

# The Myth of *Cinderella and Henna Leaf* Story in the Yemeni Legends and Folklore

*Jihan Abdul Rahman Ali Oshiesh*

Department of English, Faculty of Education and Sciences, Albaydha University, Yemen

*joshiesh2019@gmail.com*

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.56807/buj.v5i1.359>

## **Abstract**

*The legend of Cinderella is a story that carries a lot of meanings, values, principles, and morals, ranging from obedience to parents to love for others, perseverance to work, confronting evil forces, fortitude, and resilience. This story focuses on Yemeni folklore called (Henna Leaf). Cinderella emphasizes the importance of treating everyone with compassion, forgiving others when they make mistakes, and never allowing unpleasant things to break your heart. The researcher will use this article's descriptive and analytical techniques to examine the similarities and differences between the two stories. In terms of substance and significance, our Yemeni legends are no less significant than worldwide literary classics, and they require special attention and care to achieve the prestige and recognition they deserve. Yemeni folklore and legends should be preserved, and recommended that the Yemeni folklore and legends be taken into account and paid greater attention to avoid annihilation and obscurity.*

## **Keywords:**

*Henna leaf, Cinderella, legend, the heritage of Yemen, Yemeni folklore*

## Introduction

A legend is a genre of folklore that consists of a narrative featuring human actions, believed or perceived, both by teller and listeners, to have taken place in human history. Narratives in this genre may demonstrate human values, and possess certain qualities that give the tale verisimilitude. Legend, for its active and passive participants may include miracles. Legends may be transformed over time to keep them fresh and vital. (en.m.wikipedia.org) "The legends are only the ancient science, which is the product of the first man's attempts to explain everything that falls under his sight and sense" (Al-Hiti, 1977, p. 191). However, Barty defined legend in his book "Mythology" as the oldest language and method of communication, in terms of being an automatic saying in a language that is strong between certain social elements. Therefore it is an unknown origin, mysterious history and place. (Assi, 1981, p. 29) The legend, in this sense, acquires its holiness from the fact that its heroes are gods, semi-gods and from the power of belief in these gods and their actions and words. However, they have been passed from the collective mind of the people after the emergence of the three heavenly religions and modern positivist philosophies and the development of the humanities and natural sciences, but some mythical beliefs, customs and rituals still have their power over the minds of some. Hence, the tradition of myth manifests itself by moving from generation to generation in oral narration, making it the group's memory that preserves its value, customs, rituals and wisdom, transmits it to successive generations and earns it the power that dominates the souls. (Tourists, 1981, p. 21) The famous tale and fairy tale folk tale is a popular narrative woven by popular imagination

and circulated by people generation after generation hosts and bewildered by it, which, as defined by German dictionaries, is the news related to an old event transmitted through the oral novel from one generation to another, or as described by English dictionaries a story believed by the people as a fact, and develops with the ages and circulates its lips, as it may be specialized in historical accidents or heroes who make history. (Balousha, p. 20)

The famous story does not bear the character of holiness and stands in its subjects at the limits of daily life and ordinary worldly things. Like the famous tale, Superstition does not carry the character of holiness, but it is a tournament filled with exaggerations and paranormal, but its main heroes are human beings or jinns, and there is no role for the gods in it. According to Tourists, 1986, p. 22, superstition manifests itself - clearly - moral tendency, and the conflict between good and evil, angel and devil or elves, goblins and man, evil witch and beautiful girl, knight and monsters, always prevails in favour of good. Usually, the end is happy, and the folk tales reflect the psychological and emotional needs of man as compensation for his sense of oppression and weakness in front of nature and power, whatever its kind, as it reflects the yearning and dream of mastering, this is used for fairy tales, specifically in paradise, goblins, ogres and predators, sometimes with the same forces of nature as torrents, volcanoes and earthquakes, as well as recreational and recreational dimension.

Fairy tales or folk tales from the consolidation of Superstition in many societies, tales emerged from which they derive their material. They were characterized by their distorted image of reality, as "in most of their events and characters, they depict the world of the jinn,

what is going on in it, and the relationship of man to this world, and the world of the jinn in it is not separate from the world of mankind” (Abu Talib, 2004, p. 148). As for the folk tale, Jabour Abdel Nour defined it as " a very ancient art based on direct narration that leads to the enjoyment and influence of the listeners. He dictates his imagination, feelings, and the outcomes of his life stances”. (Abu Talib, 2004, p. 53)

### **Yemeni Myths and Legends Heritage**

Folk heritage is what generations and people who preceded them circulate, including customs and traditions, arts and literature, and the tools and means they use in their lives. Folk heritage has become bearing multiple connotations, which people are interested in and proud of as an identity, history, and bridge of communication between the past and the present. Folk heritage, in this sense, deals with tangible heritage and cultural heritage:

1. Material heritage deals with the legacies that have entered the scope of museums, whether they are archaeological museums or natural museums in their broad sense.
2. Cultural heritage deals with all fields of ancient arts and literature, various branches of culture, and the customs, practices and arts related to them, such as singing, dancing, games, medicine...etc. These are the two main old branches, and new ones followed them due to the subsequent development of humanity and societies. (<https://yemenscope.com/art88.html>)

Folk heritage is a mirror of the cultural and social situation and its development in time and place through successive ages and the various types of Yemeni folklore, including customs, traditions, beliefs, poetry, singing, governance, proverbs, tales, and many more; It remained a symbol of the successive stages and

development that Yemen went through. It is also considered a graphic image of the reality of Yemeni society and a means of satisfying the spiritual, artistic and cognitive aspects. (<https://yemenscope.com/art88.html>)

Mohana Al Mohana, a Kuwaiti researcher, revealed that the story of *Cinderella*, which is one of the most famous folk novels in the world, was initially taken from Yemeni folk literature. The Kuwaiti researcher in literature and history explained in a lecture held by the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters in Kuwait entitled *The Impact of the Arab in European Literature*, the story of *Cinderella*, which is one of the most famous popular novels that spread globally. He pointed out that the Yemeni story the *Henna Leaf*, from which the world-famous story *Cinderella* was taken, was transmitted to Europe through Andalusia. As reported by the official Kuwait News Agency (KUNA). He mentioned that books such as *A Thousand and One Nights*, *Kalila wa Dimna*, the Incident of *Al-Isra' and Al-Miraj* and *Diwan Hafez Al-Shirazi* and Andalusian poetry are among the most famous Arabic literature that influenced European and international literature and they inspired international stories and novels. The story of the *Henna Leaf* is a series of Yemeni tales and legends, compiled by researcher Ali Muhammad Abdo in a book issued by the General Book Authority in the year 2006 AD. (<https://www.aljarida.com/ext/articles/print/1462425621020780300>)

To the extent that the songs of the villagers are a means of expressing the different feelings and emotions in their souls, of hopes and joys, worries and sorrows, the tales and legends spread among them are equally considered a means of recording and depicting many aspects of their lives, and what they are exposed to.

From injustice and oppression, what they dream of justice and sound, and the obstacles they encounter in their daily struggle with life. Through these tales and legends, they immortalized many of the stories of their lives, attitudes, habits, traditions, joys, and sorrows, embodying in them the struggle between good and evil and between man and the enemies of man. Our lives and heritage are full of these tales and legends that no village child has not been told more than once on successive nights. It only dealt with the life of an individual or a family or was exposed to a social conflict or a specific political situation that citizens could not resist or oppose. And the thing that draws attention in some of our Yemeni myths is that it does not make its centerpiece the conflict between man and his brother man alone, but instead transfers it to a conflict between man and a living creature, a mixture of the beast, and the man takes for him in every myth a name that lives on flesh of human beings and the personality of those who want. (Abdo, 1985, pp. 13-15.)

### ***Cinderella Myth***

In the old days, a wealthy man lived, and he had a beautiful daughter named Cinderella; when her mother died, her father married a widowed woman. And her two daughters forced Cinderella to serve them, while her two sisters would stand in front of the mirror for long hours, and they would force her to do household chores like carrying coals to the stove, cleaning the ashes, cooking food, washing dishes, sweeping the floor, and she did not even take care of herself. One day, the king wanted to get his son married, so he sent inviting all the beautiful girls to attend the celebration that would be held in his palace so that the Prince would choose a bride for him; on the night of

the party, Cinderella had to help her sisters in putting on their new clothes and styling their hair, while they were mocking her torn dress ... "Why don't you go to the party, Cinderella?" asked Anastasia sarcastically. Drizella replied, "Will she go in her tattered dress?" Furthermore, how beautiful her view would be at the party, and when the two sisters left the house, Cinderella sat on their chair in the kitchen and started crying so much, and while she was crying, she heard a voice telling her, "Why are you crying, Cinderella?" Mice, four rats, and with a light touch of her magic wand, the lot turned into a giant chariot, the mice into four horses, and the rats into four men in embroidered clothes driving the cart. With another touch of the old woman's magic wand, Cinderella's torn dress was transformed into a beautiful dress of red silk, as the most luxurious jewellery appeared on her neck, and her wooden shoes turned into luxurious crystal shoes, so Cinderella was pleased and thanked the older woman who asked her to go to the party, and also wished her a beautiful party. Cinderella climbed into the carriage, and before she moved, the older woman asked her to come home before the clock struck twelve, or Cinderella would lose everything and return as she was. Cinderella was so beautiful at the party that her two ugly sisters did not recognize her, but looked at her with envy, for she was dancing with the Prince all that night, the Prince loved her so much, and she liked him too. She was so happy that she forgot all about time, and suddenly the clock began to strike twelve. Cinderella was troubled and afraid to find herself among the invited in her torn dress, so she apologized to the Prince and ran outside; when she was sliding down the stairs quickly, her foot stumbled, and her shoe fell; the Prince

picked it up hurried behind her. However, he did not find anyone, at the time Cinderella arrived at the house she turned the carriage was drawn to a lot, and her dress and necklace disappeared, and she found herself in her old dress, but the shoe remained with her...

After a while, her sister came and talked about the beautiful girl who danced with the Prince. On the next day, the Prince sent a caller looking for the owner of the shoe, and when the caller arrived at Cinderella's house, each of the two sisters tried to put her foot in the shoe. However, their feet were big, and when he asked the Cinderella to try her foot, the two sisters shouted at him; it is dirty, and it is not appropriate for her to wear such shoes, the caller insisted on his request, and when Cinderella put her foot in the shoe it was very suitable for her, at that she told her two sisters what happened that night and then the herald took her to the Prince. The Prince was pleased with Cinderella's return, so he held a fabulous wedding party attended by many guests, except for her stepmother and her two ugly daughters, and they lived happily. (Lang, 1889, pp. 64-71)

### ***The Henna Leaf Myth***

It is said that there was a man who lived in the village and had a good wife and a little girl named Wareqa Al-Henna (the Henna Leaf), but the man's wife died, and the Henna Leaf became an orphan daughter. The man was unable to go to the field to work in agriculture, so he decided to marry. He married a woman whose husband died and she had a daughter of the same age of the Henna Leaf. Her father's wife did not like her, and her hatred for the Henna Leaf increased, and she complained to her father that his daughter did not work at home. The Henna Leaf and Keram were both taking turns herding sheep. She (the Henna Leaf) used to take care of

her father's livestock daily with her stepsister. On the day of the Henna Leaf's turn, the livestock will return full and satiated, and on the day of her bloody sister, the livestock will return thirsty and hungry. The reason for this was that a combing old woman was sitting on the road to the two girls; on the day she was grazing, the Henna Leaf answered the older woman's request, gave her half of her loaf, removed her head from the lice, and did this on affection. While her sister was not appreciating the combing old woman and did not give her anything, the livestock would return on her grazing day with atrophied bellies and dry throats.

One day, the Sultan's son came to the village to choose a bride from the dance party. The Henna Leaf is an orphan from her mother, so her stepmother prepared her daughter with the best of what she had to attend the dance and made the Henna Leaf cared with home concerns. While she was like this, the old woman who lived in the pasture appeared to her, and she brought out luxurious silk clothes for her and necklaces of gold and diamonds, and presented her with unmatched beautiful shoes, and started helping her to wear clothes, decorate with jewelry, and comb her hair. And when she entered the crowd, her beauty caught all the necks, and the combing old woman was hidden, no one saw her. Her beauty, the clothes and jewelry that she was on, and everyone did not know who she was or where she came from. The son of the Sultan was following the Henna Leaf dance, and he was fascinated by her beauty and admired her dancing. He did not take his eyes off her. After all the women left, the Sultan's son found a gilded shoe, so he decided to marry her owner, so he turned to each house in the village, and that shoe did not fix the feet

of any girl until he reached the house of the Henna Leaf and that was the sole according to the size of her feet, so the son of the Sultan decided to marry her.

Mother of Keram was indignant at the choice of the Sultan's son of the Henna Leaf as his wife, so she decided to give him Keram instead of her, so they prepared for the wedding, and the son of the Sultan decorated his palace to receive the Henna Leaf. When it was time for Keram's wedding to the house of the Sultan's son, the combing old woman whispered to the Henna Leaf to go to Keram and describe to her the types and varieties of cooking and ask her to go to the kitchen to eat what she needs and the Henna Leaf will sit in her place until she returned. When the Henna Leaf saw her sister in the perfection of her decoration, she tempted her to eat meat from (pot), and when she approached, she put a pot in her head, so her clothes got dirty, and the mother got pregnant in a hurry, but it was too late, the pot came from the bride's head, and the combing old woman who was wrapping the Henna Leaf came and decorated her.

When the Henna Leaf arrived at the house of the Sultan's son, he received her and escorted her into the palace to live with him happily for days and months. During that he forgot his first wife, who was pushed by jealousy from the Henna Leaf to conspire with the combing old woman to magic the Henna Leaf and turning her into a bird. One day, as usual, she used to comb the Henna Leaf's hair, the combing old woman planted in the back of her head with seven enchanted thorns and seven enchanted needles, after which the Henna Leaf turned into a dove and flew out of the house. The Sultan's son went looking for her and searched her father's house, but no trace was found.

In the morning of the next day, Batoul (the Sultan's son) went, as usual, to drive the oxen to the valley, and began ploughing the land, and when dove fell on a tree close to him, and it began to call him: - "Oh, O Batoul (Virgin), O Betulian (Virgins)". "How is the Hariwen (Newlyweds)?" The virgin answered it by saying: "Comfortable rest". "But your father is between the legs of two horses". The dove heard this from Batoul, and it started crying and continued to cry until it rained because of its crying. The rain kept him from ploughing. The Sultan's son fell silent and went on his own. On the second day, the Virgin led the oxen to plough the land as usual. As soon as he began to do so, the dove fell on the tree that fell on it on the first day, and it started calling the Virgin what it had called him yesterday, and he answered it in turn with his previous answer, so the dove started crying and continued crying until it rained because of its crying, the Virgin stopped ploughing and drove the oxen in front of him and went back to the house. The Sultan's son met him and asked him why he came back, so the Virgin answered him: "The rain kept me from ploughing". The son of the Sultan was angry at his words and reprimanded him: "How does it rain in the valley all day and not here?" The Virgin started telling him what was happening to him with the dove and the rain after that. The Sultan's son was astonished and said to the Virgin: "Tomorrow morning, we will go together to hear its words and learn its story".

The next day they went together, and the Sultan's son sat close to the Virgin, who began to plough the land, and behold, the dove fell in its familiar place on the tree near the Virgin: - "O Batoul, O Betulian, how are the Hariwen?" And the Virgin answered it: "Relax,



comfortable, but your father is between the legs of the two horses". It heard that from him and started crying and crying until it rained because of its crying, so the Virgin wanted to stop ploughing and go home, so the Sultan's son prevented him and ordered him to continue ploughing, and he headed towards a nearby rock and sat under it until the rain stopped. It was only a short period until the dove flew from the top of the tree and fell near the rock, and it started walking until it reached the place of the Sultan's son, so he held it with his hand and began to feel it with the other hand, and with his fingers he found the heads of thorns and needles embedded in the back of its head, so he removed them one by one until he brought them all out. And she returned to her first image, the Henna Leaf stood in front of his face to face, so he rejoiced in her and returned home while telling him what the old comber had made, so he expelled her from the house and divorced his first wife. (Abdo, 1985, pp. 43-54)

### **Similarities and differences between the legends of the *Henna Leaf* and *Cinderella***

Both legends talked about the story of an orphan girl whose father marries another woman and who has her daughters from her first husband, and how she suffers from abuse from her stepmother and her two daughters. And the dance party for the Prince (or the son of the Sultan) and the help of the godmother (the combing old woman) to prepare her so that she can go to the party and attend it and how he likes her and wants to marry her, her escape from the party at midnight and the fall of her shoes, which the Prince himself works to measure the daughters of the kingdom (the village), and when he finds Cinderella (the Henna Leaf) he decides to marry her.

In the story of *Cinderella*, the stepmother has two daughters from her first husband (Anastasia and Drizella), while in the story of the *Henna Leaf*, the stepmother has only one daughter (Keram). And each of them does not bear Cinderella or the Henna Leaf, whether ridicule, indignation or jealousy of her beauty, kindness and politeness.

Cinderella was the only girl who worked in the house and was responsible for all the household arrangements and affairs, while the Henna Leaf shared the care of the cows and the care of the house with her stepmother's daughter equally with different sincerity from them in performing their duties.

In the story of *Cinderella*, the godmother is the woman who helps Cinderella reach the party and prepares her and stands next to her so that she can attend the party. In the story of the *Henna Leaf*, the combing old woman is the woman who helps the Henna Leaf from the beginning of the story, when she helps her graze the cows in the pasture and shares breakfast with her and guides her to the lake filled with gold, jewels and rubies. The difference between the godmother and the combing old woman in the two stories is that the godmother in the story of *Cinderella* was the example of a tender and kind woman from the beginning of the legend to its end whereas the combing old woman in the *Henna Leaf* was a kind, compassionate woman who helped the Henna Leaf at the beginning of the story to attend the Sultan son's party, but after the marriage of the Henna Leaf to the Sultan's son, the unthinkable happened, as the combing old woman conspired with the first wife of the Sultan's son and proceeded to plant seven enchanted thorns and seven enchanted needles in the back of the Henna Leaf's neck

and turned into a dove and left the Sultan's son and his palace.

The story of *Cinderella* ended with the marriage of Cinderella to the Prince, and they lived happily and blissfully. As for the story of the *Henna Leaf*, it did not end with the marriage of the Henna Leaf to the son of the Sultan, but rather a new story began as if it had become a story within a story, the magic of the Henna Leaf and turning her into a dove that flew and left the palace of the son of the Sultan, The combing old woman changed from a kind and tender woman to evil and malicious woman who conspired to betray the Henna Leaf that she had done well to her!

### Conclusion

These myths filled our heads and ears in the era of childhood in the villages are evaporating and fading from our minds gradually after we moved to the cities and settled there. We no longer see there is nothing in it except that it is (old men's talk) ,but what made us pay attention to it and try to remember and find out as much of it as possible we have found pictures of it or similar works in Western literature. But when these Yemeni legends and tales were circulated, they lived confined or limited to the villages alone, and that some villages and the regions kept their own tales that they circulated alone and did not allow others to know something about it. There are many Yemeni stories and legends that need attention and documentation in Yemeni literature so that we can preserve them from oblivion and extinction.

### References

Abdo, Ali Mohammed (1985), *Yemeni Tales and Legends*, Dar Al Kalima, Sana'a, Yemen. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, pp. 43-54.

Assi, Arabi (1981) "animal in children's stories", Carmel Studies, Printing, Publishing and Distribution, Damascus, First Edition, p. 29. Al-Hiti, Hadi Noman (1977) *Children's Literature*, Ministry of Information Publications, Iraq, p. 191.

Balousha, Ibrahim Mohammed, "Research on Popular Art and its Impact on the Psychological Composition of the Child", Ministry of Information, General Authority for Information, Egypt, p. 20.

Lang, Andrew (1889), *The Blue Fairy Book* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., ca.), pp. 64-71.

Tourists, Firas (1981) *"The Adventure of the First Mind - A Study in Myth - Syria and Mesopotamia"* Sommer Studies, Publishing and Distribution, Nicosia - Cyprus, 6th edition, pp. 21-22.

### Web-Sites

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org>

<https://yemenscope.com/art88.html>

<https://www.aljarida.com/ext/articles/print/1462425621020780300>