

Chapter 1

Saffron and folklore

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1.1 Introduction

The word *Crocus* comes from Greek mythology. It is said that *Crocus*, one of the friends of the god *Hermes*, was hurt by him during a disc throw. Three drops of blood from his head fell down on the center of a saffron flower and thus the three stigmas of the saffron flower grew and were named *Crocus* (Kakisis, 2017, p. 1). In another story there was a boy named *Crocus*, who adored *Hermes*, and after he died, was transformed him into a saffron flower by *Hermes* (Magdalini, 2017, p. 9). Later on during the era of scientific naming of plants, *Crocus* was chosen as the name of genus of flowering plants which saffron belongs to. Perhaps the genus name of many other plants also root in the popular culture.

Popular culture refers to all aspects of informal culture, whether material or immaterial, including aspects of everyday life. Saffron has long been used in popular culture, in particular in rituals and ceremonies particularly in the regions of the world where saffron is produced for a long time. For example, in the text *Materia Medica*, written by a Greek medical practitioner named *Pedanio Dioscorides*, the use of saffron is suggested for its healing properties (Christodoulou et al., 2015). In Kashmir people boil the bulbs of saffron in cow's milk and use the resulting paste for joint inflammation. Saffron in milk is also used by women to improve the skin color of their newborns (Srivastava et al., 1985, p. 72). In addition to therapeutic practices, saffron is used in meals, festivals, gifts, and in social interactions as in the Spanish culture (Halvorson, 2008, p. 24). The tradition of saffron cultivation in La Mancha in Spain is a part of the local folklore, represented in songs and stories such as in the opera *The Rose of the Saffron*. It is also customary in La Mancha to give couples a few filaments of saffron to wish them a prosperous future (Azafranes Manchegos, 2019). In Switzerland, meadow saffron flower is attached to the neck of infants to ward off illness (Daniels and Stevans, 2003, vol. 2, p. 841). In India, Pakistan, and Malaysia rice colored yellow with saffron or turmeric is widely used. Kashmir washermen also used saffron on clothing as an insect repellent (Hutchings, 2004, p. 61).

As most saffron planting took place in Iran historically, it is obvious that most of the folkloric related aspects are seen in Iran.

As in other cultures, saffron is a part of popular culture, and is reflected in oral literature.

1.2 Aspects of folklore in planting, growing, and harvesting of saffron

The cultivation of saffron corms, like all other agricultural activities, involves special traditions and practices. For example, in Kashmar, a member of the family makes a fire on the ground and then puts some of the fire on a plate or small tray, and someone else puts some sweets, or raisins and almonds on the other plate. Then both of them alongside the all members of the family and also workers go to the farm. Wild rue (*esfand*), sometimes mixed with salt, is poured on the fire. As the smoke of the wild rue rises, one person who has a nice and loud voice sings this song:

Wild rue is green/wild rue creates greenness.

Hundreds of tasks can be done with wild rue/the Prophet (Mohammad) burnt wild rue to ward off harm.

Wild rue is immunity from evil eye of the people, send blessings on the bright shrine of the Prophet.

During the ceremony the audience send blessings (*salawat*) to the Prophet Mohammad three times and then eat the sweets and raisins. Then they say *Bismillah Al-Rahman al-Rahim*. When the workers are working, they also sing (or shout) do-bayti (two-couplet) to removal tiredness. This is one example of a do-bayti sung during work:

I cried on a mountain-top the name of Ali, the Lion of God, O Ali, the Lion of God, the King of Men, make our sad hearts happy.

O God, I have a dear travelling, and I yearn to reunite with them, Everyone calms me by saying the departed is coming, but I have no news nor messenger for that.

The star rose and we rose afterwards, O God, when will the caravan starts its journey, O God, I wish the caravan stayed here one more night, as I have a journey ahead and a heart stuck behind.

The harvesting of the saffron flowers is also accompanied by rituals. In many areas, they first smoke wild rue, and in some areas, such as the village of Kakhuk, Birjand, they also burn boswellia. Then they form a group and curse Satan and “the evil eye,” and begin with *salawat* and *bismillah*. In some areas, someone sings the following song while others shout “*bismillah*” at the same time:

Name of God/Bismillah
 Problem solver/Bismillah
 Kindness and purity/Bismillah
 Beginning of work/Bismillah
 End of work/Bismillah
 Away from calamity/Bismillah
 When worshipping/Bismillah
 Our words/Bismillah
 Thanks God/Bismillah

In some areas, such as Kashmar, if the land is large enough and there are a lot of saffron flowers a sheep is sacrificed to ward off the evil eye. Before the sacrifice, they move the sheep once around the land. During the flower harvesting, they also sing do-baytis to removal tiredness. Sometimes people sing this song to Ali (a significant figure for Shia Muslims) while others call out Ali’s name:

Conqueror of Khaybar/Ali
 Companion of Prophet/Ali
 Warrior man/Ali
 Enemy of oppressors/Ali
 Companion of Quran/Ali

Najah is the bottom part of the stigma of saffron flower. The upper part of the stigma has three red branches. Some stigmas have more than three branches. Stigmas with six branches, called “*shishtaki*,” and are considered a good omen, and they will sacrifice a sheep in the same place. During the sacrifice, the blood of the sheep is poured on to the soil of the land where saffron with *shishtaki* grown. In some areas, such as the village of Khoor zad, Ferdows, landowners offer prizes for flowers with stigma more than three branches. After the flowers are picked, the stigmas are separated from the petals (or according to the people of Ferdows, separating of petals from stigmas called “*pare gol*”). In some areas, this practice of separating petals from stigmas is called “*gol par kerd*” or “*gol wa kardan*.” If a stigma found with

twisted branches (*Sargols*), it will be considered a good omen that this year saffron will become expensive. The separation of stigmas and petals is mainly done by women and girls, who read do-baytis and narrate stories while they work. Tea, melons, and dates are often served. In Ghaen, it is customary for a young man to help his fiancée's family by participating in the stigma separation ceremony for at least one night.

In some areas, mice eat the saffron corms and cause problems for landowners. Smoke is often used to get rid of them. Hamedani in the seventh century referred to the mouse pest and describes the way the people addressed it (Sotoudeh, 1989): "The peasants have an iron nail which they put in land to find out where the mouse canals are. After that, the hole of the mouse will be examined and sometimes they smoke into the openings of the holes to see from where the smoke comes out . . . as smoke comes out, they know the size of the hole and the boundaries of the hole and find out where it has given birth to its off springs. Then they find the mouse and kill it." Furthermore, prizes were given to workers who found and destroyed mice holes in the fields (Sotoudeh, 1989, pp. 204, 205). After 300 years, the author of *Ershad al-Zira'ah* (written by Abunasri Heravi) also recommended the same method (Moshiri, 1967, p. 211). Today, motorcycle exhaust smoke is put into mouse holes using rubber tubes to remove mice.

1.3 Applications of saffron in folklore

1.3.1 Saffron and food

Saffron has long been known as a material in the Iranian cooking systems. For example, in the story of Zahak (devilish creature in the Iranian epic narratives), while describing the foods Iblis (specific name for devil) prepared for Zahak daily:

On the fourth day, he set a long table on which meat stew of the back of calf was cooked in saffron and rosewater, as well as old wine and fine musk.

Zahak was greatly amazed:

As soon as Zahak reached for the food and ate some, he was taken aback by the taste.

He tells Iblis that he will fulfill any wish he desires (Khaleghi-Motlagh, 2007, vol. 1, pp. 49, 50). The use of saffron in food is also attributed to Jamshid (Indo-Iranian mythological hero) (Hasouri, 2005, p. 17).

Saffron was commonly used in the Achaemenid and Sassanian periods (see Abrishami, 2004, pp. 241–252) and continued in the Islamic period. Many poets and scholars have described foods such as saffron Zirbai (refer to Nezami-Ganjavi, 1995, p. 275; Shafiee-Kadkani, 2005, pp. 98, 99, 120); various types of rice saffron (Afshar, 2005, various pages); chickpea dishes (nokhodab) (Fassaei, 2003, p. 8); and saffron samosa (Golchin-Maani, 1967, p. 414, for more details see Abrishami, 2004, pp. 268–335). The use of saffron, especially as a seasoning, was so common during the Safavid era that, until beginning of the current century, one of the dowry items of the bridegroom was a pestle used for grounding saffron (Shahri, 2004, vol. 3, p. 183).

Today, in different regions of Iran, saffron is used as a seasoning in many foods, including various types of rice, halva, sweets, breads, stews, and sirups (see Daryabandari, 2006, throughout the book; Khavar, 2009, throughout the book; Moayyed-Mohseni, 2002, different pages).

Saffron is required in some foods and sirups for certain rituals and ceremonies. In Tehran, hundreds of years ago, one of the sirups placed on the bride and groom's bed was sirup made of sugar, rosewater, and saffron (Saadvandian, 2010, p. 50). In Sarvestan, Fars province, one of the foods sent from the bridegroom's family to the bride's home on the day before the wedding is saffron (Homayouni, 1992, p. 498). In Lapuie, Fars province, items needed by the bride and groom during the first few days or marriage, including saffron, are placed in the bridal chamber (Jafari and Jafari, 2007, vol. 2, p. 187). In old Tehran, the wedding night dinner was usually sweetened pilaf with abundant saffron. This meal was also served during bridal showers (Katiraei, 1969, pp. 220, 237). In old Tehran, it was customary for the family of the bride to prepare and send saffron halva for the bride and groom on the day of the bridal shower (Mostowfi, 1992, vol. 1, p. 350). In some families, the bride's mother also sent rice flour, oil, and saffron to the groom's house where they would cook halva (Shahri, 2004, vol. 3, p. 139). In Sarvestan, after removing the bridal chamber, which takes place a week after the wedding night, the mother of the bride sends a special halva, one of the ingredients of which is saffron (Homayouni, 1992, p. 59). In Ardakan, in Yazd province, the halva is cooked in the bridegroom's house one day after the wedding, and it is called "tarhalva" (Tabatabaei-Ardakani, 2001, p. 352).

In Tehran and other cities, one of the items in the layette is saffron (Homayouni, 1992, p. 425; Jafari and Jafari, 2007, vol. 1, p. 111; Shahri, 2004, vol. 3, p. 250; Shahri, 1999).

In the port of Mahshahr, Khuzestan province, Hendijan, Khuzestan province, and some of the villages in the area, people hold the first Eid of the deceased on Eid al-Fitr. At the ceremony, participants drink brewed saffron.

One of the votive offerings in Khorasan is an Omaj Komaj Ash dish that is cooked for the fulfillment of any wish and is made with saffron (see [Shakurzadeh, 1984](#), pp. 28, 29). In this part of Iran, if a woman has trouble delivering a baby or has a history of abortion, halva is cooked with saffron and given as a votive offering; it is called Halva of the Twelve Imams ([Shakurzadeh, 1984](#), p. 36).

In many parts of Iran, cookies are served at various celebrations, including Nowruz. For example, in Khor and Biabanak, Isfahan province, a confection called *Chang Mal* (a mixture of lavash, samanou, dates, animal oil, saffron, sesame) is baked and served on a Nowruz table ([Hekmat-Yaghmaei, 2013](#), p. 252). In Birjand, a bread made with saffron called “khoshki” is served at Nowruz meetings and gatherings ([Rezaei, 2008](#), p. 364; [Shakurzadeh, 1984](#), p. 105).

In some parts of Iran, saffron is used in Ramadan specialty foods. In old Tehran, women purchased saffron in addition to other food for pre-Iftar or Iftar desserts in preparation for Ramadan. Elderly women also smashed opium seed with saffron, marinated it with rosewater, rolled the mixture into small balls before the beginning of Ramadan, and then ate one or two of them before sunrise; they believed it gave them great strength ([Saadvandian, 2010](#), p. 150).

The people of Tehran also added saffron to some of their Iftar foods, including Ajil Abgoosht, taskabab, shami dumplings, and potato casserole ([Shahri, 2004](#), pp. 313–323). The people of Arak, the capital of Markazi province, also believe that during Ramadan the stomach absorbs water and so they eat a food called Zirehjoosh, which is fatty and sweet and has saffron in it ([Vakilian, 2001](#), pp. 191, 192).

Among other things, saffron sirup is used as a votive offering, especially during the period of Muharram. To prepare it, first sugar is dissolved in water and then saffron that they have separately brewed is added, while sending blessing to the household of the prophet (*salawat*), then a few grains of cardamom are added for consistency. After cooling, cold water and ice are added and the tea is distributed among the mourners. In Talesh, Gilan province, sesame is also added to the tea. In Hamedan, the capital of Hamedan province, this sirup along with apple Faloodeh is served at baby showers. In Kilan, Tehran province, four cups of this sirup are placed on the bridegroom’s bed; one cup for the bridegroom, two cups for the groomsmen, and one cup as the prize for the winner of *gush bekandag* game (*lit.: ear twisting*). During this game, the groom’s father tosses a coin at the start of the game and whoever takes the coin, has to pass a tough test, when his ear is strongly twisted until he could name seven elderly widows from the neighbors. If he manages to give all seven names, he gets drink the saffron sirup and receives a valuable prize from the groom ([Anizadeh, n.d.](#), pp. 226, 227). In Bushehr, Genaveh, and in the neighborhoods of these cities, sugar candy is used instead of sugar in the sirup, and this rosewater candy is consumed during Iftar.

In Iran, common dishes at funerals and anniversaries, as well as on Fridays for votive offerings, are starchy halva or flour and rice halva with saffron. For example, saffron is one of the seasonings in *Sholehzard*, one of the dishes served as a votive offering. In Ashrafieh, Gilan province, saffron cookies called Debij cakes are only served during the month of Muharram ([Faghih-Mohammadi Jalali, 2003](#), p. 123).

1.3.2 Saffron in prayers, charms, and talismans

In Iranian culture and civilization, saffron is used in a variety of prayers, charms, and talismans. For example, Zoroastrians wrote in Pahlavi script on a deer’s skin or paper and put it on the doors of their houses ([Saberi-Eftekhari, 2014](#), p. 680). In the narratives of *Darab Hormozdgar* a charm is also used to relieve headaches. The person who writes this charm must first read the remembrance (*bazh*) the God of Ordibehesht, ground and combine musk and saffron with wine, and then write the charm with the solution obtained on a deer skin and attach it to the left arm ([Unwala, 1922](#), vol. 2, p. 275). This kind of charm is also common among Muslims in Iran. For example, in Borujerd, Lorestan province, a prayer with the essence of saffron is written and attached to the patient’s arm for healing ([Izadi et al., 1994](#), p. 147). In old Tehran, it was customary for a new mother to wrap the “shirt of Quran” around her neck after giving birth to “ward off danger.” The shirt of Quran was made of calico pieces on which the words of the Quran were written in small script with saffron and rosewater; if the shirt of Quran was not available, *Yasin Ghaleh* was used ([Saadvandian, 2010](#), pp. 84, 85). *Yasin Ghaleh* (or *Yasin Halgheh*) is a piece of white cloth on which Yasin (the 36th sura (chapter) of Quran) is written on it with musk or saffron and making a hole in the middle of the cloth; and then people pass through it with the intention of solving a specific problem ([Asadian-Khorramabadi et al., 1979](#), p. 173). In Golbaf, Kerman province, *Ayat al-korsi* is written with saffron on a clean dress that is put in water to allow the words to dissolve. Then the water is drunk for healing ([Asadi-Kougi, 2000](#), p. 287; for other samples of curing disease, see [Boshra, 2010](#), p. 81). In Khorasan, if the bridegroom had an impotency issue at consummation night, a prayer

beginning with the phrase “Enna Fatahna” was read and blow it on some preprepared candy, rosewater, and saffron. After that, they dissolved these three substances in water. Half of the solution was poured on the groom and the other half was given to him to drink (Shakurzadeh, 1984, p. 620). In some books on occult sciences, prayers to attract loved ones or to keep enemies away are written with saffron or saffron and musk (see Ghaem Magham Farahani, 1987, pp. 403–425; Kashefi-Sabzevari, n.d., pp. 132–140). Some of these rituals are reflected in myths in which the prayers are described by amulet writers who write with saffron on paper (e.g., see Anjavi-Shirazi, 2015, p. 312; Sarmad, 2003, pp. 57–60).

Saffron is also used for prayers and rituals related to money. In Shahroud, Semnan province, before the turn of the new year, people gather in old mosques and *tekyehs* and write the seven verses of the Quran that begin with *salam* with saffron on the back of porcelain plate and bowls. This continues until the new year. Then the bowls and plates are dipped in water, and the water is drunk. Part of the water is drunk by family members and the other part used in food preparation (Shariatzadeh, 1992, p. 420). This prayer, better known as the seven *salams*, is also common in Central Asia where the “seven salams” are written with saffron on paper that is put it in apricot juice and consumed for healing purposes (Eini, 1983, p. 698; Rouzi, 2004, p. 140). The “seven salams” is mentioned in some of the Nowruz treatises written in the Safavid period. For example, in a treatise written by Mohammad Taghi Ben Mohammad Reza Razi published in 1091 of the lunar calendar the following ritual is detailed: “As for writing of seven verses beginning with Salam, at the time of new year, these mentioned verses were written with musk and saffron on a porcelain bowl, and then rinse it with rosewater or water; everyone who drinks from it will be protected against diseases and suffering in that year.” The author then writes the name of the verses (Esmaeili, 2012, pp. 50, 51). This ritual is also mentioned in other treatises written to describe Nowruz (Esmaeili, 2012, pp. 92, 103).

In some Nowruz treatises, it is recommended to write other prayers with saffron. In Sirjan, Kerman province, it is also customary to write the surah Yasin with rosewater and saffron on a porcelain bowl at the new year (Bakhtiari, 1999, p. 304). In Herat, Afghanistan, people also write prayers with saffron on paper and then drop them into a container filled with saffron water and wait for the words to dissolve. Then they drink the water for healing purposes. The tradition is called “saffron water” (Mokari, 2000, p. 220). People have also turned to amulet and charm writers to bless their gardens or ward off plant pests. Some of these prayers were also written with saffron (Saedlou and Saghaminejad, 2004, pp. 80–88; Tabatabaei-Ardakani, 2001, pp. 425–427). Writing Qur’anic verses and praying with saffron on shroud is also common in some areas. These shrouds are usually taken to sacred places and tawaf performed on them (see Abrishami, 2004, p. 362).

1.3.3 Other uses of saffron

Other uses of saffron, especially in rituals and beliefs, include the following:

- With musk and saffron the word “dear” is written on the forehead of the bride so that her love grows in the heart of her husband (Massé, n.d., vol. 1, p. 82).
- The body of a newly deceased is made fragrant with musk and saffron (see Safa, 1977, p. 30).
- People in Abyaneh, Isfahan province, believe that if a person is on his deathbed, to make it easier for his soul to leave his body, he must be given nutritious food. This food is dissolved in saffron water and given to the dying person to drink (Nazari-Dashli Boroun, 2005, p. 566).
- One of the common traditions in Lapui, a city in Fars province, is welcoming the new year, by the shepherds taking the sheep to water springs to wash them; after that they let the wool dry so that they could paint them according to their favorite; the paint was a mixture of henna, saffron, and some other natural substances (Jafari and Jafari, 2007, vol. 2, p. 49).
- In the port of Kang, Hormozgan province, a kind of divination ceremony is held on the fourteenth day of the lunar month. The “14th” is a women’s ceremony in which a group of women get together in a house and soak some henna into rosewater in a large porcelain bowl. Then they add some wild rue, saffron, and black currant for consecration to the bowl. After that, the women put their rings in henna. Then they ask a 4- or 5-year-old boy to mix henna thoroughly. Meanwhile, they start to sing poems. The child takes out the rings one by one. The poem which is sung while the boy takes out the ring is considered to be the fortune of the owner (Daryaei, 2004, p. 69).
- According to the people of Nesa, Fars province, a piece of charcoal should be placed next to the container of saffron for the jinns not to take saffron away (Rezaei, 2008, p. 459).
- In some areas, people light candles, musk, and saffron at the bed of a sick person, then they pat him in the back and say “may your pain and calamity go to the desert, go to the sea” (Hedayat, 2001, p. 54).

Saffron is also mentioned in literary and historical texts:

- In the text *Shahnameh*, burning of saffron is mentioned along with other fragrant substances during celebrations and even mourning (see [Ferdowsi, 2007](#), vol. 1, p. 89; vol. 4, p. 308; vol. 5, p. 459; vol. 6, p. 595; vol. 7, p. 274). These examples are also found in epopees such as *Kushnameh* (see [Matini, 2005](#), pp. 279, 455, 579).
- In other Persian and Arabic texts, there are many examples of saffron applications (see [Abrishami, 2004](#), pp. 374–384). A makeup made of saffron was commonly worn by the emirs and sultans (see [Bahar, 2007](#), pp. 286, 297).

1.3.4 Popular medicine

Popular medicine or folk medicine is a part of folklore, customs, and rituals. Of course, popular medicine is different from traditional medicine (for more information on this, see [Janebollahi, 2011](#), pp. 400, 401; [Matin, 2010](#), pp. 61–70, and Chapter 25: Saffron in Persian traditional medicine). The difference between these two domains can be compared to the differences between classical literature and popular literature. Just like popular literature and classical literature are connected, popular medicine and traditional medicine have also been influenced by each other.

Traditional medical practitioners sometimes use saffron in their treatments, but that will not be discussed here (for more information [Avicena, 1988](#), vol. 5, pp. 145, 146; [Zaryab, 1991](#), pp. 311–313).

In public medicine, saffron has many uses. In Gilan province, saffron, rosewater, and opium are mixed together to treat earaches ([Payandeh, 1977](#), p. 255). In Khorasan, for hard of hearing or “trapped wind in the ear,” saffron is mixed with raw oil and put in the ears ([Shakurzadeh, 1984](#), p. 129). In Sarvestan, Fars province, in order to prevent epileptic episodes in children, sugar, saffron, and quinine is mixed together in balls the size of peppercorns and given to children three times per day ([Homayouni, 1992](#), p. 440). This type of treatment is common among the people of Garrous (Bijar and the suburbs), Kordestan province, where children are also given rewed saffron and valerian mixed with sugar ([Hashemnia and Malek-Mohammadi, 2001](#), p. 235).

In public medicine, consumption of saffron by pregnant women is prohibited ([Bazrafkan, 2010](#), p. 140; [Saadvandian, 2010](#), p. 73), because there is a long-held belief that saffron induces abortion. In Tehran, during the Qajar period, if a woman opted to have an abortion for any reason, a traditional women’s doctor would prescribe her half a mithqal (4.608 g) of saffron dissolved in water per day, or a cup of barberry and saffron juice ([Saadvandian, 2010](#), pp. 247, 316). The same method was used in Khorasan ([Shakurzadeh, 1984](#), p. 92). In Lorestan, a mixture of saffron and honey was used ([Asadian-Khorramabadi et al., 1979](#), p. 252). In traditional medicine, it was also believed that saffron was useful in resolving prolonged labor, as Ghazvini wrote in his book, *Ajayeb al-Makhlouqat*: “If saffron is administered to a pregnant woman, she will immediately give birth” and adds, “If delivery becomes problematic for a woman, they feed her saffron and she will quickly deliver her baby, which is a strange property” ([Saboohi, n.d.](#), p. 261; see also [Momen-Tonkaboni, 2011](#), p. 448; [Taghi-Mir, n.d.](#), p. 199).

This has led to the use of saffron prescriptions as charms in the occult sciences for prolonged labor, as noted in the *Safineh of Tabriz*, written in 722 AH/CE 1322: “The charm for a desperate woman with prolonged labor” mentioned: “Write ‘Ya Vedud, Ya Vadud’ with saffron on a water basin, and give her a cup of water therefrom to drink, immediately her pain will go away and make it easy for her to deliver” ([Tabrizi, 2002](#), p. 246).

In Khorasan, one of the ways to remove the placenta after giving birth is to eat a confection made with saffron ([Shakurzadeh, 1984](#), p. 99). Saffron is also used for the treatment of impotency in the following areas. As in Lorestan, egg yolk is cooked with saffron and given to people ([Asadian-Khorramabadi et al., 1979](#), p. 274). In Sarvestan, Fars province, saffron is mixed with starchy halvah and eaten ([Homayouni, 1992](#), p. 336). In Kish island the amulet-writing master boils seven eggs and removes their skin and then he writes prayers on the eggs with saffron solution and the patient eats all of them once ([Mokhtarpour, 2006](#), p. 270). In Khor and Biabanak, Isfahan province, saffron is recommended for the treatment of lower back pain ([Hekmat-Yaghmaei, 1991](#), p. 398) and in Arsanjan, Fars province, a starch and saffron halva mixture ([Rahimi and Hashemi, 2009](#), vol. 1, p. 551) is prescribed. In Minab, Hormozgan province, saffron is used to treat oral infections in children ([Saedi, 2007](#), p. 413). In Tehran of the Qajar period, people ate barberry with saffron as jam for the treatment of “liver swelling” ([Shahri, 1999](#), vol. 6, p. 119). Saffron medicine is also used to aid new mothers. For example, in Khorasan, immediately after the placenta is removed, a *Kachi* bowl with cumin, cardamom, and saffron added is fed the new mother ([Shakurzadeh, 1984](#), p. 99). In Tehran, *ghavoot fofel* was considered absolutely necessary to be given to the mother and saffron is one of the main ingredients of this dish ([Saadvandian, 2010](#), p. 88). In Tehran, *ghavoot fofel* on the sixth night after the baby was born is given to the new mother. Also, a type of *kachi* was given to new mothers after post delivery shower to recover their power ([Katiraei, 1969](#), pp. 79, 80, 86). Some of these foods still are used in this way particularly in remote areas.

In Lorestan, a mixture of warm-tempered herbs including saffron in oil was fed to new mothers (Shadabi, 2016, p. 86). Saffron was also believed to be useful for melancholia treatment, as noted in historical texts (Sotoudeh, 1989, pp. 112, 113; Brown, 2003, pp. 140, 141; Haj-Javadi, 1993, p. 202). Saffron is also used to prevent miscarriage. In Khorasan, if a pregnant woman bled for any reason, a little saffron and a few drops of water were mixed and then applied around the woman's waist and on the navel (Shakurzadeh, 1984, p. 127).

In addition to the above, saffron is used in ceremonies held for the treatment of *ahl-e hawa* (possessed persons) in the islands and ports of southern Iran. Before this ceremony, the treating person who is called a *babazar* or *mamazar* (depending on his/her sex) rubs a variety of medicines, one of which is saffron, on the patient's skin (Sa'edi, 1977, p. 52).

1.4 Saffron in popular literature

Saffron is mentioned throughout popular literature, including in do-bayti (a two-couplet poem), riddles, fables, and stories, as discussed in the following.

1.4.1 Do-bayti

In some oral do-bayti, poets use saffron to describe their despair:

My sturdy body is now bent due to the separation, and my heart has now become so weak because of separation/My ruddy face that you remember, is now saffron yellow as I am separated from you.

Mihandoust (2001, p. 38); for other narratives of this do-bayti; see, p. 109, Naseh (1994, p. 53).

Separation has made me look yellow, like saffron, I am covered in blood like a red rose for I am away/My heart is now torn like hundred petals of flower; I have fallen to the ground like a violet flower as I am away.

Mihandoust (2001, p. 72).

Saffron is also mentioned in quibbles, narrated differently in different regions of Iran:

I was not in love, but you made me fall in love, I was musk and you made me saffron/I was musk accompanied by saffron, you made me lose face to the friends and enemies.

Jahani-Barzoki (2006, p. 175), Naseh (2000, p. 236).

In another do-bayti recorded in Fars, the poet describes his beloved this way:

I am grass and my beloved wears green, I am flower picker and my beloved is a florist/Her eyes are weighting platforms and her eyebrows the scale and she sells flowers at the price of saffron.

Faghiri (1963, p. 44).

Likening expensive things to saffron can be seen in *mashkzani* (making dairy products by shaking milk in a water-skin) songs as well.

Rural and nomadic women sing songs during *mashkzani* (making dough and separating butter). One of the poems sung by the nomadic women around Garmsar, Semnan province, is as follows:

O dear waterskin, keep moving, become blessed by God and give four mounds of butter/Butter was expensive last year, as expensive as saffron.

Shah-Hosseini (2006, pp. 228, 229).

In cuddling and lullaby songs mothers sing to their children saffron is mentioned in this way:

Why didn't you plant cotton, cotton is expensive, as expensive as saffron/A long garment for boys, and one scarf (chador) for girls.

Hekmat-Yaghmaei (1991, p. 416).

Saffron is also reflected in wedding songs sung by women at various wedding stages such as henna night, marriage conclusion, and the ritual of following the bride and bridegroom to their house (*arookeshan*). For example, in Neiriz, Fars province, when going to the bride's house to bring her to the bridegroom's house, people sing poems such as the following:

I crushed cumin and let it dry, the expensive cumin of Kerman/New we are off bringing a woman, a woman at the dear price of saffron.

Homayouni (2000, p. 116).

In Sirjan, Kerman province, when setting up the consummation bed, the bridegroom's sister sings:

I will plant flowers before the bed and saffron behind the bed/

Sometimes I will visit for the smell of flower, sometimes for the smell of saffron

Moayyed-Mohseni (2002, p. 118).

1.4.2 Riddles

Saffron is also the subject of some of the riddles of popular literature, such as those recorded in Kouhmareh, Fars:

It is yellow, not apricot/fleshy, but not peach/it is in the garden of a certain Khan/is the seasoning of the elders.

Behrouzi (2001, pp. 159, 160). A narrative of this riddle is also found slightly different in Khorasan Shakurzadeh (1984, p. 539).

Or this riddle that is common in different parts of Iran:

It is yellow or yellowish, bulbul makes a felt hat/It is grown in Khorasan, but eaten by the elders.

Behrouzi (2001), Emam-Dezfouli (2000, p. 101), Hashemi (2011, p. 46), Homayouni (2000, p. 383); for more familiarity with the more riddles on the theme of saffron. Behrouzi (2001, pp. 159, 160), Emam-Dezfouli (2000, pp. 100, 101).

1.4.3 Stories and humor

In a humorous manifest, a man does not want to accept that his wife has a lover. An old man bets on a hundred mounds of saffron to prove this. The old man wears his dervish attire, and takes him to his house on his shoulder while the husband is wrapped in felt. The man sees his wife with her lover. The old man, shaking the felt on his shoulder, says: "Look, look at the wickedness of women/little donkey! Give me my hundred mounds of saffron" (Marzolph, 1992, p.208).

The satirical story of saffron in Sanaei's *Hadiqat-al-haqiqah* has also been said to be completely rooted in folklore.

In this story, someone asks an ignorant person if he has seen saffron or heard something about it. The ignorant person replies: "So far, I've eaten it more than a hundred times with yogurt." That person says:

It's clear that you do not even know onion, then why would you keep moving your mouth in vain?

Modarres-Razavi (1995, p. 71).

This joke is mentioned in *Baharestan* (Hakemi-Vala, 2001, p. 96) and Latayef-al-tavayef (Golchin-Maani, 1967, p. 143), and an oral narration was recorded in Khormoj Bushehr (Jafari-Ghanavati, 2014, pp. 155, 156).

Saffron is also reflected in a large number of proverbs as in the following examples:

- Not every donkey deserves saffron: A bad-natured person does not deserve a good position, wealth property, and kindness (Bahmanyari, 1990, p. 482; Dekhoda, 1985, vol. 3, p. 1361; Zolfaghari, 2011, p. 753).
- What does the donkey know about the price of saffron? (Bahmanyari, 1990, p. 438; Dekhoda, 1985, vol. 3, p. 1170).
- It is all the same to a donkey whether you load it with saffron or hay.
- Even without eating saffron his lips and mouth are yellow.
- Crying is better than the laughing that is caused by saffron (Shakurzadeh, 1984, p. 731).
- I will throw flowers for those who come, and saffron for those who do not.
- Carrying saffron to Ghaen, is like carrying cumin to Kerman (or like carrying coal to New Castle).
- A lot of saffron gets eaten without care (meaning when there is too much of something, it loses its value; Zangoeei and Naseh, 2015).
- I am so unfortunate, as I have planted saffron but grown dung (Bahmanyari, 1990, p. 81).
- He has eaten rice with fish skin, but burps as if he has eaten saffron (Zolfaghari, 2009, p. 642).
- He eats saffron in such a way that his lips do not become yellow. It means he is a master in what he does (Zolfaghari, 2009, p. 784).
- Donkey does not care about the smell of saffron (Zolfaghari, 2009, p. 883).
- Dogs do not deserve animal oil, donkeys do not deserve saffron (Zolfaghari, 2009, p. 1100).

There are many other examples in various texts. It is noteworthy that the frequency of saffron-related parables in the south of Khorasan particularly in Ghaen, is much higher than in other parts of Iran. (see also Mokhtari et al., 2012, pp. 129, 130; see also Zangoeei and Naseh, 2015, vol. 2, pp. 874, 1175). It is quite understandable as Ghaen has been the main center for saffron production in Iran for centuries.

1.5 Conclusion

Saffron has a great influence on the culture of people living in saffron-growing areas. This effect on the popular culture is both related to the planting, growing, and harvesting of saffron and also to food, prayer, popular medicine, literature, etc. One of the most important fields of research about saffron is the comparison of saffron and popular culture in different countries.

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