CHAPTER - III

SHAH NAMEH

Shah Nameh, the celebrated work of the Persian poet Ferdowsi is called “The Crown Jewel of the Persian Literature” in which the Persian national epic found its final and enduring form. The name “Shah Nameh” is a compound of two words: Shah meaning king and nameh meaning book, translating to “The Book of Kings”. But nameh as noted before also refers to the genre of epic or almost all epics after Shah Nameh carried the word ‘nameh’, for instance Farâmarz Nameh, khavaran Nameh, Lohrâsb Nameh, Jahangir Nameh and so on. It is interesting to note that when the Indian epic Mahabharata was translated into Persian during the reign of Mongol empire Akbar (1556-1605), it was called ‘Razm Nameh’ meaning ‘the book of war’. It should be noted also the official history of the reign of Emperor Akbar including a statistical gazetteer of sixteenth century North India, compiled by his minister Abu’l-Fażl under the title of Akbar Nameh.

Ferdowsi

Ferdowsi composed Shah Nameh in the 10th century in a rich and moving language shaped in a great style. Ferdowsi (b. A.D. 932; d. 1020) whose real name was AbolQāsem Mansure, was born in a village called Baţ which itself belongs to Tābarān of Tus. Tus was a city in the eastern Iranian province of Khorāsān. Ferdowsi was a member of the landed gentry known as Dehghān. The Dehghāns were a class of educated Iranians who were interested in preserving Iranian traditions, customs, cultural values and protect them against Muslims conquest. In Ferdowsi’s time, when Iranians were experiencing Arab dominance, the writing of Shah Nameh was a strong tradition especially among Dehghans. In fact it was the ambition of all poets to write the history of Persia to portray its honors and victories. Regarding motivation of the poet to write his epic, Banani asserts that:

Ferdowsi was undoubtedly inspired by the renascent Iranism of the Samanid epoch and may have even conceived of his masterwork as an offering to that illustrious house, only to witness its demise in the hands of the Turkic Ghaznavids. The bitterness of the mythical Iranian-Turanian epic struggle that permeates the Shah Nameh and gives it its dramatic tension is the pressing phenomenon of the poet’s own time.
Regarding his knowledge and education, the available information is scanty and limited to his works which shows he knew well the Arab literature and philosophy of his time. It is said that though Ferdowsi was well-born, he spent his money to complete his work and became poor. Ferdowsi in his later years decided to present *Shah Nameh* to Sultan Mahmud who did receive neither him nor his work respectfully. Nizami Aruzi writes in *Chohar Maghaleh* that Mahmud told Ferdowsi:

*Shah Nameh* is nothing except the story of Rustam, and in my army there are thousands like Rustam. Ferdowsi answered: as I know God has not created like Rustam and went out. Mahmud told his minister: he ironically named us liar, we should kill him; but as they searched, they could not find him because Ferdowsi had been escaped from Ghaznein (65).

But there was quiet another politics at play to explain why Mahmud refused Ferdowsi, while Ferdowsi was Shia, Mahmud was Sunni. They belonged to two different faiths of Islam. Moreover when Mahmud was a Turk, the *Shah Nameh* presents a negative image of Arabs and Turks. Ferdowsi was grieved by the fall of the Persian Empire and its subsequent rule by Arabs and Turks. In this regard Diankonoff remarks:

‘Book of Kings’ (*Shah Nameh*) though, formally, impeccably Muslim, had nevertheless a certain anti-Arab and anti-Turk bias. History became an eternal feud between Iran and Turan.35 No wonder the book did not have success with Mahmud Ghaznawi, to whom it had been dedicated. The ‘Book of Kings’ by Firdousi is witness to the fact that Persian self-consciousness had been born. For Firdousi, the great past was represented by the dominion of the mythical Zoroastrian Kayanid dynasty and the historical Zoroastrian Sasanid dynasty. It is interesting to note that the Achaemenid Empire had completely disappeared from historical memory (100).

Some years later Mahmud, regretful of his treatment, wanted to make amends. Mahmud sent Ferdowsi costly and royal gifts. But as Nezami Aruzi narrates, when Sultan's gifts arrived in Tābaran, Ferdowsi's corpse was being carried out of the city. Ferdowsi had a daughter. When the royal messengers wanted to give her the gifts she refused saying she did not need such things.
The Sources of the Epic

For his sources, Ferdowsi mainly used an earlier prose version titled *Shah Nameh Abo-Mansoori*, which itself was a compilation of old Persian stories and historical facts and fables based on of much older source *Khvatay- Namak*, that reached back to the Sassanid dynasty. *Shah Nameh Abo-Mansoori* was compiled by order of Abu Mansoor Tusi (governor of Khurasan), under the supervision of his minister Abu Mansoor Abdol Razzagh Tusi and by the efforts of some Zoroastrians of Sistān and Khurasan. This work was based on *Khvatay- Namak* and some other books such as *Ayatkar Zariran, Karnameh Ardesth Babakan* and the story of *Bahram choobin*. *Khvatay- Namak* was compiled in Khusrow Anooshirvan's age which was the history of Sasanians, written in Pahlavi language.

Ferdowsi incorporated 1,000 verses of the earlier poet Daqiqi-e Balkhi, a court poet of the Sasanids. Daghighi started the versification to chronicle the pre-Islamic and legendary Persia also based on *Shah Nameh Abu Mansoori*. But he met a violent end after completion only 1000 verses when he was killed by his slave. Ferdowsi used these verses which were about the rise of the prophet Zoroaster in his work with an acknowledgment. A strong influence of oral literature is clearly seen in Ferdowsi’s *Shah Nameh*. Davidson in his comprehensive essay on Persian epic writes:

Ferdowsi describes his pre-Islamic poetic sources in terms that suit both oral and written traditions. The oral traditions are represented as stylized performances by learned men called mobads and dehqans, while the written traditions are attributed to an archetypal Book of Kings written in Pahlavi, the language of the Sasanian empire… On the surface, Ferdowsi’s own references to a prototypical *Shahnama* as an archetypal book seem to contradict the argument that Ferdowsi’s poetry is the product of an oral tradition. In terms of the cultural background of the *Shahnama*, however, oral poetry is basically not incompatible with literacy, as represented by the archetypal book (288).

Language and Style

Persian prosody and rhyme follows Arabic model. The meters in Persian classic poem are quantitative; they are based on regularly recurring patterns of short, long and extensive syllables. Stress not plays an important or clearly understood role. The form that Ferdowsi used for *Shah Nameh* is a line of eight feet in two hemistiches. The hemistiches of each line have an end-rhyme
which differs from line to line. Between hemistiches there is a regular caesura but no regular one within each hemistich. There is usually no enjambment either. Shah Nameh is written in the meter motaghareb:

Definition of the meter of Motaqāreb:  fa-‘ū-lon / fa-‘ū-lon / fa-‘ū-lon / fa-‘al
\[ \text{- -} / \text{- -} / \text{- -} / \text{- -} \]

Here is an example of two couple lines:

1. Be nameh / khodavan /d-e jan-o / kherad kazin bar /tar andi /she bar nag /zarad
2. khodavan /d-e nam-o/khodavan /d-e jay khodavan /d-e roozi /deh-e rah /nomay

The language of Shah Nameh is simple and strong and Ferdowsi used fewer Arabic words. Shah Nameh itself was a reaction to Arab conquest and Ferdowsi as a nationalist poet tried to free his work from Arabic influence. This is noteworthy as it is a known fact that it is difficult to write in Persian without using Arabic loanwords. Other poetry of Ferdowsi's time has considerably higher percentage of Arabic words. The Encyclopedia of World Biography entry on “Firdausi” gives useful information about Shah Nameh’s language and style:

He combined harmoniously what he drew from historical sources with his personal inspiration. As for his style, whether in the fantastic elements demanded by the epic or in the gracefulness of his descriptions of everyday life, he excels at describing and explaining facts or sentiments in a clear, concise manner. His style is firm but eloquent, never giving into baseless extremes. His poetry very seldom contained Arabic words, except in his descriptions of Alexander the Great, which came largely from Arabic sources. Just as Dante did with Italian, Chaucer with English, or the Gutenberg Bible with the Latin Vulgate, he was in his day a popularizer of the vernacular. Arabic was the holy Islamic language of Allah in the Koran just as Latin was the lingua franca for the Catholic Church. It was the Shah Nameh of Firdausi that recongealed the Persian language into a coherent force that soon was to be the court language for most of the Islamic world (website).

Ferdowsi’s language is strong and supple because the poet used the rhetorical devices available in Persian poetry. This stylistic point reinforces the genre of the poem as an epic. In an epic, the
greatness of the language must match the heroic action. Yet using too many rhetorical devices and figurative language reduces this magnificence. A correct balance is the hallmark of a great epic poet. Hence in *Shah Nameh* there is brevity instead of verbiage. The poet's use of metaphor is notable. The heroes are given the qualities of powerful creations like lion, tiger, dragon and whale. In other words, the hero of an epic is a superhuman so his acts and treatments are not natural. In *Shah Nameh*, Rustam eats a zebra in each meal and lives for some hundred years. There are examples of epic Similes also and extensive of use of hyperbole.

**General Themes**

From the pre-Islamic times until today, Persian literature has had a strong didactic side and *Shah Nameh* is within tradition. Didactic side strongly point towards moral, preach, justice, honesty, freedom and patriotism throughout the text. In legendary parts of *Shah Nameh*, the sense of fatalism and vanity of human desires are so strong where Rustam says to himself after his horse had been stolen “sometimes you are in the saddle and sometimes the saddle is on you.” Whereas in the historical part, the greater stress is on ethical values. Didacticism of Ferdowsi is represented by the characters, speeches and actions and by the poet himself who enters into comment action. In the historical parts of the text a newly selected king usually start giving speech on throne, stressing the need for justice and honest in the world.

The events of *Shah Nameh* are centered in Iran which spreads towards in all direction. War and hunting carry the heroes of Iran to face Arabs, Central Asians, Chinese and other peoples. Long journeys and prolonged absence from home is the rule of heroes. *Shah Nameh* is valued especially in varied sources of the national epic and covering the vast area of Iranian culture. The Iranians entered the plateau which is the political state of Iran in the second millennium B.C and have brought legend and tales. This is the time that kings and heroes like Hushang, Key Khosrow and other important figures in *Shah Nameh* have their origin. After a long time, many of this Iranian shifted their life from nomadic to more settled way of life. So conflicts occur between the Pastoralists and the agriculturalists. After this transition one of the main themes of Persian epic “the theme of Iran against Turan” emerged (Hanaway 76).
**Protagonists**

**Keyumars:** is the first man, the ruler of the world. The reign passes to his grandson, Hushang. His son, Tahmuras was his successor and it passes to his son, Jamshid.

**Zahhāk:** is an evil figure in Iranian mythology. In *Shah Nameh* he is an oppressor king who has two snakes in his shoulders but in earlier source, in Zoroastrian literature he is described as a three-headed dragon monster.

**Kāveh the Blacksmith:** is a mythical figure in Persian mythology who leads a popular uprising against Zahhāk.

**Nariman:** is an Iranian hero, son of Garshasb, and father of Sām who himself is grandfather of Rustam the hero.

**Sām:** is a mythical hero of ancient Persia, and an important character in the *Shah Nameh*. He was the son of Nariman and father to Zāl. He was Iran's champion during the rule of Faridun, Manuchehr and Nowzar.

**Zāl:** is a legendary Persian warrior who was born with white hair and so he was left when only an infant; upon the mountain Damavand. The mythical bird Simurgh found the baby and grew him up. He is father of Rustam.

**Rūdabeh:** is a Persian mythological female figure in *Shah Nameh*. She is the daughter of Mehrab Kaboli, and later she married to Zal. She bears Rustam to Zal.

**Mehrab Kaboli:** is king of Kabul and is most famous for being father of Rudabeh and grandfather of her son, the famous Persian hero, Rustam.

**Rustam:** is the greatest national hero of Iran, the champion of champions who is involved in numerous stories.

**Tahmineh:** is a female character in the *Shahnameh*. She is the wife of Rustam and the daughter of Samangan shah. Of her marriage with Rustam, Sohrab was born.

**Sohrāb:** is the son of Rustam, who was slain at a young age by his father. Rustam only found out he was his son after wounding him in a duel.
**Shaghad**: is the half-brother of Rustam who was always been jealous of Rustam's high status. He killed Rustam by dropping him into a pit full of swords or other sharp objects.

**Siyavsh**: is the legendary Persian prince and the son of Kay Kāvus, the king of Iran. Due to the treason of his stepmother, Sudabeh with whom he refused to have sex and betray his father, exiled himself to Turan where he was killed innocently by order of The Turanian king Afrasiab.

**Simurgh**: is the mythical flying creature. Zal was taught much wisdom from the loving Simurgh. The name simurgh derives from Avestan mərəγō Saēnō "the bird Saēna" as can be deduced from the etymological cognate Sanskrit śyenaḥ "raptor, eagle, bird of prey" that also appears as a divine figure.

**Rakhsh**: is the stallion of main protagonist Rustam in Shah Nameh of Ferdowsi. Rakhsh is highly intelligent and his loyalty is legendary. No one except Rustam ever rides Rakhsh, and Rakhsh knows no one but Rustam as his master.

**Bizhan and Manizheh**: Bijan is the son of Giv, a great hero of Iran during the reign of Kai Khosrow. Bijan falla in love with Manijeh, the daughter of Afrasiab, the king of Turan and greatest enemy of Iran. Both of them greatly suffered as a result where Bizhan was jailed in a deep hole by Afrasiab.

**Afrasiab**: is the king and hero of Turan and an archenemy of Iran. Finally he is killed by Rustam.

**Rustam Farrokhzād**: is the Commander of the Army of Iran in Sāsānian Empire and is remembered as an historical figure.

**Gurdāfarīd**: is one of the heroines in the Shah Nameh. She was a champion who fought against Sohrab and delayed the Turanian troops who were marching on Persia.

**Synopsis of the Epic**

It took Ferdowsi 30 years to compile Shah Nameh, starting his composition in the Samanid era in 977 A.D and completing it around 1010 A.D. during the Ghaznavid epoch.

“The Crown Jewel of the Persian literature” is honored by all Iranians (including non-Persian
Shah Nameh is the national literary epic of Persia, containing elements of folk epic that includes legend and history and covering almost 6,000 years from prehistoric times to the fall of the Sassanid empire (651 A.D). In scope it outranks all western epics and has some 60,000 rhyming couplets, making it more than three times the length of Homer's Iliad, and more than twelve times the length of the German Nibelungenlied. Shah Nameh is divided into three consecutive parts: the mythic, heroic, and historical ages:

1. The Mythical Age

The narrative of Shah Nameh begins with the praise of God and Wisdom in the manner of all epic invocations. Ferdowsi then describes the creation of the world and man, as believed by the Sasanians. This is followed by praise of the Prophet Mohammad; explanation regards the compiling of the book and its verification, the story of poet Daghighi. The introduction ends with the praises of Sultan Mahmud. After the introduction, Ferdowsi introduces Keyumars, the first man, the ruler of the world and founder of Pishdadian dynasty. Keyumars's son Siyamak is killed by Kharoozan Div. getting revenge of The Dive is end of Kumars. The reign passes to his grandson, Hushang, son of Siyamak, who discovered fire and established the Sadeh Feast in honor of that; he also did smithy and animal husbandry. His son, Tahmuras, was his successor and the next king. Tahmuras domesticated some animals and birds. He also learned writing from Dives. The kingship passes from father to his son, Jamshid. He brought the world, some other elements of civilization including smelting of metals, clothing, architecture, medicine and the organization of society into four classes: clergymen, warriors, planters and craftsmen. Proud of his deeds, Jamshid claimed that he was supreme refusing his obligation to God. Jamshid was killed by non Iranian violator, Zahhāk who also ruled thousand years. Zahhāk had two snakes on his shoulders, resulting of devil's kiss. All doctors tried to find a solution but they could not. Again devil in the mask of doctor went to Zahhāk and advised him to kill two youth every day and eat their brains. Two people who worked as cooks decided to kill a ship instead of one youth and let him free to escape to mountains. One night Zahhāk saw a nightmare. He asked his hypnologists to tell him what his dream means. The hypnologists told him the key of his death is in the hand of Faridunwho has not born yet. Years later Faridun was born but later his father was killed by Zahhāk's men and his brain gives to snakes. The following of the story which starts by
rising of Kaveh against Zahhāk may study in Heroic Part of Shah Nameh. The mythical part of *Shah Nameh* is some deal short, amounting to some 2100 verses.

2. The Heroic Age

Almost two-thirds of the *Shah Nameh* is allocated to the age of heroes, extending from the story of Kaveh and finishing with Rustam's death. The main part of this section deals with the Sistāni heroes who appear as the backbone of the Persian Empire. Garshasb is briefly introduced with his son Nariman, who is father of Sam. His successors were his son Zāl. When Zāl was born, his hair was completely white. Unhappy with this son, he took him to the mountain and left him alone there. Searching of food, Simorgh (a huge mythical bird) found Zal and nurtured him. This bird plays an important role in the epic. Some years later, led by a dream Sam goes to mountain and finds his son Zāl. There follows the romance of Zāl and Rudabeh, leading to the birth of Rustam, the bravest of the brave of *Shah Nameh*. This heroic part includes long wars between Iran and Turan, the Seven Stages (or Labors) of Rustam, the tragedy of Rustam and Sohrāb, Siyāvash and Sudābeh, Rustam and Akvān Dīv, the romance of Bīžhan and Manižheh, The *Haft Khan* (Seven Stages) of Esfandiyār, Daqiqi's account of the story of Goshtāsp and Arjāsp, and Rustam and Esfandiyār. The episode of the fight between Rustam and his son Sohrab is justly famous. The hero Rustam unknowingly meets and kills his own son in a battle. This brilliant story-tragedy was translated and popularized by Matthew Arnold in his 1853 poem "Sohrab and Rustam". There are similar motifs to be found in the German legend of Hildebrand and Hadubrand, the Irish legend of Cuchulainn, the Russian heroic legend of Ilya Murometch. It is possible that the motif spread from Persia to the Irish people via the Russian and the German (Vries 114).

3. The Historical Age

The Historical Age, sometimes mixed with legends, extended from the conquest of Alexander the Great (Sekandar) to the fall of the Sassanid dynasty subsequent and the Arab conquest of Persia. This portion of the epic is narrated woefully, romantically, and in moving poetic language. After the history of Bahrām Gur, Ferdowsi relates the history of other fifteen Iranian kings. Yazdgerd is the last king of Sassanid Empire after whom Iran experienced the mastery of the Arabs. By order of Omar, caliph of Muslims, Sad-e Vaghghās attacked Iran. Rustam-e Farrokhzād, an Iranian commander, battled against them for some months in
Ghādesiyeh but none of two sides could be defeated. In the next war which continued for three days, lots of soldiers were killed. Finally Rustam and Sad battled each other. First Rustam killed Sad's horse but couldn’t let behead Sad. Sad took advantage and killed Rustam. When Iranians saw their commander killed, they escaped to Baghdad. After this, Rustam's brother Farrokhzād attacked Karkh and killed many Arabs but again a dust storm did not let Iranians to see and they finally lost. Yazdgerd went to Khorāsān and asked Māhuy for help. Māhuy gave his army to Yazdgerd but secretly encouraged Bižan-e Pahlāvān, the governor of Bokhara, to battle against Yazdgerd. Bižan sent his commander, Barsām to war of Yazdgerd. In the war of Yazdgerd and Barsām, Iran's army by collusion did not fight and left the king alone. Yazdgerd hid in a mill. When the miller saw the king, he informed Māhuy and by his order killed the king. Then Māhuy wanted to fight against Bižan and conquer Bokhara, but he lost the war and was captured by Barsām. Barsām gave Māhuy to Bižan who killed him and three of his sons and burned them.

**Shah Nameh and the Revival of the Persian Language**

Perhaps the principal and highest importance of *Shah Nameh* is its impact on Persian language. All Persian scholars unanimously agree that *Shah Nameh* has played a major role in reviving of a language after the Islamic conquest of Persia and the subsequent influence of Arabic language. It is well known that the *Shah Nameh* has few Arabic loanwords. Most experts like E. G. Browne claim that Ferdowsi consciously “avoided their use ... because he felt them to be unsuitable to the subject of his poem. But even in his time many Arabic words had become so firmly established in the language that it was impossible to avoid their use” (II 145-46). Browne studied 21 verses from the episode of Sohrāb and Rustam and estimates the Arabic vocabulary at four or five percent. The one study offering a complete count and a comprehensive commentary on the Arabic vocabulary of the *Šāh-nāma* (sic) is the Swiss dissertation by Mohammad Djafar Moīnfar written under the guidance of Emile Benveniste (1902-76; q.v.) and Gilbert Lazard (b. 1920). Moīnfar criticizes earlier attempts for their incomplete samples and loose criteria such as lax etymology, inclusion of proper nouns, and the counting of derivatives, compounds, and components of collocations as separate words. Moinfar calculates that the *Shah Nameh* contains 706 words of Arabic origin, occurring a total of 8,938 times. The 100 words occurring most frequently account for 60 percent of all occurrences (Perry).

Ferdowsi belongs to the clan called *Dehghān* who were educated Iranians and had a sense of
responsibility to preserve Persian language and culture as well as their traditional customs against the dominance of Arabs who had been brought new values. This sense encouraged Ferdowsi in the creation of his poetic opus and shows his love for his language. Ferdowsi says:

Suffering for thirty years,
I revived Iranians by this Persian composition
Habitable constructions being destroyed
By radiation of the sun and rains,
I constructed of verses, a magnificent palace
It is protected of wind and rain.

Ferdowsi started the composition of the *Shah Nameh* when Persia's political independence had been compromised. *Shah Nameh* reflects Persia's history, cultural values, ancient religion (Zoroastrianism) and the profound sense of ethno-national history of Persia. The profound cultural and linguistic influence of Ferdowsi's *Shah Nameh* lead some scholars to say that the main reason for Modern Persian language today to be more or less the same language as that of Ferdowsi's time over 1000 years ago is due to works like *Shah Nameh*. The work has become one of the main pillars of Modern Persian language and read by Persian speakers throughout the world in its original form. This fact makes the *Shah Nameh* different from other epics which are written in languages that are now dead. For instance, the old English epic *Beowulf* (ca. eighth century) can not be understand by the Modern English speaker.

*Shah Nameh* has had an enormous influence in shaping the modem identity of its Iranian readers as well as Persian speaking societies of Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Central Asia. According to Bertold Spuler, "In the last analysis, it was the Shahnameh (sic), Ferdowsi's poetical work of universal literary rank that became the milestone for the self affirmation of Iranian identity. For the Iranian people indeed live in and by means of their poets; and the importance of the poems of Ferdowsi for the preservation of the Iranian character can in no way be overestimated" (281).

Ferdowsi, aware of the significance of his work, wrote at the end of *Shah Nameh*:

I've reached the end of this great history
And all the land will talk of me:
I shall not die, these seeds I've sown will save
Shah Nameh and Iranian Traditions

*Shah Nameh* is a compendium of Iranian traditions and customs, providing the readers knowledge and image of Persia's ancient ethics, rites, ceremonies, sports, events, values, myths and histories, arts, jobs, geographical places and cities... (Sarrami 15). It also traces the history of Zoroastrian religion from its beginnings to the defeat of the last Zoroastrian king by Arab conquerors. The sweep and psychological depth of the *Shah Nameh* is nothing less than magnificent. In its pages are unforgettable moments of national triumph and failure, human courage and cruelty, blissful love and bitter grief. It explores loyalty, familial conflict, duty; it chronicles the burdens of empire and the resentments and rebellions of the misused; it recounts the striving for justice and civilized order in times of turmoil and danger.

Amin Banani remarks that while Ferdowsi’s main objective is to preserve the history of his fatherland, the sum of the Shahnameh’s (sic) artistic worth outweighs the inherent shortcomings of the poet’s conscious scheme. He says, broadly conceived, *Shah Nameh* belongs to the epic genre, but it is not a formal epic as is the Aeneid or the Lusiad. “Rather, while its spontaneity recalls the *Iliad* its episodic character reveals its kinship with the *Chansons de geste*. More than any of its kindred poems, however, the *Shahnameh* (sic) is beset by paradoxes that shape its art and are the source of its tragic nobility. If there is a unifying theme in the *Shahnameh* (sic) it is no simple wrath of Achilles, but the malevolence of the universe itself” (website).

Yet Ferdowsi is no passive fatalist. He has an abiding faith in a just Creator, believes in the will of man and the need for his efforts and the worth of his good deeds. At the same time, it reflects Islamic principles and values, ethical beliefs and admiration of virtue, referring Ferdowsi is a Muslim who has a strong belief on Prophet Mohammad and his family (Ahl-e Beit) and admires them:

*The one who has odium to Ali in his heart
Tell me who is worse than of him in the world
I believe them for ever*
Even if the king cuts my body
I can't leave their love
Even if the sword of king passes my head. (I. 4)

These verses were one of the reasons why Sultan Mahmud did not welcome *Shah Nameh* and Ferdowsi. According to the expert Ja'āl Khālegī Mutlaq the *Shah Nameh* teaches: Worship of one God, Fear of breaking the commandments of God, Respecting God, Religious Uprightness, Patriotism, Love of wife, family and children, Helping the poor, Pursuit of Wisdom, Pursuit of Justice, Long term thinking, Seeking and Acting in Equilibrium-moderation, Acting and Knowing correct manner-courtesy, Seeking the happiness of Guests-hospitality, Chivalry, Forgiveness, Thankfulness, Being content and Happy with existence, Hard Work, Being Peaceful and Kind, Being faithful, Truth and opposing anything that is against the Truth, Keeping covenants, Shame at committing immoral acts and also control over one's self, Not acting loud-modesty, Pursuing Knowledge-education, Knowledge of Wise Words and many other moral qualities.

The opening of *Shah Nameh* in praise of God and Wisdom established Ferdowsi as an intellectual poet who is known as a *hakim* in Persian. In this introduction, he gives an account of the versification of the book, advising his readers to think carefully to historical events and to see even the legends as symbols referring to reality. Shahbazi remarks:

The singular message that the Shahnameh (sic) of Ferdowsi strives to convey is the idea that the history of Iranshahr was a complete and immutable whole: it started with Kayumarth, the first man, and ended with his fiftieth scion and successor, Yazdegerd III, six thousand years of history. The task of Ferdowsi was to prevent this history from losing its connection with future Iranian generations (126).

His effort is to preserve the memory of Persia's golden age and turnover it to new generation, to learn from the past and make the future better. He remarks, man should see the world and use its history and experience, because:

The one who uses the world,
Is needless of any teachers

He stressed on wisdom more than any other poets in Persian literature, believing wisdom as the
best gift of God to man. The wise one avoids injustice, tyranny, lying, greed, avidity and other evils. Beside these moral qualities, *Shah Nameh* gives good accounts of the ancient regions, cities, rivers and mountains of Persia along with other geographical places. *Shah Nameh* provides legends and stories about kings, heroes and heroines, warriors and their warfare. Though *Shah Nameh* is more than 1000 years old, even now Iranian names draw upon *Shah Nameh* 's protagonists, establishing the enduring popularity of the book among Iranians in modern time and how it leads them to secure a national identity. This continuing influence on Iranian nation is marked by some scholars. Victoria Arakelova points to the great impact of *Shah Nameh* on the whole literary process of peoples living in a vast area embracing the territories between Asia Minor, Caucasus, the Central Asia, India and even the Far East she writes as follows:

The onomastic system of Shahnameh (sic) can be traced in the name-giving traditions of the peoples and ethnic formations of this huge part of the world: Rustam, Sohrab, Bizhan, Manizhe, Rudabe, Tahmine, etc. are the most current names of the representative of Iranian and non-Iranian peoples of this area, followers of different confessions (Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, etc.) (1).

Jamshid Sh. Giunshvili remarks on the connection of Georgian culture with that of *Shah Nameh*:

The names of many *Shah Nameh* heroes, such as Rustam, Tahmine, Sam-i, or Zaal-i, are found in 11th- and 12th-century Georgian literature. They are indirect evidence for an Old Georgian translation of the *Shah Nameh* that is no longer existent. The *Shah Nameh* was not only translated to satisfy the literary and aesthetic needs of readers and listeners, but also to inspire the young with the spirit of heroism and Georgian patriotism. Georgian ideology, customs, and worldview often informed these translations because they were oriented toward Georgian poetic culture. Conversely, Georgians consider these translations works of their native literature. Georgian versions of the *Shah Nameh* are quite popular, and the stories of Rustam and Sohrab, or Bijan and Manizha became part of Georgian folklore (website).
**Shah Nameh and Its Impact on Persian Literature**

*Shah Nameh’s* method and style was followed by subsequent Persian poets. The study of this masterpiece was a requirement for achieving knowledge of the Persian language. Ferdowsi and his *Shah Nameh* were provided by many who admired him in their own verses. For instance, the famous mystic and poet Sanā’i writes,

How he said, the great master,  
Who established the foundation of poetry.

Nezāmi Ganjavi (1141-1209) a great story teller of Persian literature uses the *Shah Nameh* as a major source in *Eskanadr Nameh* and his two other books. He says:

The wise eloquent of Tus  
Who decorated the words like a bride.

It should be noted here that *Eskandar Nameh* of Nezami consists of two formally independent works, both in rhymed couplets and in the motaqāreb meter of the *Shah Nameh*. The first part is generally known as *Sharaf Nameh*, the second as *Eqbāl Nameh*.

Khaghani Shervani, a major Persian poet and prose writer (ca. 1127-1199) says:

Is a candle of wises’ ceremony in darkness of despondency, The  
pointer of Ferdowsi;  
His pure sense is an angelic birth  
The creatures are angelic when the poet is Ferdowsi.

Sa'adi (c. 1213-1291), the famous poet remarks:

How sweetly has conveyed the pure natured Ferdowsi, May  
blessing be upon his pure resting place:  
Do not harass the ant that’s dragging a seed, because  
it has life and sweet life is dear.

Anvari (c. 1126 - 1189) writes,

Well done to Ferdowsi ’s sprit
Owning the fine inclination and beatific
He was not just a Teacher and we his students.
He was like a God and we are his slaves

Many more poets can be mentioned here. For example, Rumi and other mystical poets have used
many imageries from *Shah Nameh* but in mystical symbolic manner. In a famous verse, Rumi
writes "*shir-e Khwoda o Rustam Dastanam Arezoost*" (The lion of God (Ali as first Imam of
Shia) and Rustam of Dastan is who I seek), Rustam is symbol of ideal man who reached God.

**The Shah Nameh in India**

Copies of the *Shah Nameh* illustrated in Persian style are attributed to India in ‘Sultanate’
period of 1420s which was marked by political fragmentation of Muslim power after the sack of
Delhi by Timur in 1398. This was followed by the rush of Afghan chiefs and their followers into
India. When Timurids lost their control over Central Asia, they turned towards northern India
where one of Timur’s descendants, Babur (1526–1530) defeated the Lodi sultans and founded
the Mughal dynasty (1526–1858). Significantly, Mughal governors were bibliophiles and Persian
language and culture was dominant at their court. Calligraphed and richly painted copies of the
*Shah Nameh* were preserved in their libraries. In the following years, an astonishing set of
illustrated manuscripts was prepared for Emperor Akbar (1556–1605). The Akbari style
combined major artistic traditions the Safavid from Tabriz, Hindu from Vijayanagar and
European styles brought by Jesuit missions and diplomats to the Mughal courts. Illustrated
copies of *Shah Nameh* are among the most magnificent examples of Persian miniature painting.
Several copies remain intact, although two of the most famous, the *Houghton Shah Nameh* and
the *Great Mongol Shah Nameh*, were broken up as sheets to be sold separately. A single sheet
(now in Aga Khan Museum) was sold for £904,000 in 2006. The Fits William Museum reports:

The *Shah Nameh* endured as a princely manual on wise and just kingship. It offered
splendid opportunities for Mughal rulers and courtiers engaged in hunting, fighting,
diplomatic ceremonies, feasts and amorous affairs. It also continued to provide a topical
commentary on contemporary events and individuals, extending its relevance to the
recent past and the present. Above all, its lasting appeal points to a core of meaning —
the eternal strife between good and evil — that transcends specific time and place (“The Shahnameh in India.” website).

Post-Shah Nameh Epics

Shah Nameh of Ferdowsi inspired other Iranian poets to write epic poems using the same meter and language. The influence of Shah Nameh on other epics can be seen in the imagery and the adventures undertaken by the heroes. There were more than sixteen other epic poems written following the completion of Shah Nameh. All the post-Shah Nameh epics are in the Sisatn cycle, and each is devoted to the adventures of a single eponymous hero. The following is a list of these epics with a short introduction to them:

1. **Garshāsb Nameh**: The second greatest epic is Garshasb Nameh of Asadi Tusi appeared about half century after Shah Nameh. This epic has got seven to eleven thousands lines and is the story of Garshasb, the ancestor of Rustam. The poet took the story from a written work which was possibly Garshasb Nameh of Moayyed Balkhi and he noted that it is a complement to the stories of the Shah Nameh.

2. **Bahman Nameh**: Ascribed to Iranshah Ibn Abul Kheir in 11th c, Bahman Nameh contains six thousands lines, deals with the story of Bahman son of Esfandiyār, narrating his revenge on Rustam’s clan. Bahman Nameh includes a preface and four chapters. The poet in his preface praises sultan Mohammad and asks for premium.

3. **Kush Nameh**: this work also ascribed to Iran Shah Ibn Abul Kheir, composed probably in twelfth century. Kush Nameh deals with the heroic tale of Kush the Tusked (or Persian: Pil-gush, “The Elephant-eared”), the son of Kush who is the brother of the king Zahhak who mutinied in Feridon's time.

4. **Farāmarz Nameh**: written by unknown poet in 11th c, is the story of Faramarz, Rustam’s son who attacked India in order to help the Indian king Nowshaad. Nowshaad was taxpayer of Iran. This epic has been presented to Sultan Mahmud.

5. **Bānu Goshasp Nameh**: Banu Goshasp, Rustam's daughter, was a heroine. She had lots of great suitors but Rustam married her to Giv, son of Gudarz.
6. **Borzu Nameh**: this epic, possibly by Atayi recounting the exploits and adventures of the legendary hero Burzu, son of Sohrab and grandson of Rustam, who almost has a similar story with his father. Before war against Iran, Sohrab fell in love of Shahru in Shangan and Borzu is outcome of this love. Burzo was captured by Rustam and when the secret out, he joined Iranians.

7. **Bižan Nameh**: this epic is written by Amīd Abu’il-Alā Aṭā b. Yaqūb Kāteb Rāzī, thought to be the author of Borzu Nameh relating the adventures of the legendary hero Bižan, son of Giv, son of Gudarz which contains 1400 to 1900 lines. The story originally is derived of the story of Bižan and Gorzan of Shah Nameh. Matini believes that Bižan Nameh is “nothing more than a plagiarism of Ferdowsi’s story with some verses added by the author and some of Ferdowsi’s omitted”.

8. **Susan Nameh**: Susan Nameh is a part of Burzu Nameh. Susan was a Turani jigger and mermaid whom Afrāsyāb sent her with Pilasam to fight of Rustam.

9. **Shahriyār Nameh**: this epic written in 11th c, by Serajeddin Osman-ebn-e Mohammad Mokhtari Ghaznavi is important because related the adventures of Rustam's clan up to third generation. Shahriyār, son of Burzu, son of Sohrāb, son of Rustam and is the last man of Garshāsb's family. He unknowing of his decent, battled with his relatives but the war ended to peace.

10. **Āzarbarzin Nameh**: Azarbarzin was the son of Farāmarz from daughter of Sur, the king of Keshmir who lived in India when his father was fighting against Bahman. He hastened to help his father but was captured by Bahamn and joined him. The story starts from birth of Azarbarzin and ends by his death.

11. **The Story of Kak-E Kuhzād**: Kak-e Kuhzad was an Afghan warrior. This story possibly written in Mongol's time, narrates how he obsessed Sistani people. Rustam in his hildhood with Milād hastened to fight him and his notability started from this point.

12. **Lohrāsb Nameh**: Lohrāsb Nameh is another epic poem, mainly about the hero Lohrāsb.

13. **The Story of Shabrang**: this epic poem is the story of Rustam's fight with Shabrang, son
of Div-e Sepid and all gnomes of Mazandaran.

14. **The Story of Jamshid:** this story relates the revote of Zahhāk against Jamshid and has been attached to *Shah Nameh*. This poem is full of Arabic words and has been written after rush of Mongol to Iran.

15. **Jahāngir Nameh:** Jahangir Nameh is a long epic poem which relates the story of Jahangir, son of Rustam and his fight with Rustam. The poet is an unknown composer named Ghasem who has been written it in Harat.

16. **Sām Nameh:** *Sam Nameh*, possibly composed by Khaju-ye Kermani seems to have been written in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. The story covers the life time of Sam, son of Narimān.

17. **Zafar Nāmeh:** Hamdallah Mustawfi’s *Zafar-Nāmeh* or the ‘Book of Victory’ is a 14th century epic history. This epic, compiled in 75,000 couplets, relates Iranian history from the Arab conquest to the Mongols. Mustawfi spent fifteen years of his life to complete this long historical epic.

However, *Shah Nameh* has been a source of inspiration for countless writers, poets and artists for almost 10 centuries and its influence on culture and literature can not be overestimated. Davidson concludes that although there were other Persian epics besides the *Shah Nameh* of Ferdowsi, it is this poem that is recognized in Persian culture as Iranian epic par excellence (267) and he is Ferdowsi who has been called the Homer of Persia.
Work Cited


