

Food as an Element of the Scapegoat

Javad Maddahi Mashizi¹, Abbas Haidary Behnuieh² and Rafailovna Stolyarova Guzel³

¹*Institute of Ethnography, Ethnology and Anthropology of Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russian Federation, 420008*

²*Department of Political Science of ShahidBahonar University of Kerman, Kerman, Iran, 76169133*

³*Department Archaeology and Ethnology of Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russian Federation, 420008*

E-mail: ¹<madahi1980@yahoo.com>, ²<abas.haidary@gmail.com>, ³<Guzel.Stolyarova@kpfu.ru>

KEYWORDS Islamic Nutrition Culture. Nutrition Traditions. Holy Food. Scapegoating Rituals. Divine Alms

ABSTRACT The Islamic nutrition tradition has a prominent role in Islamic culture. The center of the present research is Islam's attention to food, its traditions and its roles in keeping away the disasters and also in attracting divine alms. This part of the Islamic beliefs about nutrition is so deeply rooted in the minds of Muslims that its effects have been extended to the world after death. In the research, through the field research and the interview, we have tried to detect the different types of food and the influential traditions in this kind of metaphysical beliefs among the Muslims; and also an attempt has been made to depict the convergence and divergence of the beliefs formed in this special sphere and the mechanism of the effectiveness of such beliefs in averting disasters and in attracting divine alms.

INTRODUCTION

More recent studies in anthropology of food focus on food and identity (Maheshvari et al. 2014). Different types of food influence different religions and cultures all around the world as identity elements. In some cultures and religions, eating some food is permitted while eating some other food is a taboo; eating some food is considered evil while some are considered holy. Some metaphysical power has been assigned to some foods. In all the cultures, there have been such food and they have a considerable positions in these cultures. One of the powers assigned to such food is their ability to avert disasters and attract the divine alms for the dead and living people. The pivotal point of many of traditions and rituals, which have a religious color, is the injunction to eat some food which, they believe can avert some disasters and diseases and also solve many problems. In such a belief, food is a context in which life and culture are in line with each other, so that on one hand, without food, life is impossible, and on the other

hand, food is something that in many people's beliefs can avert disasters and attract the divine alms. The first aspect affects the human body directly, and the second aspect exerts its influence indirectly through sacrificing for a metaphysical being and having other people eat some special food. Although the relation between food, averting disasters and attracting divine alms is not easily conceivable, yet in almost all societies, food has been considered as an influential element in this regard. Such foods are always considered to be holy and are a part of the religious rituals. The scapegoating rituals are religious representations and as "Durkheim" believes, the religious representations are collective representations which express the collective reality and in fact, stem from social realities and collective thoughts, showing the collective needs and collective lifestyle in societies. In fact, such rituals and religious traditions are practical methods which emerge among the united religious groups to create excitement and perpetuate and reproduce the psychological states of these groups (Durkheim 2011). Frazer believes that these scapegoating rituals originally are for the growth of plants, averting disasters from the person or the society, exorcising the evil spirits and neutralizing evil plots (Frazer 2009).

Address for correspondence:
Dr. Javad Maddahi Mashizi
24 Azar St, Kerman, Iran
Postal Code: 7619675533
Telephone: 00989131998421
E-mail: madahi1980@yahoo.com

The doctrine of people's beliefs is that nutrition is the source of physical and spiritual energy which can link humans to the source of goodness and badness through influencing their souls. In such beliefs, nutrition is used as a scapegoat, through which the bad aspects of the soul are attracted or repulsed. Bad aspects which affect our worldly life and cause worldly disasters to happen are the ones repelled. To do such, humans by sacrificing edible elements such as animals and plants or sometimes by feeding others with these things avert disasters which they deserve or even transfer these disasters to another person or thing. This belief can be widely observed in primitive people. This idea that disasters, pains and sufferings can be transferred to others was very familiar to primitive people. This idea stems from mixing the objective and subjective aspects of the material and immaterial, and the idea that you can remove a rock from your own shoulders and put it on somebody else's shoulders; primitive humans imagined that the burden of disasters and pains could be transferred to others. These people acted based on these beliefs and the result was a great series of cruel measures so that the sufferings that they themselves couldn't tolerate would be transferred to others. The disasters and pains that humans want to free themselves from should not be necessarily transferred to people, but they could be transferred to animals, plants or other objects (Frazer 2009). Foods have a special position in Islam, to an extent that they could be a medium to avert disasters and attract divine alms; in Islamic culture, such a goal is achieved through feeding the needy for the sake of God. In the research, different aspects of scapegoating and attracting divine alms have been considered based on the Islamic sources such as Quran and Islamic narrative sources including the recognition of the beliefs of a Muslim group; these beliefs play a very essential role in the life of Muslims.

The Importance of Research

In today's society of Muslims, religion plays an important role in food culture, and foods have a special place in Islamic training. Never the less, till now, a coherent study has never been done on issues such as Islamic culture food, the role of religion in the food culture of Muslims and

the rate of adoption and influence of Islamic culture on food culture of Muslims. Thus, research in this field is necessary and crucial.

Objectives

- Review and identify foods and sacred traditions of foods that evacuate evil and digest charities from the perspective of Islam and beliefs of Iranian Muslims;
- Identify the similarities and differences between religious and non-religious beliefs of Iranian Muslim around products and food traditions that evacuate evils and digest charities;
- Determine the mechanism of foods and sacred traditions of foods, which evacuate evil and digest charities among religious and non-religious beliefs of Muslims.

METHODOLOGY

The method used in this research is a field and document-based methods that utilizes interviews and written documents. The statistical community of research is the Muslims of Iran, especially those of Kerman. To collect information, the author has interviewed 30 people thoroughly (15 men and 15 women). The age of the interviewees is from 45 to 75 and 19 (12 men and 7 women) of them had academic degrees and 11 (7 men and 4 women) of them had high school education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Nutrition as an element was used to avert disasters and to attract divine alms in Islamic world throughout history. Foods have been the cause of many sufferings and disasters and also the reason for averting disasters and attracting divine alms. In holy books such as Torah, Bible and Quran, the reason for humans' entrapment in the earth and all the earthly afflictions is Adam's and Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit. When Islam spread, the scapegoating rituals changed in the Islamic realms; the evil spirits and illusionary gods were not held responsible for disasters anymore; transferring the disasters to someone else was not acceptable anymore, but in the Islamic view, the element which

causes many disasters or keeps the good things away from humans, is the sins that human beings commit; or it could be that the person does not commit these sins but is satisfied with the existence of sins in the society or does not warn people not to commit the sins. The idea of scapegoating is an acceptable matter in Islam. Averting disasters and attracting divine alms in the Islamic teachings, have both mundane and divine aspects. Its mundane aspects are represented in earthquakes, floods, fatal diseases, sudden deaths and such things, while its divine aspects include entering paradise and God's satisfaction and being away from hell and avoiding God's wrath. Studying Islamic texts show that Islam considers nutrition, how we use it, and its aspects very important; Islam believes that the most important aim of all these traditions related to food is helping humans grow both physically and spiritually. One of the practical aspects of food which has a considerable effect on the physical and spiritual aspects of humans and is believed by many Muslims is its role as something that averts disasters and attracts divine alms. In Islam, traditions and rituals have been created for averting disasters and attracting divine alms that are strongly related to food.

One of the most important traditions which avert disasters is sacrificing. Sacrificing is a ritual behavior through which an animate creature or a plant or a valuable object is given to God or gods, so that they can forgive or avert disasters. The ritual of sacrificing has existed since the time of primitive people and its relics could be found in holy books such as Torah, Bible, and Quran. The tale of Abel and Cane as the first children of Adam and Eve can be referred for the sake. Abel brought his best sheep for God and Cane brought some wheat; what Abel brought was accepted but what Cane brought was not accepted. This story shows that the ritual of sacrificing has existed since creation and only animals were not sacrificed but plants or any edible animals or plants which could be eaten by humans were also offered. Marsell Moss defined sacrifice as an intermediary element between this mundane world and the spiritual world which is used to gain God's help to achieve something (Sill 1968). Sacrifice became so important in divine religions when Abraham was ordered by God to sacrifice his child, Ismael, but

God forgave him and sent a sheep as the scapegoat of Ismael. Further, Abraham was successful in this divine test, God ordered the ritual of sacrifice to continue and it has continued up to this day and has been considered as a scapegoating element. In Islam, sacrificing is a common ritual but the motive behind it in Islam is very different from that behind it in other groups and religions. Unlike many religions such as Judaism in which the aim of killing and burning the sacrifice is dedicating the blood to God and the reaching of its smell to God's realm, Islam does not accept this idea at all.

Sacrificing in Islam and among Muslims is primarily done to remind people of God and its aim is to help people to get closer to God. It is evident to refer-God said in the 37th verse of sura "Al Hajj": Their meat will not reach Allah, nor will their blood, but what reaches Him is piety from you (Zamani 2014). And the Prophet of Islam believes that one of the most important functions of sacrificing is to feed the needy and the poor (Majlesi 2002). Maybe, it can be said that because meat is considered as an expensive food in many places and in different times and the poor can hardly have access to meat which is very important for health, therefore Islam has considered feeding the poor as one of the most important functions of sacrificing. Also this goal is achieved through the mediation of believing in its scapegoating effect. According to the Islamic teachings, the aim of sacrificing in Islam is as follows: to get close to God, to avert and avoid disasters and diseases, to attract divine alms, to have the needs fulfilled, to atone for sins and for the evil deeds to be forgiven, to obviate the needs of the poor and the needy and to thank God for health and victory (Makar-emShirazi 2010). Among Muslims of the world, the tenth of *Dhu al-Hijjah* has been named as the feast of *Qurban* (sacrifice); on this day, people on hajj after going to Mena (a holy place in Mecca), do the sacrificing ritual and other Muslims who are not on hajj also perform this sacrificial ritual. It is a custom among Muslims of Kerman that the animal should be sacrificed after dawn and some of its meat should be distributed among the poor and the needy. These people highly respect the sacrificed animal and its meat and deem it holy; so some people believe that the meat of the sacrificed animal can avert

disasters and heal diseases. In wedding parties before the bride and groom, or when a beloved person comes back, or for healing diseases, or when they buy a car or a house, the act of sacrificing is performed, and they believe that this act of sacrificing will avert disasters from them.

Another type of sacrificing which has been emphasized in Islam and is important in the society and which we are investigating is "*Agheegha*". This tradition is related to rituals of happiness and it is performed on the seventh day after the birth of a child and its most important function is to avert disasters from the newly-born child. The Islamic scholars believe that *Agheegha* should be a sheep, a camel or a goat. Slaying these animals as *Agheegha* for the child is a tradition which has been highly emphasized in Islam. In line to the beliefs of Kerman, disasters are always very close to the newly born child, that *Agheegha* will keep the disasters away. In the old times, because of the high fatality of children, this tradition was promulgated by the Prophet so that children would be saved from the disasters threatening them, and this tradition still exist (Ghomi 2013). People of Kerman believe that a newly born child's life is dependent on *Agheegha*, that is, if they don't offer an *Agheegha* for him/her, the child will be exposed to some dangers which could lead to his/her death. They believe that the meat of the sacrificed animal should not be eaten by the parents and if they want it to have greater effects, they should distribute it among the poor and the needy.

Another tradition which has a metaphysical side and whose most important function is to avert disasters and attract divine alms, is "*Nazr*". *Nazr* is a religious ritual which is still seen throughout the world and is primarily accompanied by religious ceremonies; in this ceremony, people offer an animal, edible things or a valuable object to a spiritual power which has the ability to change the destiny and the status quo; they have recourse to this spiritual power and ask for his/her help. In the Islamic view, the tradition of *Nazr* is known as a religious act or behavior which is highly believed by people and it is through this ritual that people let their needs, wants and wishes be heard by their Creator either through the mediation of a spiritual power or without it. In other words, holy people act as

an intermediary between the person offering *Nazr* and God so that through this process, God can solve their needs and fulfill their demands. The tradition of *Nazr* is an interaction between humans and metaphysical beings and in some way; it is the expression of their hopes and wishes. The needy person offers *Nazr* based on which if his problem is solved or his wish that has been granted. So the most important reason for the existence of such a belief is the existence of a need. Bronislaw Malinowski asserts that believing in God's will includes believing in powers which have mercy on humans and can help them in life, therefore such beliefs can expand humans' capacity while facing problems and increase the bonds between them (Givian 2011). The tradition of *Nazr* among Muslims of Kerman is highly popular and is performed under the name of God, Prophet, Imams and holy people for fulfilling demands, healing sick people, and averting disasters. *Nazr* in Islam has a great range which includes paying some money, building religious and public places, offering sacrifices, preparing food for the poor and the needy, etc. According to our interviews and considerations which were analyzed, it was observed that edible *Nazrs* are more prevalent than other types; and this type of *Nazr* is offered by sacrificing an animal and preparing food. Nevertheless, the most important demand of people who offer *Nazr* is the fulfillment of their needs, helping of sick people and averting of disasters. It is noteworthy that this tradition is more popular among women than men and the society. It is known to be a female religious activity. These Muslims respect edible things and the meat of *Nazr*, and technically, any food which has the name of "*Nazr and sacrifice*", turns into a holy food; they believe that such food has a healing effect and can heal sick people and avert disasters. They believe that the holy is unified (that is God) with other things which have a connection with God and has a holy aspect. *Nazr* food, according to the same principle, is deemed holy by Muslims. Women's participation in rituals of *Nazr* and in some sense, their making this ritual an exclusively female ritual, provides the social context of their identity. In this tradition, all the things related to the *Nazr food* such as preparing the ingredients, cooking this food, distributing this food, the type of the food, the ar-

rangement of the food on the table cloth, and their colors have a feminine aspect; the foods like *Shir-Berenj* (the mixture of milk and rice), *Adas-Polo* (the mixture of rice and lentil), *Shole-Zard* (the mixture of rice, sugar and saffron), *all types of pa* (the mixture of grain and wheat), *Halva* (the mixture of flour, saffron and rosewater) or bread, cheese and vegetables. These kinds of *Nazr* edible foods are not expensive and they are light. Women show their identity through the type of the food they offer to others. Women's identity through *Nazrs* is a kind of independence and at the same time a social activity and movement; through this, women recognize their position among theists, interact with them and also find a way to express themselves.

The foundation of this way is traditional and is based on scapegoating and attracting divine alms through holy foods. It can be said that the most important food tradition in Islam is "*Zakaat*" which is a way to avert disasters and attract divine alms and is the greatest economic tradition of Islam which falls among the obligatory alms. *Zakaat* is one of the representations of charity for the sake of God; God has promised people who offer *Zakaat* prosperity and the doubling of property. In the sura "the cow", verse 261, God says: "The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed [of grain] which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and knowing" (Makarem Shirazi 2011). Besides, the religious law-maker of Islam sometimes promises rewards, sometimes promises averting disasters and sometimes the proliferation of wealth and sometimes remission and the compensation for sins, and through these, forces people to pay the *Zakaat* of their properties; so that poor people's living conditions will improve and all people in the society will have a serene life together. The tradition of *Zakaat* is so important in Islam to the extent that God has emphasized on it as the most important tradition after praying. According to Islamic teachings, the functions of Islam are as follow: bringing about a balance between the life of the rich and the poor, providing an economic support for social plans, which is the reason for the descent of divine alms, making people's longevity longer, which is also a reason for prosperity and averting

ing disasters. Paying *Zakaat* includes 9 items, seven of which are edible things and 2 of which are not edible; they include: wheat, barley, date, raisin, camel, cow, sheep, gold and silver. With a little reflection, we can understand that the role of edible things is very important and prominent in this Islamic tradition. The Prophet of Islam has been quoted many times regarding this topic, and we can refer to some of them: whenever *Zakaat* is not paid, the earth will bar people of its rewards and the sky of its descending rewards and famine will spread. No properties have been ruined on the earth except for not paying *Zakaat*; so protect your properties through *Zakaat*. Whenever people stop paying *Zakaat*, the earth will bar farms, fruits and mines of its rewards. He also said that giving alms will avert seventy bad kinds of death and bad accidents. In another situation, he said: "God averts disasters and dangers from others because of the people who pay *Zakaat*; but for their *Zakaat*, God would have destroyed all of them" (Koleini 2007).

Considering holy verses and Islamic narratives show that one of the main functions of *Zakaat* and alms is to avert disasters from humans and what belongs to them; emphasis insinuate that this belief is important for the people of Kerman. In the beliefs of people in Kerman, the good and bad deeds of people have an effect on social matters and on natural and heavenly matters; so not to pay *Zakaat* has otherworldly punishment and also has an effect on worldly affairs. It brings about the descent of plagues such as massive death of livestock, the severance of heavenly alms, the increase in pests, floods, earthquakes, and vendettas among groups and zones; but paying of *Zakaat* provides the poor and the needy with food, averts disasters from the society, lets animal and plant products improve and provides a conducive environment for the descent of divine alms. Of nine things for which paying of *Zakaat* is necessary, 7 of them include animals, grain and fruit which play an important role in human health and as such Islam has recommended people to eat them a lot; to an extent that the Quran has referred to date and grapes (raisin) as the good food and has emphasized the importance of others such as wheat and barley. These foods are deemed holy by people and they respect these

foods a lot. God has ordered this tradition in order to help the poor have these products too; God has also promised the averting of disasters and the descent of divine alms to those who persuade people to do this and try to make this tradition firm in the society. So based on Islamic teachings, we can consider *Zakaat* as the most important tradition in the beliefs of people of Kerman whose function is to avert disasters from a wide range including humans, animals, and plants; a tradition in which foods are used as intermediary to avert disasters.

There are also some other scapegoating traditions among people of Kerman, which are not as prevalent as the traditions of sacrifice such as: *Agheegha*, *Nazr* and *Zakaat*, but have Islamic roots; these traditions will be studied here too. According to the beliefs of people being studied here, whoever feeds a hungry person in the time of famine, God will let him enter paradise from a special gate on the Resurrection Day and will forgive his sins and avert disasters from him. They believe that feeding people is one of the characteristics of the Prophet which will lead to the satisfaction of God and the attraction of divine alms by the person; on the condition that this deed is done only for the sake of God and not for any other expectations. According to the beliefs of these people, feeding a person who is fasting, or feeding people after the return from hajj, or feeding people while circumcising a child, or in a wedding party or after buying a house are among things which will avert disasters from the person or things for whose sake the feeding of people has been done. They also believe that if there are needy and poor people among the people being fed, the effect of this will increase.

People of Kerman believe that if a person swears to do something and he doesn't do it, he should feed ten poor people and the quality of this food should not be lower than the food his family eats; and its quantity should make the poor person feel satisfied, but if he doesn't do this, he will be bereft of prosperity and afflicted with problems and disasters. With more consideration, we found out that this believe among them stems from the 89th verse of sura "the table spread" (Al-Maidah): "Allah will not impose blame upon you for what is meaningless in your oaths, but He will impose blame upon you for [breaking] what you intended of oaths. So its

expiation is the feeding of ten needy people from the average of that which you feed your [own] families" (Zamani 2014). On day of *Fetr feast* (the feast concluding Ramadan month), every family gives a special amount (759 g for each person) of the usual food of the family (usually rice or wheat) or the money equal to it, to the poor and the needy; they believe that by doing this, they and their families will be saved from accidents and disasters. In the past, one of the prevalent ideas among people of Kerman was that if one member of the family dies, the close relatives and neighbors should bring food for the bereaved; because they believed that this helps the bereaved family mourn more comfortably and this will alleviate the sufferings of this family; also this will not force the bereaved family to prepare food for those who have come to offer condolences. They believe that this can cause the satisfaction and happiness of God and the attraction of divine alms by the people who prepared the food. Farmers of Kerman, in order to have prosperity and to avert disasters, determine some trees or some part of their harvest and they give it to the needy and the poor. This tradition is found among the farmers, especially among those who have farms of palms. They give some of the palms to the people who are descendants of the prophet and Imam Ali, and to the poor, the clergymen of the village, and the needy holy people, so that they will use it throughout their whole life or for a specific period and pray for the prosperity of the farm and the forgiveness of the dead relatives of the person who gives the palms. They also read Quran for them. Furthermore, they believe that, by doing this, disasters will be averted from their orchards and farms and their dead relatives will be blessed. This tradition is somehow like the 17th to 32nd verse of sura "Al Nahl" were farmers didn't allocate any part of their harvest to the poor and they decided that no poor person could enter their orchards and farms; and so were afflicted with a disaster and their orchards and farms were ruined (Zamani 2014). One of the most important reasons why these farmers and ranchers allocate some part of their products for the poor can be found in this verse of the Quran; because they are scared of being afflicted with God's wrath and disasters.

Among ranchers, there is also a tradition like that of the orchard men; they allocate one or

more sheep or some part of their milk and dairy for the poor and the needy devout people or for the descendants of the Prophet and Imams, and they give it to them at the time of milking or when the sheep have grown; they believe that this will prevent the death of their livestock and increase the milk of their sheep (Farhadi 2013). “*Zamzam*” is a spring located in Mecca and has been since the time of Prophet Abraham, but was built through the help of Ismael; it is known as one of the miracles of God among Muslims and Abrahamic religions. Muslims and especially people of Kerman do believe in the scapegoating and healing powers of the water of this spring; to an extent that this water is considered as one of the most important souvenirs of the people who go to hajj. Also drinking water in glasses on which verses of Quran are written indicates their belief in the scapegoating and healing powers of this water. Among some Muslims, there is this belief that if one feels a pain in his body, he should recite “*Hamd*” sura in that glass and then pour that water on himself; then he should give a basket of wheat to a poor person and ask him to pray for his health. In another similar tradition, people who are afflicted with a disaster or a disease should find some wheat then lie on the ground in a supine position and put the wheat on their chest and pray for their health and they will be healed; but they should stand up and collect the wheat around them and divide it into four parts. Then, they should give each part to a poor person and ask that poor person to pray for their health. When natural disasters like earthquakes happens which make people panic, people in some part of Kerman perform a scapegoating tradition. In this ritual, most people of the city or area in which the natural disaster has occurred, participate and raise some money and buy some sheep. The type of the animal they buy depends on the magnitude of the disaster. If the event is great, they usually buy some cows and if the event is not great, they buy smaller animals. After the purchase, they circulate the animals in the city and the area and then slay them in the parts of the city which are badly damaged, and give the meat to the poor and the needy. By doing so, they believe that they have averted disasters from the city. It is noteworthy that people’s belief is not to transfer the affliction to the poor people, but

by helping the poor, God will avert disasters from them and the whole area. Another tradition that highlights the role of foods in metaphysical matters is giving alms to the dead. Distributing food for the dead is very important in many rituals and cultures. This act was done by the primitive people either because they thought the dead needed food or because they didn’t want the dead to come back from the underworld to annoy them (Tofighi 2012).

In the view of the Islamic culture, the smallest thing that people do for the sake of the dead will have an effect on their lives and will avert disasters from them. Besides, in Islam, giving alms, feeding the poor, and reciting Quran for the dead have been strongly emphasized. This belief is really important for the people of Kerman; people usually go to the cemetery and distribute food for their dead relatives and pray for their blessing. Some of these people believe that the spirits of the dead are free on Thursdays, so the family of the dead person cook the food the dead person liked, and distribute it among the poor, neighbors and acquaintances and ask them to pray for the dead person’s blessing. *Date* and *Halva* (the mixture of flour, sugar and oil) are two types of food which are important in the ritual of giving alms and in the funerals these two types of food are always used. I believe that because dark colors are symbols of mourning, so the food which is used in the funerals have dark colors too; example of such foods are date, *Halva*, and drinks like hot chocolate which is both dark and nutritious. The fact that in Islam and its teachings, foods are believed to atone for the sins, to cause the descent of divine alms, to avert disasters, and to cause tranquility, shows that their importance is beyond their role for nutrition. They also believe that feeding others has a luminosity which can purify people of the contaminations caused by sins. They receive spiritual food by giving material foods to the poor, which will avert worldly problems from them.

Food for Scapegoating in Non-religious Beliefs of Muslims

In the previous parts we talked about Islamic traditions and food that functions among the Muslims was to avert disasters and attract di-

vine alms; traditions such as sacrifice, *Agheegha*, *Nazr*, and *Zakaat* which are prevalent among Muslims in all Muslim countries; but there are also some traditions which probably don't have Islamic roots, but are performed by Muslims. These traditions are traced back to pre-Islamic traditions and they will be discussed here. It is noteworthy in my previous studies, that five edible things including wheat (bread), salt, milk, egg and honey are holy among many Muslims, so in the examples which will be given, we can attribute their holiness to their ability to avert disasters. Among some of the people of Kerman, when the bride and the groom want to enter their house, they put an egg before them and they step on the egg and enter their house; they believe by doing so, disasters will be averted from them and they will have a serene life. There is a kind of skin disease which appears like a corn on the skin; in order to heal it, some people count the number of the corns and put the same number of wheat and barley and rub it on the corns; then they put them inside a piece of cloth and throw it into a well or a crowded place outside the house. By doing so they believe that the disease will be transferred to the first person who picks this up and opens it; it is worth mentioning that it has been widely observed and experienced. Throwing water behind a traveler is common in most cultures; it is believed that by throwing water, the traveler will return without any accidents. We could say that the philosophy behind it is that water (as a holy thing) is sacrificed for the traveler, so the disaster is averted from the traveler.

People of Kerman used to believe that at Nowruz eve, before talking to each other, people have to taste some sugar and anoint themselves with olive oil. By so doing, all disasters will be averted from them. The tradition of breaking a pot filled with water was prevalent among women, especially unmarried girls. These people believe that before young girls get married, they could be afflicted with many disasters; and these disasters could change their fate and prevent them from getting married. Out of this belief, women gave girls empty pots to bring water from the spring or the stream of water. Then in public, girls would break the pots to let all afflictions and disasters go away with the flow of the water and they would be happy. Some people believe

that when a person has stomachache, they should rub a piece of bread on the part that aches and then throw that part before a dog; they believe by doing so, the cause of the pain will be transferred to the dog and the person will be healed. Many of these people put some salt in a piece of cloth and then hang it around the neck of their children; they believe having some salt with you or eating such a holy thing as salt will avert disasters caused by evil eyes. Similarly, when a person gets sick, they rub some salt on his body, and then throw that salt into water; with the believe that the dissolution of the salt in the water, the disasters and afflictions will go away too.

Another tradition observed by me was the tradition of "*egg-breaking*". In this tradition, it is believed that when a person is afflicted by evil eyes, they could aver this affliction by performing "*egg-breaking*" tradition. The person first writes the name of the people the afflicted person has seen in the previous days on the egg, and put a piece of cloth over the head of the afflicted person, and the performer puts two coins on two side of the egg and raises the egg over the head of the afflicted person; then the performer crushes the egg a little by little as he calls the names on the egg one by one. If the egg breaks, they believe that the affliction was brought about by that person. So by breaking the egg, the disaster will go away.

Setting "*Espand*" (something like incense) on fire is a tradition which is still prevalent among many people specially people of Kerman. This tradition is performed when a child is born, or at wedding parties, when a traveler returns or in most happy celebrations. This tradition has been prevalent since the time of Zoroastrianism and still continues to be believed. "*Espand*" is derived from the *Avesta* word "*Sepanta*" which means "holy" and Zoroastrians by putting it on fire (which was a holy thing for them), provided the conditions to get closer to God. People of Kerman believe that *Espand* has the ability to clean the contaminations and avert the disasters; so by putting it on fire, circling it around the head of their loved ones and throwing it into fire; they will be saved from disasters. They also use this plant as a remedy for many pains. The grass which they plant (with the holy seeds like those of wheat) and put on the Haft-Sin table

cloth is thrown into water on the 13th day of the first month of spring when they go to natural places. They believe by doing so, disaster will be averted from them and they will have a good year. This tradition is performed by many people among the Muslims of Iran, Tajikistan and Afghanistan (Bimen 1991).

Among a group of Muslims, there is a ritual which is called "Naan-Push". This tradition is for women; they put a newly-born child in a holy place on the ground and cover the body of the child with bread (Naan); then they pray for the health of the child and after that, they distribute this bread with the already cooked *Halva* among people. They believe this will save the child from disasters (Hasanzade 2008).

"*The problem-solving nuts*" (a mixture of raisin and pea) is believed to be a holy and magical food; they prepare this food every Thursday night and first narrate a story about a poor old man whose job was to remove weeds, but who kept on preparing and distributing this food and how this caused him to become rich; then they distribute the nuts among people with the hope that their problems such as poverty, diseases, etc. will be solved. The noteworthy point is that in such traditions, some products are used to avert disasters which are believed to be holy in their beliefs. Moreover, we can observe that these foods in most rituals function as scapegoats for human beings.

This research which is a step towards understanding culture through the lens of foods indicates that foods can have a serious role in bringing about psychological and physical security for people.

The review and study of food, food traditions and in general nutrition as a part of the culture of ethnic groups, relates to anthropological science. There is a significant body of literature on these issues dealing with different topics like *Ethnology of the Kwakiutl* (Boas 1913), *Land, Labor and Diet in Northern Rhodesia* (Richards 1995), *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning and Power* (Counihan 1999), *The Triangle Culinary* (Levi-Strauss 1965), and so on.

In the culture of the Islamic nutrition, eating food and feeding others are not just a struggle to survive, but encompass a concept beyond nutrition. Islam considers foods as one of the

most important mediums of averting disasters and attracting divine alms; to an extent that foods are an inseparable part of Islamic traditions. Because of this, great traditions of Islam such as *Zakaat*, sacrifice, *Agheegha*, *Nazr* have a strong connection with foods.

All types of food which are prepared by these Muslims for sacrificing, *Nazr* and *Agheegha* are holy and have the ability to heal; but in the religious beliefs of these people, their holiness is not because of the foods themselves rather it is because of their connection with a holy creature such as God, prophets, Imams and other holy people.

Some of Islamic traditions such as *Nazr*, whose most important function is to avert disasters, heal sick people and to fulfill needs, are a feminine tradition and improve the socio-religious status of women among the group or the society and help them have improved social identity.

The research conducted here indicates that in the view of Islamic teachings, one of the most important reasons for the occurrence of disasters and loss of divine alms is committing of sins.

In most religious traditions, the presence of poor people and fulfilling their food-related needs are a major part of these traditions which, in Islamic teachings, function as the medium for forgiving sins and attracting alms.

In general, one can express the mechanism of the effectiveness of foods' ability to avert disasters and attract divine alms in this way: the person who feeds poor people fulfill the food-related needs of poor people through foods and food-related traditions, and satisfy God; and God's satisfaction brings about the forgiveness of the sins of the person who has been afflicted because of committing a sin. Again, but if a person feeds the poor just for God's satisfaction and not for the forgiveness of sins, this will not only avert disasters, but also will cause the descent of divine alms.

In contrast with Islamic traditions, there are other traditions among the studied community, functioning to avert disasters, but the mechanism of their function is different from Islamic traditions. Foods which, in irreligious traditions of these people, have a scapegoating function are primarily holy elements which have the ability to avert disasters and heal diseases. But the afflicted person believes that by sacrificing these

holy elements and asking help from them (not from God), he/she could be freed from pains and disasters. In this tradition, the primary reason for these foods and feeding them to others is not to fulfill the needs of the needy and the poor, but these foods function as the medium of transferring the disasters from the afflicted person to other humans, animals and things. To be precise, these holy elements are sacrificed to avert the disasters of the afflicted person.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussions in the present research, we can identify following items in the system of religious beliefs and that of religious beliefs in our studied community, especially the features of scapegoating and attracting divine alms:

1. In both of these belief systems, foods have an important role in averting disasters and attracting divine alms on humans and their belongings; these foods in these systems, are respected by people and are deemed holy; and the fact that they deem these foods holy, makes them believe that these foods are capable of scapegoating.
2. In religious food traditions, the promise of averting disasters, the forgiveness of sins and the attraction of divine alms in both worlds have been guaranteed directly either by God or by the holy legislator; but in irreligious scapegoating traditions, there is no guarantee for this.
3. In religious food traditions, the food scapegoating is an element which creates social unity between the poor and the rich while irreligious scapegoating rituals are not capable of this and in some contexts, they create some kinds of schism and discrepancy (like the egg-breaking tradition).
4. In religious scapegoating traditions, sacrificing animals (their meat) is more common; but in irreligious scapegoating traditions, plant and non-meat products are used.
5. The mechanism of effectiveness of the foods which have a scapegoating role in religious beliefs, usually functions through fulfilling the needs of the needy

and the poor and is not considered as the direct cause of the scapegoating; but in irreligious traditions, fulfilling the needs of people is not the matter, but the foods themselves are the elements of attracting, averting and transferring the disasters and diseases.

6. In the system of religious beliefs, the reason for the holiness of these foods which have the power to avert disasters or attract divine alms, is completely obvious to people (it is because they are attributed to a holy place or person); but in irreligious traditions of the studied community, the reason for the holiness of the foods which have scapegoating power is not known by them or clear to them.
7. Performers of the religious scapegoating rituals gain a kind of identity, a kind of socio-religious status by performing these rituals; but the irreligious traditions and rituals don't have such a function.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from this case study can serve as evidence that anthropological methods work in nutrition culture research and can be helpful in a better recognition of Muslim's nutrition culture and Islamic culture of food.

LIMITATIONS

The fundamental limitation, about this research is the lack of prior research studies and lack of reliable data on the topic. Therefore, this study can serve as an important opportunity to describe the need for further research.

REFERENCES

- Bimen W 1991. Symbolic scapegoating in the Iranian theater. *Iran-Nameh*, 34: 293-303.
- Durkheim E 2011. *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Tehran: The Publication of University of Al-lame Tabatabai.
- Boas F 1913. *Ethnology of the Kwakiutl*. Washington: Government Printing Office.
- Counihan C 1999. *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning and Power*. London: Routledge.
- Farhadi M 2013. *Vara*. Tehran: Khoshbin Publication.
- Frazer J 2009. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. London: Oxford University Press.

- Ghomi A 2013. *Mafatih al-Jenan*. Qom: The Publication of the Mosque of Jamkaran.
- Givian A 2011. *Anthropology of Religious Communities*. Tehran: Imam Sadeq University Publication.
- Hasanzade A 2008. *Food and Culture*. Tehran: Mehrnamag Publication.
- Koleini M 2007. *Alkafi*. Tehran: Noore-Vahy Publications.
- Levi-Strauss C 1965. The triangle culinary. *Art*, 26: 19-29.
- Maheshvari N, Nokwanda N 2014. Transnationalised-memories among migrants: How 'indigenous' food can bring home closer. *Anthropologist*, 17(2): 333-340.
- Majlesi M 2002. *Baharolanvar*. Tehran: Islamiyah Publication.
- MakaremShirazi N 2010. *The Selection of the Interpretation*. Tehran: Daralkotob Islamiyah.
- Makarem Shirazi N 2011. *The Translation of Quran*. Tehran: Quran publication.
- Richards A 1995. *Land, Labor and Diet in Northern Rhodesia*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Sill D 1968. *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. New York: The Macmillan Company and the Free Press.
- Tofighi H 2012. *Getting Familiar with Great Religions*. Tehran: Samt.
- Zamani K 2014. *The Translation of Quran*. Tehran: Namak Publication.