Conclusion

Andrew Lang in his account on the comparative study of early epics holds that, “The similarity of human nature under similar conditions makes it certain that comparison will discover useful parallels between the poetry of societies separated in time and space but practically identical in culture” (266). In the study of Shah Nameh and the Ramayana, we observe the parallels and similarities of two epics which appear closer and more intimate than one would expect. As cultural texts, both return to their Indo-Aryan origin.

Language and culture are closely intertwined. Language reflects the world-view, epistemology and cultural patterns of a society. Language significantly conditions our perception and thought processes. Momin remarks, “Comparative linguistics tells us that when two or more cultures are in close contact over a period of time, there takes place a process of cultural exchange and hybridization, which influences customs, habits and languages”. The main part of Shah Nameh reflects ancient sources of Indo-Iranian (Aryan) origin, preserved in the Avesta, in the other scriptures of Zoroastrianism; some of the characters of the epic are of Indo-Iranian heritage. Historical linguists appraise that a continuum of Indo-Iranian languages probably began to diverge by 2000 BC, preceding both the Vedic and Iranian cultures. The earliest recorded forms of these languages, Vedic Sanskrit and Gathic Avestan, have close similarities, having descended from the common Proto–Indo-Iranian language (Mallory 35).

Findings

1. Shah Nameh is a national heroic epic. Shah Nameh recounts myths and history of Persia, beginning with the creation of the world and the introduction of the arts of civilization (fire, cooking, metallurgy, law) to the Aryans and ends with the Arab conquest of Persia. Though Shah Nameh is more than 1000 years old, it is a live text, present in all Iranian homes and has significante presence in people’s life. The popularity of the text can be traced to the name-giving traditions of the peoples and ethnic formations. Rustam, Suhrab, Bizhan, Manizhe, Rudabe, Tahmine and so on are popular names of Iranian and non-Iranian peoples. Notably, in some parts of Iran Shah Nameh is gifted to the bride as dowry.

The principal and highest importance of Shah Nameh is the impact of the epic on Persian language. All Persian scholars are unanimous in its agreement that Shah Nameh has played a
major role in reviving of this language after the Islamic conquest of Persia and subsequent influence of Arabic language. *Shah Nameh* itself was a reaction to the Arab conquest of Persia and Ferdowsi as a nationalist poet tried to free his work from Arabic influence.

*Shah Nameh* is valued especially in varied sources of the national epic which covers the vast areas of Iranian culture. The Iranians entered the plateau which is the political state of Iran in the second millennium B.C and brought legend and tales with them. *Shah Nameh* is an encyclopedia of all the Iranian traditions, customs, myths, tales and legends. It offers its readers fruitful knowledge and perspicuous image of Persia's ancient cultures, beliefs and practices. As Sarrami says, ethics, rites, ceremonies, sports, events, values, myths and histories, arts, jobs, geographical places and cities, ... can be inferred of the book (Sarrami 15). Also it reflects ancient religions by tracing the history of Zoroastrian religion from its beginnings up to the defeat of the last Zoroastrian king by Arab conquerors. At the same time, it reflects Islamic principles and values, ethical beliefs and admiration of virtue.

2. *Ramayana* is a spiritual text. Its religious aspect outweighs its heroic theme. The *Ramayana* tells about life in India around 1000 BCE and offers models of dharma. *Ramayana* narrates the journey and adventures of the hero Rama -- who is an incarnation (avatar) of the God Virtue - to annihilate vice. *Ramayana* portrays the image of ideals; in this work the hero Rama exhibits the ideal execution of the dharma as a son and king. The princess Sita illustrates the dharma of the ideal woman and wife. Hanuman, the divine ape, exhibits the dharma of a devoted servant and messenger for Rama. Rama’s brothers Bharata, Laxmana and Shatrughna exhibit the dharma of younger siblings for the eldest brother.

In Hinduism and other Indian religions, *yatra* which means pilgrimage to holy places, refers to places associated with Hindu epics such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and other sacred pilgrimage sites, as for example the forests of Chitrakuta where Rama, Sita and Laxmana spent eleven and half years of their fourteen-year exile. Visiting a sacred places is believed by the pilgrim to purify the self and bring one closer to the divine.

The *Ramayana* story, more than any other sacred story in India, has been interpreted as a blueprint for the right kind of human action. Although *Ramayana* is a myth that can be approached on many levels, it is the human level that has had the most profound effect on the Indian people. The importance of *Ramayana* is not limited just to its literary features but it functions as a fundamental part of Hinduism. *Ramayana* is a sacred books in the subcontinent.
which illustrates Hindu ethics and conduct. This important aspect leads Hindus to learn the epic as a holy book from their childhood. Holding such respect, Hindus believe that reading or hearing of the epic blesses the reader or the listener. In this regard U. Thein Han states, “It (the Ramayana) is not only a literary treasure but also a source of ennobling influence on the relationships of men as parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, relations and friends, teachers and pupils, and rulers and the ruled” (cited in Iyengar xiii). Pointing to its significance in common life of Indians, two all-Indian holidays celebrate events of Ramayana, the first is Dussehra, a fourteen-day festival in October which commemorates Rama's victory over Ravana, the demon king of Lanka. The second is Divali, the festival of Lights in October-November which commemorates Rama and Sita's return to their kingdom of Ayodhya.

The Ramayana as an impressive monument of poetry has been reflected on other boughs of art vastly. The story of Ramayana appears reflected in songs, drama and theatrical performances, on screen, painting, temple architecture and dance. The 1975, Hindi television serial based on the Ramayana story attracted millions of Indians.

3. From the point of view of mythology there are similarities between the two epics. The myth of fire for example is a common myth in the two epics as discussed in the earlier chapters. Other similarities can be seen in the use of common motifs as the abduction of the princess, marriage with the condition that the suitor should do great deeds of prowess, recognition via a token, assuming the form of other creatures, supernatural animals, crossing of the sea, invulnerability and panacea or cure-all as discussed before. These examples also can be seen in the Western epics.

4. There are seven translation of Shah Nameh in English both in verse and prose.

- Dick Davis (translator), Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings. Viking, 2006; Penguin, 2007. (abridged prose translation). Fullest widely available edition in English, but skips much Sasanian material, due to Davis' belief that much of it is repetitive and unnecessary, serving only as a deterrent for modern readers.

Epics of the West and the East

1) While Shah Nameh and Ramayana as Eastern epics are similar to Western epics in many aspects like having sublime language and great style, beautiful imagery, theme of warfare and heroic adventures, in my view it is the subject of morals that distinguish Eastern epics from the Western epics. As noted, the Ramayana is a sacred book and forms an important part of the Hindu life and canon. Ramayana explores human values and the concept of dharma. “Moral values of life, pious obligations of individuals, righteous conduct in every sphere of activity, being helpful to other living beings, giving charity to individuals in need of it or to a public cause or alms to the needy, natural qualities or characteristics or properties of living beings and things, duty and law as also constitutional law” as broad meanings of dharma all are reflected in Ramayana. This ancient epic of India portrays also the concept of ideal characters like the ideal father, the ideal brother, the ideal wife and husband and the ideal king. Dharma is a leitmotif which finds significant repetition throughout the Ramayana. In fact the whole story of Ramayana
offers models in dharma. It is the matter that Benjamin Khan in his clear treatise *The Concept of Dharma in Valmiki Ramayana* describes in the epic as "the national manual of ethics" (98) and Hein puts his stress on *Ramayana* as a leading revealer of the pulse of Indian convictions which "has carried traditional Hindu ideals to the youngest and simplest of many generations" (94).

*Shah Nameh* too presents morals and human values through out the work. In fact from the pre- Islamic times until today, Persian literature has had a strong didactic nature and *Shah Nameh* is within this tradition. *Shah Nameh* speaks of the infelicity of jealousy and greed, the infelicity of arrogance, the infelicity of oppression, parsimony, anger and hot temper, as well as the infelicity of drunkenness and lying. Ferdowsi blames cruel kings and their injustice but he praises magnanimity and righteousness. Unlike Homeric and Western epics that the hero must win at any cost, the Iranian hero must bear the consequences of not only his actions but his intentions as well and at the highest level he must be ready to make a redemptive sacrifice of himself. Banani who compared *Shah Nameh* and *Iliad* in his essay explains that Ferdowsi’s genuine compassion for the poor and the wronged, his remarkable and persistent sense of social justice, his courageous and vocal condemnation of the irresponsibility of rulers, his altruism and idealism-in short, his profound humanity-account for some of the most moving and ennobling passages in the *Shah Nameh* and endow it with a consistent integrity (website).

The didactic side and moral dimension of both *Shah Nameh* and *Ramayana* is so highlighted and it is the matter that differ them from the western epics. Rama- as ideal man “Purushottama”- is a role model for the society by the character he presents in the epic. Supriya Gandhi in her short account on Persian versions of *Ramayana* states that the figure of Rama in theses renderings is portrayed almost in three shapes;

i. Representation of Rama as a heroic king combining both human and divine attributes, mostly famously depicted in the illustrated Persian *Ramayana* commissioned by Akbar during the last quarter of the sixteenth century.

ii. Portrayal of Rama as a seeking prince, who eventually achieves spiritual realization without abandoning the world as depicted in the various Persian translations of the Laghu Yoga Vasishta including those commissioned for Prince Salim, son of Akbar, later Emperor Jahangir, as well as for Prince Dara Sikoh, son of Shah Jahan.
iii. Depiction of Rama as an ideal lover, in poetic renderings of the story of Rama and Sita.

This category given by Gandhi would be also a start point for further studies.

Rustam as the greatest hero of Shah Nameh as well as other heroes of the epic like Tus, Gudarz, Giv, Bahram and Bizan are vulnerable. They do their deeds by their choice and unlike Western epics gods are not involved in the stories. Thus we see Rustam for example kills his son Sohrab unknowingly and leads him to create a tragedy.

2) Eastern epic modifies the genre of the epic as understood in Western classification and enrich it in some significant ways. Ramayana has some features of the charit as an Indian genre where Rama is portrayed more as a king rather than a god. Shah Nameh also is a heroic nameh-style work composed in motaghareb meter carrying a national theme.

Difficulties faced in this research: Matters of Language

This study relied mainly on the English translations of Ramayana which while is useful – since the translations are commendable – it cannot be denied that deeper investigation in language and style of Ramayana would need the knowledge of Sanskrit. Similarly, the main part of Shah Nameh is rooted in its Avestan source and so studying the original stories of Shah Nameh would need the knowledge of Pahlavi language. To research the etymological and mythological similarities between these two texts, one requires knowledge of Sanskrit and Pahlavi languages which I sadly do not have. I admit this a handicap faced in my research.

Further Directions

This concluding chapter is open-ended. It tries to weave the threads of the arguments together and indicates avenues for further work on the subject, opening a new window, a much deeper and wider comparative study on myth of early Avestan and Sanskrit literatures would be meaningful. There seems to be striking similarities between Vedic gods and ancient Iranian and Hittite deities. Etymology and comparative linguistics could aid us to indentify and discover the similarities and in some cases the transformation of concepts. An example of such transformation is ‘Feridon’ as a mythological figure in Shah Nameh who is originally Thraêtanoa in Avesta. Thraêtanoa whose first part of the name in modern English is three, in Indo-Iranian mythology is a three -headed dragon. But when the national Iranian epic was composed the story tells of a king who has three sons (Shamisa 42). Monfored (website) holds that there is a close similarity
between the Hindu Krishna and the Avestan Sam. Mitra, an ancient Persian Sun god is also represented in Indian literature and culture. The cult of sun-worship was brought to India by the Magas who migrated from Sakadvip or Persia around the first century B.C. Initially they were not admitted into Hindu rituals and ceremonies but in the course of time they were absorbed into Vedic society and came to be known as Sakadvip or Maga Brahmans. In fact, in India exists an "early Aryan initiation", in which a character named Visvakarma "crucifies the Sun", called "Vikkartana", who is "shorn of his beams", on a cross or "cruciform lathe" (Momin website).

A wide and vast study on Persian versions of Ramayana is an important requirement and should not be neglected. Persian itself has evolved a great deal from the time of the Persian rulers who ventured into India. During the medieval period, Persian language enjoyed a pre-eminent position of cultural and political in India which caused consequently to influence, to a greater or lesser degree, a large number of Indian languages. The deep impact of Persian on Indian regional languages led some scholars to claim that “no other language, apart from Sanskrit which is the mother of all modern Indo-European languages in the country, has left such a deep and enduring influence on Indian languages as Persian” (ibid). Persian literary traditions also dominated a large part of Indian literature and saw flourishing of Persian literature in India. In this period of time, lots of Sanskrit works were translated into Persian under the patronage of Muslim emperors and kings. If we leave out the re-telling of the stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in Indian regional languages, the first significant translations, took place at the time of Emperor Akbar (Asaduddin website). In Akbar’s reign except Ramayana and Mahabharata some other Sanskrit texts were translated into Persian. How many Ramayanas were composed in Persian? The number of complete or partial translations of the Ramayana in Persian is unknown because the evidence we have consists of poorly catalogued, or un-catalogued manuscripts scattered in museums, libraries and private collections throughout the India and Iran, but we know at least over a period of three centuries, from the end of the sixteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century Ramayana was composed in Persian.

The former curator of Persian and Arabic manuscripts at the Natural Museum in Delhi once estimated that the number of Ramayana composed in Persian was thirty eight but some scholars has counted it even up to ninety. Therefore the further attempt should be collecting the manuscripts of Persian versions of Ramayana from the libraries and museums of India and Iran.
and then to conduct a research based on them. Of the available data we know at least some names and titles if we don’t have access to whole books, where each of which can be the subject of a study. One of these translations of *Ramayana* into Persian was done by Sheikh Sadullah Masih Panipati, the contemporary of Emperor Jahangir. This text entitled *Ramayan-e-Masihi* was published in 1899 by Munshi Naval Kishor Press, Lucknow. Masih transformed *Ramayana* to a love story and wrote his work in Persian ‘*masnavi*’ style. Thus he employed an Indic theme within the literary conventions of the Persian *masnavi* which can be an interesting subject for a critical study. Another translation of *Ramayana* into Persian was done by S. Mohar Singh entitled *Balmiki Ramayan*. It was published in 1890 by Ganesh Prakash Press, Lahore. Moreover, the figure of Rama was portrayed in Persian literature also through translations of the Vedantic text, the *Yoga Vasistha*. This work is one of the Rama stories which was rendered into Persian during the Moghul Dynasty. One of the significant translations of *Yoga Vasistha* carried out by Nizam al-Din Panipati in the late sixteenth century A.D. The translation, known as the *Jug-Basisht*, became popular in Persia among intellectuals with Indo-Persian interests since then (Leslie, 2003: 104). Later, Jahangir’s grandson, the prince Dara Shikoh also commissioned a translation of the *Yoga Vasishtta*. Later in 1860 the next translation was done by Amanat Ray Lalpuri. Almost in next decade (1709), Meser Ram Das Ghabel translated four chapter of *Ramayana* into Persian. A unique illustrated *Ramayana* of Valmiki translated into Persian by Sumer Chand and illustrated during the reign of Farrukh Siyar in1715-16 A.D. Munshi Chagann (1866-1899) also known by his pen name: Hasan wrote his book named *Neirang-e Hasan* (trap’s of Hasan) or known as Bahar-e Ayodhya (spring of Ayodhya) in 1877.

Finally, this research is a cross-cultural study which examines similar and dissimilar characteristics of two epics from two different societies. While we know that epics are often of national significance in the sense that they embody the history and ideals of a nation, this thesis attempted to highlight the enduring relevance of the two immortal epics *Ramayana* and *Shah Nameh* by emphasizing the ethical and moral models they represent that bring peace to the mind and soul of humankind in a world fraught by troubles and stress. I must admit that this research has been a rewarding experience for me.
Work Cited


