshipped in one way or another at some point in its history (Hume, 1969). Harder still is to find a facet of human knowledge and understanding that has not been entangled with religious beliefs. At least up to this point in history, humanities as academic disciplines have been influenced by religious thought, although to various degrees. This is particularly true for ambiguous, non-empirical fields such as the occult (Eliade, 1997). Nature, as the setting and framework for the formation of human existence, has been an open ground for all sorts of analyses and explanations, including religious interpretations. When nature was to be feared, it was perceived as a roaring beast; and when the time was right to cherish nature, it was regarded as a charming lady who could alternately take on a motherly role or be a lover. Seeking to demystify

sacred texts, Spinoza stated that since the masses were unaware of the inner workings of nature, they were open to farfetched supernatural interpretations and, therefore, would readily accept any natural occurrence as a miracle (Spinoza, 1862).

Divs were among the first entities to be sanctified and worshipped by Aryans. The synonymity of the terms used to refer to divs and concepts like *God*, *day*, and *light* indicates that Aryans lived with this religious belief before their ultimate dispersion and the great diaspora. According to linguistic studies on Indo-European languages, *Dyēus pheter* is the original term denoting the concept of deity. This deity was still recognisable for ancient peoples even after undergoing inevitable transformations in other lands. It became *Dyáuṣ Pitā* in Sanskrit, *Zeùs Patḗr* in Greek, and Jupiter in Latin. Evidently, these terms are derived from the word *Div* whose original meaning in Indo-European languages was *day*. It later transformed to *Díva* in Sanskrit, *Tiv* in Armenian, *Diēs* in Latin, and *Die* in Old Irish. It would gradually come to be used as the most common word for *God*: *Dīvus* or *Deiuos* in Old Latin, *Deus* in Latin, *Deva* in Sanskrit, *Dievas* in Lithuanian, *Dia* in Old Irish, *Tvar* (plural name) in Old Icelandic, and *Dava* in Avestan (Beekes, 2010: 78). The close proximity of the words *div* and *day* signifies the prehistoric inclination toward naturalism in primitive religions.

In those historical periods, nature, with all its obscure elements, was the chief source and stimulus of human thought. Nearly all other concepts and phenomena were either constructed in its image or understood in reference to it. Supernatural beings, including divs, embodied the frightening and mysterious side of nature, while women and feminine characteristics symbolised its gentle, beneficial, fertile, and motherly aspects.

B) Belief in Divs at the Dawn of Global Religions

During the formative periods of global religions, the concept of divs and the worship of divs as primitive deities had significantly different connotations compared to the organised religions that emerged later. Among primitive peoples, "sacred" beings were generally seen as frightening and furious entities capable of causing harm. In order to protect oneself from their malevolent intentions, it was necessary to seek their favor and mercy. This separation of negative aspects from the supreme divine power eventually led to the development of demonology and the belief in the existence of devils. This pivotal development likely took place during the Paleolithic period (Brandon, 1970).

In ancient Near-Eastern religions, particularly early Judaism (Angelini, 2021), as well as in Christian demonology during the Middle Ages, Satan was perceived as a malevolent supernatural being who could possess individuals and required exorcism. Much of Jewish demonology, which greatly influenced Christianity and Islam, was influenced by ancient Persian teachings, particularly those of later Zoroastrianism (Boyce, 1987).

The abstraction of negative traits from primitive deities was not absolute, and some of these traits were preserved and even celebrated in certain religions. In the case of Iranian culture, these deities were originally divs who underwent a transformation in their conceptual function over time. Initially appearing as gods, these entities were later dethroned and replaced by Ahura (or Asuras). They then became ostensibly powerful malevolent beings whose might was matched by heroes but ultimately faced defeat against

forces of good. In the final stage of the transformation of divs, they became peripheral and powerless entities in feminine forms, who were defeated not by mighty warriors but by pampered kings and love-struck courtiers.

The concept of "femininity" and the role of women have also undergone various transformations throughout history. From the early matriarchal era, where goddesses held supreme authority and enjoyed widespread popularity, to centuries of progressively patriarchal societies where male gods dominated, the history of femininity has been marked by constant changes. However, during the period spanning from the formation of early civilisations to the Age of Enlightenment, men assumed the position of the "primary" sex, relegating women to the unenviable role of the "second" sex.

For centuries, many civilisations have personified the earth as a goddess. In Greek mythology, the goddess Gaia, colloquially referred to as *mother earth*, is synonymous with the earth and nature (De-Gaia, 2018: 43). To those who hold this belief, interactions with the environment and caring for the earth represent devotion or prayer to this goddess. Furthermore, the earth and all the beings it supports are seen as a network of life embodying Gaia (Parsons, 2002).

The decline of the golden age of goddesses and the dominance of specialised deities led to the decline of women's overall status. The matriarchal era had also come to an end. In this period, women often appeared in the role of a beloved, mothers, or at best, queens. However, with the emergence of major global religions, including Abrahamic religions, respect for women and their vital role in family life was restored. However, this was far from implying complete equality with men (Klingorová, Havlíček, 2015; Inglehart, Norris, 2005). Notable progress was also made in the position of women in Islamic thought. While virtually no women, perhaps except for Hagar, were addressed by divine revelation or supernatural forces in the teachings of religions, by some Islamic accounts, it was Khadijah who first conveyed the message of revelation to the Prophet of Islam.

The social system of the period maintained its longstanding foundation based on patriarchy and religion. Indeed, religion and patriarchy are fundamental social structures that largely operate based on social organisation (Attoh, 2017). The patriarchal system, which targets the position of women, persisted in most religions. Religions rooted in patriarchy served to solidify the hegemony of male humans. The relationship between an ostensibly male God and humanity, as established within the internal system of these religions, would naturally extend into families in terms of the man-woman relationship dynamics (Slusser, 2009). This is exemplified in Christianity, wherein the male authority in the household and the church is founded upon and informed by the system of creation, and salvation is only attainable to those who remain faithful to this hierarchy. From this perspective, God has endorsed – an continues to consider – patriarchy as the optimal structure for human societies (Waltke, 1995).

In tandem with the transformations in the concept of femininity, humanity's perceptions, assumptions, and fantasies regarding themselves and the universe have also undergone significant changes. Two particular concepts, which are closely linked to the notion of "woman" and have continuously evolved with it, are *nature* and *div*s. In the past, these three were intertwined with each other. That is, nature was conceived as both

a woman and a div; woman symbolised both nature and embodied elements associated with divs; and divs symbolised nature and were portrayed as women-like creatures. With the intellectual and physical development of humanity, these concepts, along with other human thoughts and perceptions, have arguably undergone five stages of evolution and metamorphosis: 1. Worship, 2. Compromise, 3. Challenge, 4. Subjugation, and 5. Realism. From this perspective, the present research examines the concept of Div in its fourth stage of metamorphosis in Iranian culture and art.

The process of associating women with demonic qualities was, on the surface, only a pretext for applying sexual violence. However, the psychological rationale behind this association was more rooted in the mysterious nature of women and divs. Within a somewhat bizarre syllogistic line of reasoning, just as humanity turned to the occult to comprehend and explain the enigmatic wonders of nature, women's resemblance to nature in terms of fertility led to their association with supernatural beings. Therefore, the conceptual position of woman underwent transformations that paralleled these associated qualities. As a result, the fourth stage of the conceptual metamorphosis of women, characterised by subjugation, ultimately worked to their disadvantage. Women came to be viewed in a negative light and were subjected to submission and obedience. Alongside the constant threat of sexual violence that many of them faced, women were now antagonised for their presumed supernatural qualities, which were now viewed as sinister and menacing, rather than fascinating.

The prevailing belief among patriarchs was that women, as a result of their perceived emotional nature, were more prone to arousal and seduction than men, and were less hesitant to indulge in sinful conduct to gratify their fleshly desires. This belief was often cited as the reason behind women being more susceptible to the temptations of devils and their predisposition to engage in sorcery. The notion that the majority of sorcerers were women, and that they were typically picked from among disobedient and rebellious women, further reinforced the association of femininity with sinister supernatural qualities (Dunn, 2017). In medieval Europe, a connection was even established between sexual crimes and female demonology, leading many to believe that the relations between witches (female) and demons (male) were of a sexual nature, as well (Broedel, 2013). As a result of being labeled with this characterisation, some women felt compelled to double down on this misconception by emphasising their "ugly" and socially deviant behaviors in order to showcase their supreme metaphysical and magical powers. This, in turn, contributed to a heightened sense of betrayal associated with these women (Bardsley, 2007).

C) Belief in Divs in the Qajar Era

Qajar art, with its unique characteristics distinguishing it from earlier periods, is recognised to have originated around the reign of Naser al-Din Shah in 1848 AD. Prior to that time, during the rule of Agha Mohammad Khan, Fath Ali Shah, and the brief rule of Mohammad Shah, the Qajar dynasty had not achieved the level of stability in its borders and society necessary to shape the prevailing social discourse encompassing religious, political, literary, and artistic aspects. It was during this period that the Qajar kings defined their ideals and established their desired state, which soon became prevalent in society through endorsement or synthesis. It is crucial to also recognise that the Iranian society

of The Qajar era, was strongly influenced by the tumultuous periods of the Safavid, Afsharid, and Zand dynasties; it thus had the propensity for – and had displayed symptoms of – impending cultural shifts. Therefore, the examples selected and examined in this study of Qajar art are not limited to any specific period within the rule of this dynasty.

The Qajar era marked the beginning of a fateful historical phase for Iranian society. It navigated cultural influences from other regions, acknowledged its scientific and technological backwardness, as well as outdated lifestyle, in comparison to the rapidly advancing outside world, and grappled with its intellectual and managerial inefficiencies. Ultimately, these circumstances led to the recognition that immediate reform was necessary, culminating in the Persian Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911). Beneath these changes were motives accumulated over several thousand years of Iranian culture, resulting in the emergence of a modern "equivalent": the ancient nature, once teeming with predatory animals such as lions, tigers (formerly known to Persians as "red lions"), leopards, and eagles, was now subdued and dominated by Iranians through the introduction of firearms. The institution of monarchy and the longstanding structures attached to it, which for millennia had claimed to be the masters of Iranians' fate, were gradually stripped of their dignity and splendor. Kings and their entourage were now not only subject to incessant criticism, but also seen as completely deserving to perish at the hands of armed insurgents like Mirza Reza Kermani.

METAMORPHOSIS OF PRE-QAJAR ARTISTIC MOTIFS

The depiction of encounters between humans and demonic entities, even prior to the emergence of Qajar dynasty, was a consistent theme in Iranian art. In pre-Qajar art, divs were depicted as powerful beings whose most notable characteristic was their humanoid forms. The beings would often be illustrated with terrifying faces, heads like carnivorous animals, horns and tails resembling those of herbivores, and adorned with armbands, leg bindings, saddles, and other accessories (see Figs. 1–10). The most popular demonic creatures for pictorial representations among artist were divs and dragons. However, in the pre-Islamic era, sphinx-like motifs, often depicted as a combination of carnivores, herbivores, and birds, had the strongest presence. This trend to illustrate metamorphosed beings continued after the advent of Islam, as well, with artworks often featuring composite creatures. Figure 1 depicts a div with a repugnant face and talons like gigantic birds.

Divs were sometimes illustrated in painting as wielding a mace, a detail especially prominent in depictions of battle scenes (see Figs. 2, 3, and 4).

The physical anatomy of divs mirrored that of heroes; however, divs were made to look more robust and formidable, emphasising the hero's inner struggle against their own negative and animalistic qualities (Figs. 5–7).

Divs in pre-Qajar illustrations were often depicted as unmistakably male, a detail that was underlined in many instances by artists through an explicit depiction of the male genitalia (Figs. 8–10). The popular derogatory term *narreh-ghoul*, literally "male ghoul", which is used in Persian in reference to heavyset young men, is thought to have been inspired by such illustrations.

Figure 1: A div carries the Queen of Sheba's throne, from *Ajayeb al-Makhluqat*, watercolor, 16th century, Shiraz or Qazvin, Iran. (Bibliothèque nationale de France)

Figure 2: Battle of Imam Ali with subterranean divs, from *Ahsan al-Kibar*, watercolor, 1580 AD. (Golestan Palace Museum)

Figure 3: Battle of Rostam with a div, from *Shahnameh Tahmasbi*, watercolor, 1600 AD. (Aga Khan Museum)

Figure 4: Sultan Muhammad, Battle of Tahmuras with divs, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, watercolor, 1525 AD, Tabriz, Iran. (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Figure 5: Battle of Rostam with a div, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, watercolor, 1300–1330 AD, Iran. (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Figure 6: Battle of Rostam with a div, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, watercolor, 1330–1340 AD, Isfahan, Iran. (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Figure 7: A div tossing Rostam into the sea, watercolor, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, 1330–1340 AD, Isfahan, Iran. (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Figure 8: A div tossing Rostam into the sea, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, watercolor, 1500 AD, Iran. (Library of Congress)

Figure 9: Moein Mosavar, A div tossing Rostam into the sea, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, watercolor, 1660 AD, Isfahan, Iran. (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

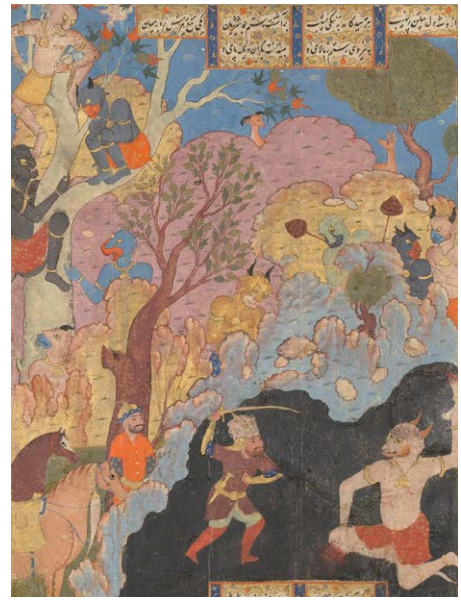

Figure 10: Battle of Rostam with a div, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, watercolor, 1560–1580 AD, Iran. (Metropolitan Museum)

METAMORPHOSIS OF ARTISTIC MOTIFS IN THE QAJAR ERA

Before exploring instances of metamorphosis, it should be reminded that in pre-Qajar art demonology, male divs, or other malevolent beings with masculine traits, were prevalent. While this type of divs was depicted comparatively less often, when ordinary people discussed murderous or destructive divs, they were in fact referring to male divs who were ostensibly devoid of feminine tenderness and maternal instincts. Masculinity, having traditionally been associated with warfare, competitiveness, and sexual dominance since ancient times, was evidently more aligned with the depiction of invisible vicious creatures. At any rate, the same divs whose masculinity had traditionally been emphasised, began to be depicted by Qajar era artists as having feminine shapes and attitudes.

During The Qajar era, women, in particular, experienced a significant phase in the evolution of their nation's spirit. On one hand, they witnessed the persistence of radical religious beliefs and the survival of customs that had lasted for millennia. On the other hand, the totemic psychological aspects associated with women's gender were being discarded. Whereas the increasing weight of societal, economic, and political constraints forced women to maintain their quiet existence within the walls of their house, geographical and cultural doors were being opened to foreigners, who had transformed from infidel enemies to affluent trail-blazers of the civilisation, compelling women to reconsider their perception of femininity. One of the outcomes of this duality was the trend to portray malevolent beings in feminine shapes in artworks of the period.

The formerly ferocious-looking divs, who were described as twisting and turning and levitating in disturbing allegories and folk tragedies, were now being portrayed in a quasi-comedic light. Consequently, the female form became a more suitable vessel for these beings in artworks. Qajar artists dispensed with conventional demonological forms and began to present divs in distinctly feminine shapes. The new divs possessed prominent breasts, feminine thighs and buttocks, and wore short skirts that accentuated their curves. The faces and features of divs now looked gentler. Once portrayed as imperious warriors, divs now merely went through the motions in their confrontations with those looking to claim their lives, looking quite beatable against the adversary (Figs. 11–25).

Male heroes known for their demon-slaying skills also underwent a transformation. Characters like Rostam, who had often looked exceedingly masculine and muscular, were now being portrayed as the ideal Qajar youth: dressed in light-color clothing, with slender waists and kind faces. This transformation can be observed in lithographic prints (Figs. 11 and 12), ceramic work on public buildings (Figs. 13 and 14), and epic illustrations (Figs. 14 and 15).

In pulp illustrations of this era (figures 17 and 18), we see a young man with a glowing face and lithe physique engaged in a solemn and worthy ritualistic task.

Qajar era artists also depicted Fath Ali Shah in the same idealised fashion, with a lean figure, delicate hands, and royal attire, solemnly bringing divs to their demise (see Figs. 19 and 20). Were the div motifs eliminated from these illustrations, it is highly likely that an unsuspecting Iranian from the Qajar era would have had difficulty differentiating a valiant hero grappling with divs from a young man portrayed as heading to his new bride's chambers to consummate their marriage.

Figure 11: Battle of Rostam and the Div, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, lithograph, late 19th century, Iran. (Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of Asian Art)

Figure 12: Slaying of a div by a folk hero, lithograph, Qajar era. (Zolfaghari, Heidari, 2012: 1981)

Figure 13: Battle of Rostam and the White Div, underglaze tile, Nasser al-Din Shah era, Sa'adabad Palace, Iran. (Archives of the authors)

Figure 14: Mousazadeh, Battle of Rostam and the White Div, seven-color tile, mid-14th century, bathhouse in Afifabad Garden, Shiraz, Iran. (Seif, 1997: 163)

Figure 15: Battle of Rostam and Akvan Div, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, watercolor, 1800–1850 AD, Iran. (Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of Asian Art)

Figure 16: Battle of Rostam and the White Div, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, watercolor, c. 1900 AD, Qajar Persia. (Bonhams Auction House)

Figure 17: A young Qajar hero punishing a div, gouache on paper, 1750 AD. (Wellcome Collection)

Figure 18: A young Qajar man confronting a div, gouache on paper, 1750 AD. (Wellcome Collection)

Figure 19: Battle of Fath Ali Shah and the Div, gouache on board, Qajar era. (Wellcome Collection)

Figure 20: Battle of Fath Ali Shah and the Div, gouache on board, Qajar era, (Wellcome Collection)

During the Qajar era, the attire of divs, typically reduced to a short skirt, did not undergo significant changes. However, it did align with the clothing worn by lower social classes. According to some accounts, women's clothing gradually became shorter during this period, with skirts reaching just above the knees, which was in line with the artistic trends of the time.

There were instances, however, where divs were depicted wearing women's trousers and dresses. For instance, in Figure 21, an angel is illustrated wearing traditional clothing associated with affluent women, while the two divs in the scene are depicted wearing tight trousers, with the lines of their trousers discernible on their calves. Women during that era would reportedly wear a tight and delicate red garment called *Arkhalig*, whose distinguishing feature was its corset-like waist panel (Soltikoff, 2002). Similar to the figures in the image, women were often seen wearing tight trousers with short skirts known as Shaliteh (D'Allemagne, 1956).

It is highly likely that these tight trousers were influenced by Western cultures, as Naser al-Din Shah, in particular, ordered such trousers and short jackets to imitate the fashion trends he had observed during his travels to Europe (Alam, Dinary, 2019). However, there are other accounts whose description of traditional Iranian trousers are consistent with what the angel in the image is wearing. D'Allemagne mentions that Iranian women, when venturing outside their homes and into public places, would wear *Chaqchour*, which were peculiar trousers wide in the thigh area and narrow in the calves (D'Allemagne, 1956).

In Qajar era art, divs were generally depicted in a passive state. However, when it came to depictions of the court of Prophet Solomon (Figs. 22–25), which was a popular subject among artists of that time, there was a coinciding period of renewed public interest in the narrative of Imam Hussein's uprising against the oppressive Umayyad caliph, Yazid I (Najmi, 1977). According to certain religious historical accounts, Imam Hussein not only called on all people to join him in his fight against oppression, he also sought supernatural assistance to aid him and his family in the *Battle of Karbala* (Majlisi, 1983). Consequently, in all of these images, divs are not portrayed as submissive or obedient beings. Instead, the artists gave them imposing physiques, as if suggesting their capability to undertake arduous, decisive tasks on behalf of a king.

The reaction of divs towards heroes (Imam Ali: Fig. 2; Rostam: Figs. 11, 13, 14, 15, 16; Qajar young princes: Figs. 17 and 18; Fath Ali Shah: Figs. 19, 20; a folk hero: Fig. 12) seems to follow the same sensibility. They had all become passive, powerless, manipulable beings, mirroring the depiction of Qajar women against "men privileged with institutionalised behavioral patterns". In Qajar illustrations, the divs were often depicted without typical masculine characteristics like fierceness and brutality. They showed no resistance when confronted by the heroes alongside whom they were portrayed. This characterisation style was widely accepted by the Qajar audience to the extent that, in some instances, artists would go so far as depicting a Qajar teenager without a heroic physique or armor effortlessly slaying a div (Figs. 17 and 18). Fath Ali Shah himself was not an exception to this rule: with a mustache flowing like a maiden's tresses, a stretched physique resembling the Persian Leopard, and a graceful face like a bridegroom, he charges forward and triumphantly overpowers any divs on sight (Figs. 19 and 20).

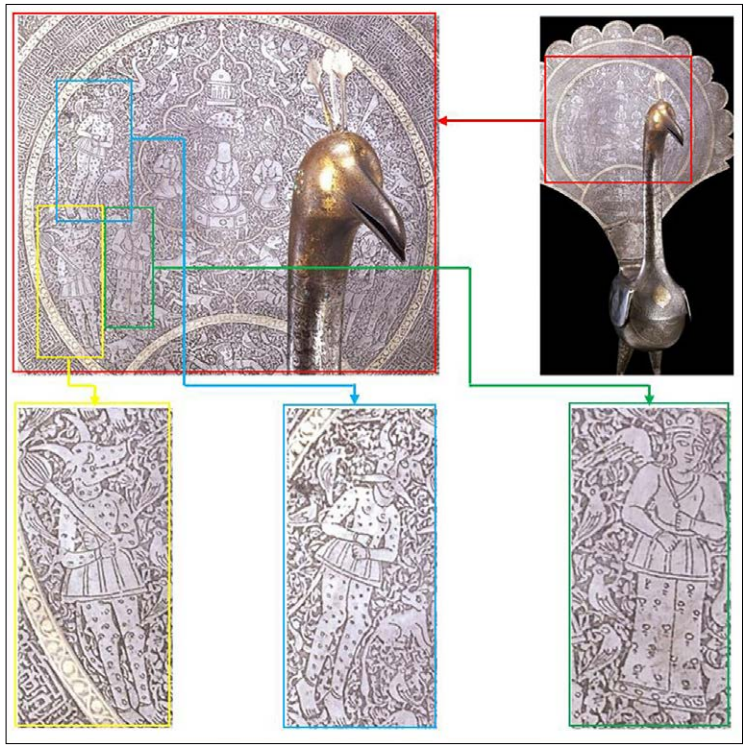

Figure 21: A div and an angel in the court of Prophet Solomon, steel engraving, 19th century, Iran. (The British Museum)

Figure 22: Divs at the of Prophet Solomon, lithograph, Qajar era. (Farhang Razi, 1949: 559)

Figure 23: Divs carrying the throne of Prophet Solomon, lithograph, Qajar era (Meem Gallery)

Figure 24: Divs in the court of Prophet Solomon, mirror frame, lacquer, Qajar era. (The Michael Collection)

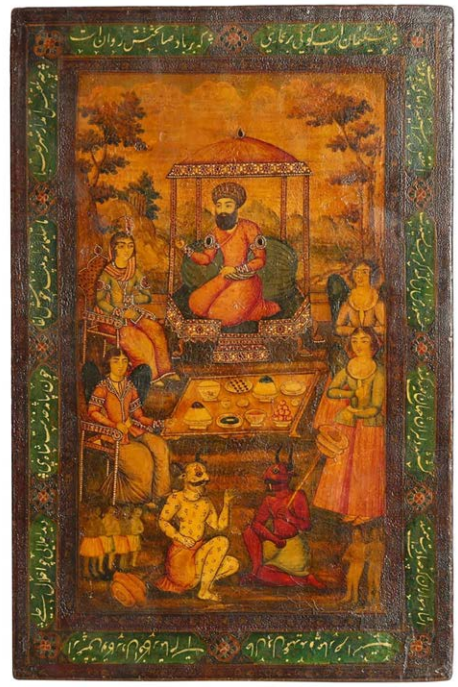

Figure 25: Divs in the court of Prophet Solomon, mirror frame, lacquer, Qajar era. (The Michael Collection).

In this particular instance, it would be inaccurate to state that the artist depicting the Qajar king had not been influenced by illustrations of ancient Iranian demons. There are frank imitations of Shahnameh illustrations like *Rostam and the White Div of Mazandaran* where, instead of half-human and half-div offspring, two bound divs are placed lifelessly within the frame.

Figures 2 to 10 can serve as cases that exemplify the above-mentioned imagery. In all these examples, which date back to pre-Qajar periods but follow the prevailing Qajar sensibility, the hero's triumph and the div's downfall are inevitable. However, pre-Qajar divs had a distinctively aggressive body language, with terrifying facial features and bodies like carnivorous animals. Another point is that, unlike the classic "captive in the king's court" motif (Figs. 21 to 25), in the pre-Qajar illustration (Fig. 4), the div appears to be a fearsome and irrepressible creature that has not yet been reduced to servitude by the all-conquering king.

If we consider passivity and subjugation as the predominant female characteristics in the Qajar era society of Iran, there are other indicators that can be examined to understand the significant gender metamorphosis of divs in the artworks of that time. The gender metamorphosis of divs in the Qajar era may be identified through the following three components.

A) Morphology and appearance

In artworks, divs were often depicted with feminine breasts (see Figs. 13 and 15), which easily differentiated them from male warriors who were depicted with robust muscular chests. Divs' figures exhibit graceful feminine curves, particularly with full thighs and broad hips (see Fig. 19), which were commonly depicted characteristics during this era. These creatures were never portrayed as agile, dynamic, or proactive. In some instances (Figs. 14 and 21), even the div's face is adorned with the erotic makeup style associated with the era. However, it is important to note that the artist did not mean to imply that the human hero was confronting a "female" div; ironically, the hero's face appears more heavily made up than the div's (as shown in Fig. 17). Among epic illustrations, Figure 15 takes a step further in this regard. The div's feminine physique and clothing in this image are complemented by seductive tints, lending the artwork a distinct color spectrum. Notably, the triumphant hero neither has the same skin tone as the div, nor does it possess the same full limbs. What gives the creatures a non-human appearance are their semi-animal faces and long tails.

B) Attitude and actions

The depiction of divs' reactions and behavior toward the hero in Qajar era paintings presents a notable departure from earlier portrayals. Unlike pre-Qajar paintings where defeated and subjugated divs were often shown submerged in blood, trapped in mud, or in chains, the divs of this period exhibit distinct and meaningful reactions. In contrast to past depictions where heroes sought to brutalise and tear apart the limbs of the divs, the heroes in Qajar era artworks appear on the verge of kissing the subdued divs. Remarkably, the divs do not display any inclination to fight off the hero's advances, let alone retaliate aggressively. It is important to note that the passive, welcoming body language of the divs also existed in visual artworks and epic literary works of preceding eras (see Fig. 6).

The epic hero's final triumph has long been considered an essential and inevitable element of the narrative. In illustrative arts, divs were often portrayed as proactive and ready for battle, emphasizing the gravity of the precarious situation in which the hero found himself. However, Qajar era artists clearly, and consciously, deviated from these conventions, choosing instead to depict the hero as poised to hurl the div to the ground and stand triumphantly over it.

C) Clothing and equipment

Another significant feature in div paintings during the Qajar era is the clothing, weapons, accessories, and ornaments that accompany the divs. Similar to the Qajar era women, divs are depicted wearing a short skirt known as *tonban* or *shalteh* which only covers their genitals. In some cases, divs are also depicted as wearing skin-colour trousers traditionally worn by Qajar era women (Fig. 17). In contrast, in pre-Qajar periods, divs were often portrayed with exposed torsos and protruding stomachs. Some artists even placed the divs' uncovered genitalia in full display to accentuate their shameless and dishonourable nature, considering that being fully covered was a traditional hallmark of feminine purity

and self-restraint in Qajar culture (and most other Eastern cultures) (Figs. 1–10). In Qajar artworks, divs were not equipped with deadly weapons or other terrifying tools; and if they did, the artists often gave the accessories a deliberately comic appearance (Figs. 19 and 20). In contrast, in pre-Qajar periods, divs were usually illustrated holding large weapons (Fig. 3) or possessing physical characteristics reminiscent of predatory animals, symbolising their proclivity for violence.

Figure 22, a lithographic work from the Qajar era, showcases a scene where a group of divs stands on the right side, while a group of naked women stands on the left, all prepared to serve the royal court in an unidentified land. The depiction of both the divs and women wearing identical short skirts conveys a hidden message. Firstly, it evokes the imagery of Prophet Solomon's court for Muslim Iranians, where the array of servants extended beyond humans to include animals and supernatural beings. Secondly, it alludes to the notoriously hedonistic lifestyle of the Qajar kings. Lastly, it signifies the command of humanity over nature, depicting divs and other supernatural entities humbly under the legal authority of a human being.

Women are portrayed as street girls resembling European dolls. More importantly, divs appear as both terrifying symbols of nature and as sex slaves catering to the desires of lustful men. The same divs, it should be noted, that Prophet Solomon had employed for labor and entrusted with challenging tasks. The portrayal of divs in this context showed them as unarmed beings with gentle faces, small non-threatening jaws, short feminine skirts, and seductive smiles, suggesting a shift in belief whereby divs were no longer suitable representations of the violent and frightening aspects of nature, as they had been in the past.

In Figure 26, we encounter what could be considered the quintessential piece in this collection, which contains all the aspects of the metamorphosis in question. The artwork features a group of divs, each holding a mace, which resemble a chorus. Their relaxed and seductive postures do not evoke the image of battle-hardened warriors. The maces, perfunctorily given to them by the artist, resemble honey spoons, bearing no resemblance to heroes' lethal weapons. Ironically, their pseudo-weapons further diminish their perceived grandeur. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that they inhabit an Iranian artwork, as they are even depicted wearing *tonban*, trousers adorned with intricate patterns typically worn by Qajar women.

To better evaluate gender metamorphosis in this example, let us consider Figure 27, a complementary artwork displayed in the same museum aisle. This piece portrays a group of female divs. Interestingly, the divs in this artwork bear a striking resemblance to their male counterparts from the previous image, characterised by distinctively unusual eyes and animal paws instead of human feet. A comparative analysis of the two images reveals a significant blurring of gender distinctions among the divs, as all of them have acquired distinctly feminine human forms. Both male and female divs are depicted wearing similar attire, and their physical appearances and postures are nearly indistinguishable. The only discernible gender marker is the presence of a male tail, which, in the absence of additional evidence, serves as the sole indicator to determine the gender of these creatures.

Figure 26: Divs with pitchforks, tilework. (Musée du Louvre)

Figure 27: Feminine div, tilework. (Musée du Louvre)

From a broad perspective, the components and instances of the gender metamorphosis of divs in the Qajar era can be shown in Table 1.

Component	**Example**	**Figure number**
Appearance	Feminine breasts	13, 15, 19, 26, 27
	Soft and curved lines instead of broken lines and sharp angles	15, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26
	Inverted lower body volume with upper body	19, 20, 22, 25, 26
	Feminine makeup	14, 17
	Human-like skin colour	11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25
	No frightening or ferocious features	11, 13,14,15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25
	No emphasis on masculine features	11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26
Attitude	Non-aggressive posture	21, 22, 23, 24,25 26
	Propensity for subjugation	11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20
	Emphasis on usefulness and ability to do manual labor instead of harmful intentions	18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26
Clothing and equipment	Short skirts in alignment with contemporary fashion	18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 26
	Being unarmed or possessing ineffective weapons	11, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27

Table 1: Components and examples of gender transformation of demons in the Qajar era.

CONCLUSION

Throughout history, humans have valued, conceptualised, and replicated natural phenomena, objects, and living beings to facilitate their understanding of nature. Our ancestors attributed mystical aspects to all harmful, incomprehensible, or frightening entities, considering them capable of exerting dominance over human life. In this way, mysterious and ominous beings emerged in the human mind that were associated with natural phenomena and the universe. The virtuous, helpful, beneficent, and comforting aspects of these beings were identified and symbolised, with the distinction that they were tangible and could be observed in the external world.

The female human, endowed with the gift of fertility, encompassed and embodied all of these positive aspects due to her nurturing, supportive, and beautiful nature. Nature and the female human, despite their continuous evolution and changes, have maintained their fundamental meaning and significance in the collective consciousness of humanity. One significant phase of transformation regarding these concepts occurred during the Qajar

era in Iran, where they were demystified. Scientific progress and humanity's triumph over nature led to the diminishing of the divine and celestial aspects associated with nature, supernatural beings, and women, relegating them to a secular and earthly realm.

Examining this topic through written records, oral literature, and scant historical material sources may present notable limitations. However, we have chosen visual artworks from this period as our primary sources, as they provide well-documented and revealing insights into the subject.

The demystification and desacralisation of nature also had an impact on the mythological and supernatural aspects associated with femininity. Toward the end of the Qajar era, nature had ceased to be seen as sacred or possessing mythic feminine qualities. Through a gradual shift, the earth lost its feminine aura and, paradoxically, women became more grounded in earthly realms. The encounter of Iranian society with modernity sparked a revolution in the nation's worldview. As the reverence and enigma surrounding nature diminished, supernatural beings that were once believed to have dominion over the natural world and posed threats to humanity were no longer perceived in the same light.

Ultimately, Iranian women, in the face of societal constraints in a patriarchal society on one hand, and the global wave of women's liberation on the other, gradually lost their traditional and mythic gender roles as "goddess", "mother", "beloved", and "queen", and began to assume more conventional and worldly roles. The consequences of these changes are evident in the oral and material culture of that period.

The depiction of divs during the Qajar era exemplifies how artists of the period, perhaps unconsciously, incorporated all three levels of social transformation into their works. The feminisation of divs in the Qajar era art was a reflection of the shifting perception of nature, supernatural beings, and the female gender. The appearance, clothing, equipment, and physical attributes of divs all resembled the feminine form. These mythical beings, once symbols of the supernatural forces or dark aspects of nature, now appeared in – and were regarded as – feminine beings. Both within the confined households of the Qajar era and in the modern, Western-influenced tendencies of the day, women no longer resembled their perennial "nature" and were undergoing a deep-rooted transformation. Nature, divs, and the female gender, were all made earthly to proclaim the existence of terrestrial femininity.

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ПОЛОВАЯ МЕТАМОРФОЗА ДИВОВ В ИЛЛЮСТРАЦИЯХ КАДЖАРСКОГО ПЕРИОДА: МИФОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ И СОЦИОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ

В персидской традиции дивы – это устрашающие сверхъестественные существа, которые часто становятся предметом обсуждения, а их половая метаморфоза была темой многих исследований. Анализ развития природы, сверхъестественных сил (включая дивов) и женского начала в историческом контексте показывает, что в прошлом их воспринимали как таинственные и пугающие силы, способные воздействовать на человеческую жизнь посредством злонамеренных вмешательств. Со временем эти существа утратили свою непостижимую, эфирную природу и стали объектом разума, наблюдения и размышления. Иранское общество, как древняя часть мировой цивилизации, также пережило эту трансформацию восприятия.

В настоящем исследовании мы рассматриваем причины появления половых преобразований в образах дивов в искусстве каджарской эпохи. Период Каджаров считается важным поворотным моментом, когда начали исчезать последние остатки традиционной иранской социальной структуры, что открыло путь новому взгляду на мир. Произведения искусства того времени отражают глубокое изменение отношения к природе, сверхъестественным существам и женщинам. Дивы, как воплощение ужаса природы, и женщины, как символ красоты и нежности, постепенно сливаются в этих образах. Некогда устрашающие дивы приобретают более мягкие и отчетливо женственные формы. Эта метаморфоза отражает тенденцию к демифологизации природы и секуляризации положения женщин в обществе.

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