

Title of paper: wielding technology specifically the Internet to retrieve and revive Iranian children`s lost cultural identity.

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Introduction:

Admittedly, with the advent of technology and its manifold features and high tendency towards development and growth, the face of life has undergone a radical change. This is far more pronounced in the East, namely undeveloped as well as developing countries where the masses or populace particularly in terms of technology are consumers rather than producers.

It is quite discernible that in highly developed countries especially in the West, technology and a wide variety of its tools are being wielded as a means of cultural, traditional and even religious dissemination, that is to say, a way of acquainting children and youngsters with all motifs and components of their cultural identity and constantly reminding them of the cultural heritage that has been handed down to them and thus emphasizing the significance of the concept of “preservation”.

In Iran and many other Eastern countries however, since western technology has been implemented just superficially and without the

proper requisite infrastructure, many dire consequences are transpiring including the alienation of Iranian children and youngsters as the foremost users of technology especially the Internet from their cultural identity ranging from once highly popular characters such as Hassan Kachal[literally(lit.)the bald] to folk indigenous games eg Alak-Dolak and typically nursery rhymes eg “Amu zanjir baf”(lit.Uncle plait-weaver).

Hence, we propose an attempt or a sequence of attempts preferably supported by the government or governmental organizations with a view to reviving our children`s immaterial and indigenous culture by designing computer games and even didactic softwares which would mirror features and material plucked directly from our own culture, folklore and traditions and in which for instance a non-Iranian character like Hulk is substituted with our legendary hero “Rostam”.

But, before we come to elaborate on the technical details and practical aspects of implementation of the project, namely the digitization of children & youngsters` material within the NLAI, we would better have a brief overview of the endeavours and initiatives adopted hitherto to achieve the above-mentioned purpose. In this day and age when one`s incapability of using computers and electronic services stands for the person`s illiteracy, most of the information required by children and youngsters is presented in the format of computer softwares. Children seek the New, diversity and practicality, so learning computer and satellite communications makes the whole process of learning about life far more exciting and tremendous. Many of our software engineers are busy designing softwares and computer programmes for children. Designed programmes which not only transmit information but also comprise a diversity of games, dramas, music, stories and films.

## Survey

In 1995(=1374) Mr Mostafa Rahmandust and a bunch of cultured and intellectual friends established the very first virtual library for Iranian children and youngsters named “Dustane”.(=meaning friendly)(at their personal expense) The site did not last for longer than three years due to its high expenses, yet, it had the emergence of many childrens` sites in its wake including the”Virtual society of Iranian children & youngsters”`s site which was set up through an attempt made by some laymen in childrens` field and also the group of Iranian engineers called “Rasa”.

The site has an outstanding position and consists of such sections as playground, childrens` club, child`s album, rhymes and poetry, tales and stories, contests, riddles, eminent figures and celebrities, places of interest, joke shop, school, child`s knowledge, little artists, along with mothers, child`s criticism, lab, astronomy and etc. At the moment only the Iranian children living in Iran can have membership, but, it is hoped that next year the Iranian children living abroad will also be able to become members.

## The(non-digital) children & youngsters` department of the NLAI

In early 1980`s(=1360`s) the department began to provide and organize childrens` resources.(including books and non-book materials) Obviously two copies of childrens` books just like other published works are submitted to the NLAI by virtue of deposit law and just like other resources are recorded in the national bibliography of Iran.

The collection of resources at this library holds 100000 copies of Persian and non-Persian(i.e books in European languages such as English, French, German etc) and Braille books, 44 special journals of children, a collection of non-book materials including CDs, tapes and video cassettes, educational jig-saw puzzles to be applied by children and youngsters as well as researchers in the field. This library also renders such services as story-telling, recitation of poems, film show etc.

Children & youngsters` (non-digital) department of the NLAI has evidently contributed quite extensively to the dissemination and revival of Iranian folklore particularly childrens` stories, tales, games, riddles and the like. Unfortunately the blindfold and unsystematic implementation of technology in general and specifically in the area of education and learning through the Internet has in effect rendered the perusal of books and essentially a possible recourse to printed resources roughly futile and superfluous to our Iranian children and young readers as they would rather spend their leisure playing computer games or take their time with a wide variety of entertaining softwares which for the most part reflect no traces of our cultural identity and in fact are mostly rooted in the Western culture and traditions. Therefore, it can be asserted that the non-digital library of children & youngsters as part of the NLAI has not been utilized so frequently and hugely by its young users as one would expect, despite the fact that it has been provided with the most extensive and diverse facilities and equipments. In view of these facts and accounts, by our reckoning, the digitization of childrens` collection of the NLAI or in other words the possible establishment of a national digital memory for children & youngsters can solve the problem by engaging their interest in books(in digital formats), that is to say, by resorting to technology, we might be able to reconcile the new generation of Iranian children if not

thoroughly at least partly with their past and so to speak, their lost cultural identity, and frankly speaking, in this respect, one can go so far as to declare that indeed the magic of technology has at long last done the trick.

## The National Digital Memory of Children & Youngsters(=NDMCY)

The NDMCY as a vast public source of information can play a prominent role in establishing part of the cultural infrastructure of the Iranian information society. What the NDMCY is charged with include: digital storage and preservation of information sources concerning a particular country and her people with a view to preserving and transmitting knowledge to masses and especially posterity and supporting education , research and perpetual learning. In the years to come this portal is going to scan all childrens` existing books in compliance with the copyright law and present them at the above-mentioned site. The resources to be digitized at this portal include: reference books, and books on science, education, art, literature, history, religion, Iranology and folk literature.

The NLAI according to its constitution, as the lawful organization in custody of preservation and dissemination of printed, non-printed and digital works concerning Iranian culture and civilization , Islam and Iranians, ought to give priority to the project of the NDYMC and supply the mechanisms necessary for its implementation.

### 2-1 The goals pursued by the NDYMC

The development of the NDYMC aims at the following:

- revival of children & youngsters` immaterial culture and parts of folk literature
- development of a valuable digital content from children and youngsters` resources in scientific, cultural, historical and Islamic domains
- erection of a firm consolidated infrastructure for preservation, organization and information processing of the scientific and cultural content of children and youngsters in digital format
- facilitation of access to information resources to support education and research

### 3-1 Requirements for the establishment of the NDYMC

The NDYMC is a project of national caliber and its realization calls for certain issues. To implement this project, the issues and concerns below should be taken into account.

#### 1-4-1 Selection of resources according to priorities to form digital collections

The resources fall into two major categories :digital resources(such as websites, electronic journals and books and digitized resources) and analogue resources. In getting the priorities right, it is determined which resources(including educational cassettes, video cassettes, musical scores, books, short-termed resources, newspapers, magazines, sound recordings etc) have priority over the other ones and should be digitized first.

#### 1-4-2 Establishment of hardware, software and communication infrastructures

Preservation of digital collections on the one hand, and their information processing on the other hand, oblige us to adopt a different infrastructure

for the storage or retrieval of information. The most important issues in establishing infrastructure include processing, preservation and information processing of a massive amount of information and digital objects. The hardware, software and communication infrastructures should be designed in a way that they can be held accountable to inside and outside users on vast scales.

### 1-4-3 Compliance with national and international resources & metadata standards

The METS standard has been chosen as a packaging format. It binds together the data objects(digital files or bit streams as managed by the Fedora system) and the metadata. The latter includes a minimal subset of descriptive metadata in Dublin Core format, imported from the bibliographic catalog through the OAI-PMH repository; but the main part of the metadata is administrative and technical metadata generated by the system itself. The provenance metadata, ensuring the audit trail of changes that occur within the system, are recorded as a series of events encoded according to the PREMIS standard. The technical metadata is extracted from the digital files during the ingest process, and encoded in the METS technical metadata section using appropriate extension schemas such as MIX for still images and TextMD for textual documents. The METS manifest thus obtained provides a global view of the digital object to be preserved, and is stored along with the digital files in the preservation system. However, to ensure the accessibility of this metadata and the ability to query it in a flexible way, an innovative data management system will be developed. The data management will be based on a mapping from METS to RDF and the resulting RDF data will be stored in a RDF triple store. This technology will provide the most accurate access to all information stored in the system and will allow a strong monitoring of the digital objects in the perspective of preservation strategies such as migration and emulation.

### 1-4-4 Legal issues and making resources accessible

Legal issues and authors` copyright in particular form the chief concerns of digital libraries nowadays. According to national and international laws and regulations, copying a resource partly or wholly or converting

them into other formats requires the permission from the author or authors, although there are some resources and huge collections without copyright restrictions as some belong to the state and some others are national. The resources without legal restrictions should have priority over the others. Even so, the importance of digitization of updated scientific resources (like articles, books etc) should not be underestimated and in collaboration with publishers and authors, one should be enabled to make use of resources protected by copyright law.

#### 1-4-5 Education and development of culture

The establishment of the processes regarding the NDYMC requires a cultural ground-breaking and teaching new skills to the staff. Teaching the processes and the standards which should be followed at each stage, demonstrating library management software or digital archive and promotion of technicians' technical knowledge in the management and maintenance of infrastructures are most necessary from the very beginning. The staff should adapt themselves to the new conditions in proportion to organizational changes and are to be trained, should the necessity arise.

Besides education and cultural ground-breaking within the organization, some propagandizing efforts should be spent to introduce and enhance this national resource in and out. Apart from the system's introduction, the prospective and actual users of this programme need to promote their experience and skill, so that they can benefit from the services rendered by the NDYMC most.

#### 1-4-6 National contribution

Being national, this project necessitates the support and interaction of different state and private sectors. Establishment of the NDYMC calls for national and public contribution and participation on an enormous scale, and all governmental centers as well as NGOs and even individuals should feel responsible and get practically involved.

### Conclusion

Iranian children and youngsters in the age of information receive most of their information mainly from the Internet and computer games as the same goes for almost every teenager anywhere in the world. This has prompted many of experts in the IT and software engineers to design



especially computer games and softwares for children. Given childrens` high tendency towards technology and specifically the Internet, we must adopt this means to revive the children`s folk tales, stories , games and riddles as the components of a culture once very popular to older generations of Iranian children. Obviously, this duty most of all lies with the NLAI that officially has the custody of preservation and dissemination of books, non-book and digital works on Iranian culture and civilization, Islam etc. The proposal of establishing the NDYMC in collaboration and harmony with different state and private sectors as well as the support of experts on the field ranks as one of the major strategies to attain the above-mentioned goal.

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