

International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies

ISSN: 2308-5460



Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*: An Attempt to Save Aryan Tradition through Diminishing the Concept of Filicide

[PP: 27-38]

Esmail Zohdi

Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities,
Vali-e-Asr University, Rafsanjan,
Kerman, Iran

Sohila Faghfori

Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities,
Vali-e-Asr University, Rafsanjan,
Kerman, Iran

Corresponding Author: **Mohammad Hussein Oroskhan**
Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities,
Vali-e-Asr University, Rafsanjan,
Kerman, Iran

ABSTRACT

Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* is filled with different numbers of filicides. Mostly in each of them, the older side is privileged over the younger one. Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to investigate the notion of conflict between these two sides specifically in the tragedy of *Rostam and Esfandiar* with respect to its reason. As it is evident, Ferdowsi devoted a great deal of effort to revive the Aryan tradition ruined by Arab invasion through writing *Shahnameh*. Therefore, in most of the old/new conflicts, he favored the older side so as to restore the glory of the past traditions. Moreover, Ferdowsi has tried to show the unjustifiable stand of new side against the reasonable stand of the older side. Indeed Ferdowsi's willingness toward filicides in *Shahnameh* is actually showing his willingness toward the older tradition of Iran which has been destroyed by Arab invasion.

Keywords: Filicide, Zoroastrianism, Mithraism, Arab invasion, father-son conflict

ARTICLE INFO

The paper received on: **12/05/2015**, Reviewed on: **30/06/2015**, Accepted after revisions on: **09/08/2015**

Suggested Citation:

Zohdi, E., Faghfori, S. & Oroskhan, M. H. (2015). Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*: An Attempt to Save Aryan Tradition through Diminishing the Concept of Filicide. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*. 3(3), 27-38. Retrieved from <http://www.eltjournal.org>



1. Introduction

Ferdowsi (935–1020) is deemed to be one of the greatest Persian poets to have ever lived. His persistent endeavor and personal sacrifices to save the identity, language and history of his motherland brought him a lifetime of hardship, but earned him great fame and honor for one of the greatest poetic masterpieces of all time- *Shahnameh*. Beside its utmost literary importance, *Shahnameh* is written in almost pure Persian. This factor of *Shahnameh* has been pivotal for reviving the Persian language which has been subsequent to the influence of Arabic language.

In fact Ferdowsi grew up in a culture which was controlled by the Arabs for three hundred years because the Arab conquest of Persia in seventh century ended the great civilization of the Aryans. Before the invasion of Iran by Arabs, Iran was known to be a land of great civilization in which magnificent kings and emperors developed and built Persian civilization. Kings like Jamshid, Darius and Anushervan, the Just, all of them are always praised in the history and civilization of Iran as architects of the Persian civilization. These kings are mostly considered to be the repository of wisdom and divinity. However, Arab invasion ruined this great civilization and established Islamic laws as the accepted criteria for the nation. Precisely, at this juncture, Ferdowsi undertook his venture to avoid extinguishing all the good memories of Aryan tradition.

Therefore, *Shahnameh* is a marvelous work of assertion of the cultural identity, language, values and the compendious history of a nation at a time when it was suffering from a tumultuous period of transition, transformation and the consequent confusion of the aggressive march of alien influences. If today Iranian people can be honored to have preserved its ancient culture, values and identity despite adapting itself to

a Semitic religion and laws, a lot of its credit should be offered to the patriotic and poetic genius of Ferdowsi.

Shahname is comprised of three sections based on the stories that are narrated. Its first section, from Keyumars to Fereydu, narrates the story of mankind as a whole coping with forces of nature and is called the *mythical* section. The second part, from Manuchehr to Bahman, narrates the stories of legendary kings and warriors and how they established the Iranian world and it is called the *heroic* section and the last part narrates the history of Iran during the reign of Sassanid dynasty and is called the *historical* section.

Among these sections, the heroic section is considered to be the most important one. Because two-thirds of the *Shahnameh* is devoted to this part and also it comprises the majority of scholar's researches on *Shahnameh*. This period extends from the time of Manuchehr until the conquest of Alexander the Great. The distinguished feature of this section is the prominent role played by the Sistānī heroes who appear as the backbone of the Persian Empire. Garshāsp is briefly mentioned with his son Narimān. Then the story of Narimān's son, Sām, is told. Sām is the leading knight of Manuchehr while controlling Sistān in his own right. Afterwards, Zāl comes as his successor and his son, Rostam, becomes the leading hero of *Shahnameh*.

By focusing on this part, one can see a conflict between the older and younger heroes. The conflict has shown its face in different contexts; and the story is received by different reactions. From time to time novelty and youth are attributed to freshness and vigor. However, in *Shahnameh*, generally being of novelty and young age is expressed to be unworthy and when a conflict occurs, the younger side is usually the one to

be condemned. Mostly the outcome of these conflicts is the act of filicide.

One of these well-known conflicts is portrayed in "The Battle of Rostam and Esfandiar". This tragic conflict is a unique example of twofold filicide action in *Shahname*. By the word filicide, a broader sense than committing the murder by one's own hand is also meant in this paper. The duality mentioned is due to the fact that a king knowing through a prophecy that his son would be killed in the campaign, sends him to do the impossible, namely, to capture Rostam, the mightiest hero of all the times; and Rostam who is called "World Hero" and considered the foster father of all the warriors and kings of Iran kills Esfandiar (Iran's crown prince and its new patron warrior, who therefore should be protected by him as a son). Therefore the younger side is destroyed by the older side.

Generally speaking, *Shahnameh* is filled with such examples of filicides. This paper tries to justify why filicide, in its most symbolic social meaning, is accepted and even supported in *Shahnameh*. Accordingly, it is asserted that Ferdowsi aimed at reviving the Aryan tradition therefore he had to attribute all that is pure and flawless to the old days, and older generation so as to save the older side. Thus, one can see an unreasonable number of filicides in *Shahnameh* and it is mostly well-justified. Indeed Ferdowsi's willingness toward filicides in *Shahnameh* is actually showing his willingness toward the older tradition of Iran which has been destroyed by Arab invasion.

2. *Shahnameh*: An Attempt to Save Aryan Tradition

Persian literature is the most persistent literature in showing issues such as ethics, religion and philosophy in literature. Considering the variety of literary forms, the epic kind is the most suitable one for the inclusion of the characteristics of educational

form. In this respect, an epic poem can aptly define heroism and simultaneously the generosity of the ethnics and religion. This feature is available in all major poems of the world. Therefore, when one reads *Shahnameh*, he or she realizes the Iranian moral, religious, intellectual, and cultural aspects. And most importantly the different religious views are discussed thoroughly in *Shahnameh*.

Although it is never expressed utterly in *Shahnameh*, probably due to kings' puritanical attitudes that would not accept their national heroes as heathen; Iranian kings and heroes in *Shahnameh* prior to Zoroaster were followers of Mithraism, "a basic element of which is sun worshipping" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1995, 198). Though, it is believed that Rostam has converted to Zoroastrianism; through symbols and rituals he possessed and observed; it is clear that he is still actually a Mithraism. Evidence for this is seen throughout *Shahnameh* in various parts. A certain feature of Mithraism observed in *Shahnameh* is heroes' and kings' exaltation and worship of sun prior to the coming of Zoroaster. They worship, ask for strength and benevolence from sun and moreover they pray to, and take oaths to sun, and address it as God (Ferdowsi, 2003, 263). In the battle of Rostam and Esfandiar, Rostam swears to sun and seeks help from sun (ibid, 2003, p.1021). Another proof of Mithraism is that different kings and heroes, including Rostam, had maces whose heads were shaped like a cow's head (Ferdowsi, 2003, 43); and "cows were considered sacred animals and sources of power and creation in Mithraism" (Shamisa, 1990, 31-32). Fereydun, another great warrior of *Shahnameh*, is highly believed to be a Mithraist because when Fereydun ascended the throne and took Zahak down; he ordered to make maces shaped as cows' head (Ferdowsi, 2003, 37). In addition, Rostam's



mace is referred to as the *cow-headed mace* in various parts of *Shahname* including in Rostam and Esfandiar combat. "Different accounts of the symbolic meaning of cows or bulls in Mithraism have been clearly given in *Shahname*" (Cumont, 2001, 37-38).

Additionally, the sanctity of tamarisk tree whose branch is used by Rostam as the decisive weapon to kill the invulnerable Esfandiar is a reference to an ancient religion that is believed to be Mithraism by some scholars. For instance Shamisa argues that "tamarisk is a tree native to Sistan (also called Zabulistan or Sarzamin-e Nimrooz which means "the land of sun") and has preserved its sanctity to the locals from the ancient days of Mithraism to this date (1990, p.35).

During the reign of Goshtasb, Zoroastrianism is chosen as the new state religion and is spread in the world through military campaigns of Esfandiar who is also a religious hero praised in *Shahnameh* by the prophet and the king as the defender of the faith as well as in the Zoroastrian religious texts written in pre-Islamic Sassanid era which exalt him as a saint and expander of the true religion (Bahar, 2000, p.263).

In this respect, the battle of Rostam and Esfandiar is not a mere fight over a throne. According to Shamisa,

The battle is not merely about a young glorious hero against a much older and a more renowned one or an old king (Goshtasb) sending his son to capture *World Hero* (Rostam) with the purpose of indirectly killing his son who is claiming his right to kingship, whereas it is about how the previously widely accepted religion of Mithraism through its symbols and heroes defeats the newly emerged religion of Zoroastrianism (1990, p.18).

The conflict between Rostam and Esfandiar on its religious level could be noticed through how they address each other. It seems that Ferdowsi, or more probably his

sources, did not want to put blame on Rostam, the national hero, by declaring him as the killer of an Iranian religious saint, and reduced the story to a father-son conflict. This is one of the reasons that in *Shahname*, in parts of his conversations with Esfandiar, Rostam swears on "Avesta" and "Zand", two Zoroastrian religious texts, along with the sun. Probably, Ferdowsi's referring to Avesta illustrates the point that Rostam is not holding a belligerent attitude toward Esfandiar's religion because in Avesta's view "peace is beside pure nature and commands for peace and health and being away from revenge and war" (Irani, 1955, p.33). However, his seeking resource in Simorgh and the tamarisk tree that are both connected to Mithraism and his cow-headed-mace (*gorze-e gav-sar*) show that he belongs to the old faith practiced by Iranian kings and heroes.

Additionally, Esfandiar still recognizes him as an old man of old faith; in two other instances he also refers to Rostam as "a man of bad-faith and someone who is connected to sorcery" (Ferdowsi, 2003, p.1023) but as a matter of fact Esfandiar is relating to naturalistic features of Mithraism. In addition, Rostam tries to relate Esfandiar's injustice to his new religion by means of calling him a proselyte. When Rostam advises the prince to think sensibly behind his venerating words, he has an undoubted sarcastic tone in calling Esfandiar a new convert, a new glory seeker and a good young man (*ibid*, p. 1002). Rostam describes Esfandiar as a person trying to build his glory on the basis of a new religion not on his good actions and deeds for his country.

Finally, because of Rostam's victory, Sistan remains under the control of his family who has their roots in ancient religion. But not long after, during the reign of *Bahman* son of Esfandiar and after Rostam's death,

Zoroastrianism destroy Sistan and slaughter Rostam's family. Hence, "Zoroastrianism is established in that era too" (ibid, p. 1057). Here too, Ferdowsi shows that how the followers of the new religion are faithless, since Bahman was raised by Rostam and his family as Esfandiar wished on the moment of his death (ibid, p. 1034). In general, Rostam is glorified; because he knew that killing the young prince will lead to his own bad omen. This glorification is to be understood through the whole portrayal of Rostam and how Bahman avenges his father by a violent massacre despite the fact that his father declares Rostam not guilty on his own deathbed.

Moreover, beside the religious aspect of this battle, the story of Rostam and Esfandiar could be interpreted as a battle between the old and the young/new. This is mirrored in Ferdowsi's constant repetition of the terms young and new on various occasions in the piece and could be observed on different levels; a new religion versus an older one, a new ethics versus an older one, a new order of affairs versus an older one, a new royal house versus an older one, and father versus son.

This characteristic of Rostam and Esfandiar has been noted by many scholars. Eslami Nodooshan mentions that "the matter of oldness and newness is a key factor of the conflict between Rostam and Esfandiar" (1971, p.105-107). Shamisa has also noted that "beyond the mere conflict of a father and a son, this is a story about how the old religion fights the expansion of a new religion" (1990, p. 15). Moreover, Mirshakak sees "Iranian literature as filicide in nature in contrast to the Western patricidal nature of literary works" (1991, p. 6).

However, it is necessary to draw a line between the two uttermost instances of filicide in *Shahname*, *Rostam and Esfandiar* and *Rostam and Sohrab*. The latter is merely

a tragedy of the literal act of filicide and also could be read as a game of fate if we will to deny the son-slaying nature of the incident; this reading however cannot be applied to the former in which the nature of the conflicts is undeniable. In *Rostam and Esfandiar*, the conflict of interest occurs in several contexts all having the element of the newness versus oldness in common. This element shows its face in the battle of the previously accepted religion defending itself against the expansion of the newly emerged Zoroastrianism, in other words, the ancient royal house of Sam defending its right to have a role in ascension of kings to the throne against the newly established house of Lohrasb. Accordingly, the element reaches its peak in a father killing a son; the single combat of *Rostam and Esfandiar*, and *Goshtasb* (Esfandiar's father) elaborately planning Esfandiar's death.

Rostam, who has always played and always is to play the role of a father and patron to the throne of Iran and young heroes worthy of majestic feats, kills Esfandiar, Iran's crown prince and a new patron warrior of Iran claiming to be the new *World Hero*. Also Goshtasb knows that his son is sure to be killed in Zabulistan by Rostam through divine revelation (Ferdowsi, 2003, 981), but he sends him to fight with Rostam. The most prominent hero of *Shahnameh* is Rostam who is known to "be a staunch defender of good against evil and he attempts to keep his kings on the straight and narrow" (Farhat-Holzman, 110). But why he kills Esfandiar whom Rostam believes to be a true hero. The most justifiable reason is that Rostam honors Iran above anybody else and is ready to do anything for its sake. Amin Banani, one of the most honored scholars of Ferdowsi, says of it: "while there are heroes of the classical type in this work, the real, ongoing hero is Iran itself" (Banani, 109). Iran is the reason that



Rostam is ready to sacrifice everything even an honorable hero like Esfandiar.

Rostam is the head of a royal family with a thousand-year-old history. "His ancestors were descendent of old kings who were chosen to be warlords of Iran and local kings of Sistan" (ibid, p.91). High kingship of Iran was offered to them during the reign of Nozar, but his grandfather Sam refused to take it because in his opinion Nozar was deviating from the right path. However, they traditionally have a major role in the ascension of kings to the throne of Iran. Whenever there was an argument in the royal family about the true heir of the throne, they were the ones to settle the dispute. In this regard, Rostam is known as the "bestower of crown" since Iranian royal family owed their kingship to him. For instance, he rescues Kay Kavus twice when he had put himself in fatal perilous situation. He also helps Kay Kavus twice in ascending the throne and in avenging his father's death.

On the other hand, Esfandiar's grandfather Lohrasb was appointed king as a result of lacking a close kin to Kay Khosrow, despite the unknown line of heritage and Zal's objection. His house descends from a lost branch of Kayanian dynasty and from the day they ascend the throne, they start to change the ways of dealing with affairs. From the beginning of this new house's establishment, neither Rostam, nor his father Zal approved of their kingship; therefore, they never pay homage to the new kings and ridicule them because of not having the old roots and this fact has been mentioned by Esfandiar and Goshtasb as a source of Goshtasb's anger with Rostam. Esfandiar comes from a royal family with only two-generation history who seek to establish their newly achieved kingship.

This effort is mirrored in the scenes during which Esfandiar wants to honor and glorify

his father's and grandfather's reigns and manners, sometimes to the point of denouncing customs of ancient days. Rostam in response denounces Lohrasb and Goshtasb's achievements and commands theirs as not worthy of challenging a hero such as him. This conflict reaches its climax in the scene where *Rostam and Esfandiar* reprobate one another's ancestors (Ferdowsi, 2003, p. 1003, 1008). In addition, because of Esfandiar's death, the new house is eventually forced to abandon its claims against the older house. They even would not dare to seek revenge or ransom and treat the killers of their son with respect. Hence the conflict is to be read as a struggle between the two houses among other struggles. One house, Rostam's family, is esteemed with a rich history and tradition and however, the other one, Esfandiar's family, has just sprouted up and is claiming to have a new religion to present to the world.

As it is discussed above, Rostam is not so much up and against the new religion. As one can infer from different incidents, Rostam even respects the new religion and its emissary, Esfandiar. Nonetheless, Rostam deplores Esfandiar's action to spread the new religion by force and stands against him. Rostam fights against Esfandiar not for the sake of himself but for the sake of saving his own country from the incompetent decisions. Rostam does what is right to be done and becomes "Persian exemplar of that rare creature, a disinterested hero who does his duty for its own sake" (Farhat-Holzman, 110).

The basic element of the whole skirmish occurs when Goshtasb has demanded his son, Esfandiar, to put Rostam in chain and bring it to the court. Rostam tells Esfandiar he can command whatever he wishes but putting him in chains. Esfandiar says he wills nothing but to do so. Goshtasb has ordered so; hence,

Esfandiar declares that this is his one and only mission. In his view, king's command is to be carried out even if it is unjust. In addition, he argues that nobody should feel uneasy for being in chains by king's order. On the contrary, Rostam thinks that if a king orders to do something unfair and inhumane, he has lost his right for kingship. Esfandiar's view is approved by Zoroastrian ethics which rules to be obeying the king at any price and in any situation; otherwise one who disobeys is doomed to hell. Esfandiar becomes angry with his brother Pashton when he advises Esfandiar to forget chaining Rostam. His anger is based on the Zoroastrian proposition that leaving king's order undone is immoral and will doom him to hell (Ferdowsi, 2003, 1014).

Rostam tries to persuade Esfandiar to forget chains. He offers Esfandiar to have his treasures, army or anything he wants; he even tells Esfandiar he will ride with him to the king's court and show his respect for king and ask for forgiveness. In addition, he claims that he has done nothing wrong and is not fair and justified to be bound. He tells Esfandiar that the king is wronging him and his will should not come true. Esfandiar on the other hand believes that even though Rostam is innocent he should be put in chains because the king has ordered so. He in turn tries to persuade Rostam to accept the chains and promises to defend him once they are in king's court (Ferdowsi, 2003, 998).

As Rostam understands the world, the only thing worth defending is his great country; if he is put in chains, nothing is left of it. He sees Goshtasb and Esfandiar as people who try to maintain a new order in the world and disapproves of their new ethics of obeying the king under any circumstances. Eslami Nodooshan has the same comment on this issue that "It seems that in Rostam's view those manners that have been experienced and honored in the past should be preserved.

These are the very principles that contradict the newness of Esfandiar's world" (p. 105, 1977).

2.1 Judgment of Father-Son Killing in *Shahnameh*

Comparing patricides' and filicides' destiny and other character's reaction to their kin-slaying in Classical European literature, one could say that both deeds are determined without any prior bias. Exoneration and criminalization is done in respect to the act itself and not to some sanctity one side possesses while the other one lacks. However in *Shahnameh* the two are judged in completely different ways. Patricide is out of question. Under no circumstances, a patricide is tolerated or even exists; only one instance of such incident exists. And even in that example, the event is presented as something nearly impossible; in this case Ferdowsi comments on Zahak killing of his father by declaring that "Even the worst of offspring will not be brave enough to shed his father's blood" (Ferdowsi, 2003, 23). Even when the father is deemed guilty, the poet says his punishment is better to be left to be done by fate rather than by revenge. Kay Kavus and Goshtasb's lives after their sons to death are among such examples.

"Rejection of father's equals rejection of oneself and a blasphemy to the creator. Even if a father banishes religion ... one cannot evade paying ones dues to the father. These principles are beyond ethics and unquestionable (Mirshakak, 1991, p. 113)." Here the general Iranian idea of a solution for the arisen conflict between father and son is expressed. Mirshakak also argues that "many Iranians tend to reduce the harsh filicidal nature of conflicts in Rostam and Esfandiar to a fight for gaining power or to fate's game" (ibid, pp. 95-96). In another comment, on Siavsh's and Esfandiar's approved right to expel their fathers by force he argues that "Although both fathers (Kay Kavus and



Goshtab) are guilty and deserve expelling; according to the religion of *worshippers of the lord* (ancient Iranians) one who is innocent should remain innocent to the very end. He cannot commit a bigger sin by getting the sinful one (his father) out of the way." (ibid, p. 113) or that "Gaining power isn't worthy for a son to have his father's blood on his hands"(ibid, p. 113).

In *Shahname*, there is only one instance of patricide, Zahak murders his father Mardas (Ferdowsi, 2003, 22-23). Zahak is the king who ruled Iran for the one day short of one thousand years (symbolic impermanence of tyranny) and is portrayed as an example of all that is wicked, evil and satanic (ibid, pp. 27-45). His downfall into tyranny and bringing hell on earth begins when he commits patricide. Mirshkak argues that "(In *Shahnameh*) Patricide is unforgivable by any means and the sole father murderer is Zahak"(1991, p. 95).

To the contrary, different examples of filicides are presented in some episodes of *Shahnameh* such as Feruydun killing Salm and Tur as a punishment of their unjustly killing of their brother, Iraj. When Feruydun apportion his territory equally among his sons, Salm and Tur become motivated by greed and decide to kill Iraj to divide his portion between them. Therefore, as a punishment, Feruydun raises Manucher, Iraj's son, to avenge his son's death by killing Salm and Tur. In another case, Sam abandons his infant son, Zal, who is featured by bad omen in the desert as a father punishment of his wicked son or as his right to make a decision about his child's life. And Rostam killing Sohrab is shown as a sad tragedy of heroes in the hands of fate; and Rostam is declared not guilty, even though after Rostam kills Sohrab Ferdowsi says that "a tender heart is filled with rage at him" (2003, p. 367). Moreover, Kay Kavus puts his son Siavash under

pressure until he seeks refuge in Iran's archenemy, Afrasiab, who later kills him (ibid pp. 289-334),

Of all instances of filicide in *Shahnameh*, only two are condemned, Kay Kavus's unjust behavior towards Siavash which led to his death and Goshtab's stratagem to avoid releasing his hold of the crown. The rest are justified as mere games of the fate, the son unwittingly putting himself in a dire situation, or even a righteous deed of the father.

Goshatab and Kay Kavus are ungrateful of their son's great achievements and assistance to the crown. They are also guilty for breaking their promises. Other than this, Goshtab deceitfully and knowingly sends his innocent son to be killed. And Kay Kavus favors his treacherous and faithful wife Sudabeh over his son and puts him under pressure as far as he is led to take refuge in the land of enemy in which he is finally killed.

They are both sinful in causing their sons' death. However, they do not face the retribution of what they have done in this world. When Esfandiar's sister/wife is angry with her father, Goshtab, and is blaming him, her other brother Pashotan takes her out and tells her not to talk hard on their father because losing a great son as Esfandiar is enough pain for him. Kay Kavus too does not face much repercussion; as a punishment for her unfaithfulness and truthfulness that led to Siavash's death Sudabeh is killed by Rostam; and losing his wife is all Kay Kavus has to endure. Although the two kings are guilty, they are left to be punished in the other world. In the battleship of Rostam and Esfandiar, Rostam's slight fear of Sohrab leads him to his stratagem against Sohrab which is against the ideal of his own warrior function. However Eslami Nodooshan has tried to justify Rostam's trick by proposing the idea

that he is a human being and is not immune from the defaults of humanity:

Rostam is but a human being similar to other people, with the same flesh, blood and nerves; affected by self-preservation; simply put, he is a person seeking recourse as the rest of mortals do; and Rostam's grandeur lies in the very fact that though bound to earthly flaws; he is unique (Nodooshan, p.114).

By reading Nodooshan's *Story of Stories: Rostam and Esfandiar* which is one of the most authorized Iranian analysts of *Shahnameh*, one can see how Rostam's action of deceiving warriors younger than him when he is on the verge of his demise, provides Rostam an opportunity to seek his way out of his death by killing them the next day. One can see without any doubt how Iranian mythology closes an eye when it comes to an old hero mischievously leading younger heroes (even his own son) to failure and death. In *Shahnameh*, the brutality of filicide is trivialized, by means of placing the blame on fate, the deceased son, the son being guilty, or even a specific type of right is given to the father for deciding his offspring's destiny.

Rostam is portrayed in different pieces of *Shahnameh* as the defender of the glorious heritage of the past either moral or material. He guides and advises kings and other heroes. Therefore, it is no surprise that he is the one killing the two young thriving Iranian heroes, one being his metaphorical son, the other his biological son. It was explained here how this deed overlaps other facets of old versus new in the battle of Rostam and Esfandiar; and in *Rostam and Sohrab* he denies his heart's signals for Sohrab being related to him and he only accepts Sohrab as his son once he has put him on his deathbed (Ferdowsi, 2003, p. 280).

In both cases, Rostam overcomes his rival through subterfuge and trickery. His trickery is even admitted by Eslami Nodooshan:

The first point is his (Rostam's) promise to yield, when on the edge of being overcome he promises Esfandiar to surrender the other day in order to get himself out of his hands; and of course he doesn't mean to do it. ... The first reminds us of his deceiving of Sohrab, when he was on the ground and Sohrab was about to take his life. (Dastan-E Dastanha: Rostam Va Esfandiar (Story of Stories: Rostam and Esfandiar) 113)

Yet as mentioned earlier, Rostam is seen free from guilt; and his beguilements are seen as innocent human faults. Mirshakak also states that "Rostam is not to be blamed for killing Sohrab; he is exonerated by all means"(1991, p. 95). Sirus Shamisa tries to depict the situation as a mere tragedy which is the consequent result of serious deeds not the failing of a person:

Tragedy is the illustration of important and serious deeds that are generally disadvantageous to the protagonist, i.e. the main core of a serious story which leads to a tragedy at the end. This tragedy is usually the death of the hero in the story. This death is not accidental, but a logical and direct result of the events throughout the story (Shamisa, 1367: 93).

It is true that Rostam won the battle by subterfuge but one point should be remembered that Rostam never started the fight. He has always been urged to fight for the sake of the country. And if he has used any trick during his battle, it was aimed at saving the country not personal glory. The true hero of *Shahnameh* is Iran which is portrayed in Rostam. He makes every endeavor to defend Aryan heritage and tradition. Even though, some conservative views do not support this view. As an example, *Shahnameh* was harshly condemned by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini after the Islamic Republic of Iran. Because Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini believed that *Shahnameh* has insulted Islam. Even after the Islamic revolution public reading of *Shahnameh* was banned due to its



islamophobic nature. However, Iranian patriotic people never forgot *Shahnameh* and its true hero, Rostam.

As things went after the death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a more moderate view was taken toward *Shahnameh* by Ayatollah Khamenei. *Shahnameh* was not condemned by Ayatollah Khamenei. Though he neglected the patriotic nature of *Shahnameh* and Rostam but he relates the durability of *Shahnameh* to its Islamic features. And in the case of Rostam and Esfandiar, he praises Esfandiar and considers him as a deeply religious person and the true hero of *Shahnameh*. Moreover he compares Esfandiar with *Basiji* guys (those trying to enforce the execution of Islamic law on people) when he says: "I once said that Esfandiar is like our *Basiji* guys, because in the context of *Shahnameh* he is a brave *Basiji* person in search of the religion"(Public Conference, January 27, 2003).

Ayatollah Khamenei has never mentioned Rostam in his lectures let alone praising him. Yet, it is known to everyone that Rostam is the true hero of *Shahnameh*. He was prepared to risk everything to achieve the safety of his country. Even he disregarded Sohrab's pleading because he had been so much focused on the victory of the battle and how this will save the country from its enemy. Surly, Rostam is the all-time hero of *Shahnameh* and Iran and he will be praised for all the sacrifices he has performed and his name will last forever. Moreover, Ferdowsi was never against Islamic thought, he writes reverently of the Prophet Muhammad and his son-in-law, Imam Ali. However, he has shown an explicit antagonism against the Arabs and the culture, if not the religion, they imposed on Iran and persistently tried to revive the Aryan tradition of Iran lost by the Arab invasion.

3. Conclusion:

The battle of Rostam and Esfandiar is a multilayered tragedy from *Shahnameh* in which the father-son conflict and filicide are to be interpreted as having the underlying general idea of old-new conflict in them. The discord spoken of is present throughout *Shahnameh* and could be observed by means of the great number of filicide by kings and destinies, and reaches its climax in the battle of Rostam and Esfandiar. As it is shown, different levels of conflict are presented in Rostam and Esfandiar. In all of these layers of conflicts, the outcome is the victory of the older/father side. The ancient religion doesn't give way to its vigorous opponent; the ages-old ethics gains popularity among Iranian public because of being presented as the one supporting freedom while the new one mostly aimed at subduing people to kings. The threat to the throne was overcome and the new royal line did not get the approval of Iran's arch-defender and his house. Moreover, Esfandiar, Goshtab's son and son figure to Rostam, was killed.

All the levels of adversary between oldness and the old to youngness and the young are judged in favor of the former. It was shown that Ferdowsi and his ancient sources for gathering Persian myths (and through the long lasting popularity of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* even to the date, the Iranian culture) privileged older ideas, people, etc. over new/young ones. And the reason for not condemning filicide in *Shahnameh* is that the action itself is favoring the older side over the younger side. It is a punishment for the younger generation who disrespected the older generation without any reason. By favoring one side to other Ferdowsi is teaching some lessons to the future generations. Moreover, he has written the history of a nation vividly out of these conflicts.

Ferdowsi has created a national icon for the people to see their rich history and tradition with all its advantages and disadvantages. As Zabihollah Safa mentions in his famous book entitled *Epic Narration in Iran*:

Those nations who have lived for long in a region and have faced bad or good incidents, achieved victories, or failed wars, will have stories of their warriors, heroes, and intruders to their territory, which are indeed memories serving as a basis for creation of their nationhood. And it's for this reason that when they get together, some stories which represent their grandeur and awesome history are made, narrated, and developed from one generation to another in so far as a powerful poet with very strong patriotic feelings composes an unforgettable and immutable epic (2008, 5).

In this unforgettable work, Ferdowsi presents Rostam as the true hero of *Shahnameh* over Esfandiar or anybody else because, beside any kind of religion or other factors favored by the government, he aspires to save his country and to secure the freedom which everybody deserves to enjoy. Certainly, Iranian patriotic people care about such a decisive factor in a hero and not how is he successful in imposing the religious regulations and laws on people. And at last, Ferdowsi expresses his animosity toward the Arabs through Rostam's sigh over the ruins of Iran which will be left after their invasion:

When the pulpit's equal to the throne
And Abu Bakr's and Omar's names are
known
Our long travails will be as naught, and
all
The glory we have known will fade and
fall.
The stars are with the Arabs, and you'll
see
No crown or throne, no royal
sovereignty. (Ferdowsi, 2003, 67-69)

About the Authors:

Esmaeil Zohdi got his PhD from Calcutta University in 2000. He is a faculty member of Vali-e-Asr University since 2000. He is an assistant professor of English Literature majoring in political fiction. Moreover, he has been a member of Psyart Foundation from 2008 until now. He has translated two books from English to Persian, one related to Psyart Foundation and one related to writing academic papers. He has also published a good number of articles on a variety of subjects such as poetry, novel and comparative literature. He is presently more involved in a number of projects concerning film studies as well as comparative literature.

Sohila Faghfori got her PhD from Calcutta University, India in 2000. She is a faculty member of Vali-e-Asr University since 2000. She is an assistant professor of English Literature majoring in social drama. Moreover, she has been a member of Psyart Foundation from 2008 until now. She has translated two books from English to Persian, one related to Psyart Foundation and one related to writing academic papers. She has also published a good number of articles on a variety of subjects such as poetry, novel and comparative literature. She is presently more involved in a number of projects concerning film studies as well as comparative literature.

Mohammad Hussein Oroskhan is currently a M.A student of English literature in Vali-e-Asr University. He got his B.A in English Literature from Yazd University. His main field is film studies and comparative literature. Until now, he has written several articles on these subjects.

References:

- Bahar, M.** (2010), *Pazhuheshi Dar Asatir-E Iran (a Study of Iran's Mythology)*. Tehran: Agah, Print.
- Banani, A.** (1988) "Ferdowsi and the Art of Tragic Epic," *Persian Literature, Columbia Lectures on Iranian Studies*, edited by Ehsan Yarshater, No. 3, *Bibliotheca Persica*.
- Cumont, F.** (2001) *Les Mysteres De Mithra*. Trans. Razi, Hashem. Tehran: Behjat, Print.
- Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.** (1995), "Mithraism." *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*. Eds. McHenry, Robert, et al. 15th ed: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., Vol.8. 32vols. Print.



Eslami N. (1997) *Dastan-E Dastanha: Rostam Va Esfandiar (Story of Stories: Rostam and Esfandiar)*. Tehran: Toos, Print.

Eslami N. (1971) *Zendegi Va Marg-E Pahlevanan Dar Shahnameh (Life and Death of Warriors in Shahnameh)*. Tehran: Toos, Print.

Farhat-Holzman, L. (2001) "The Shahnameh of Ferdowsi: An Icon to National Identity", *Comparative Civilizations Review*, 44. 104-114.

Ferdowsi, A. (2003) "Shahnameh." Moscow ed. Tehran: Hermes Publishers, 1010. Print.

Irani, D. (1995), ethics in ancient Iran, 3th edition, Mumbai, Zoroastrian Association of Iran.

Khamenei, A. (2003). *Believe in God or Believe in West?* Retrieved from <http://rebellion-to-god.mihanblog.com/extrapage/rahbari2>.

Mirshakak, Y. (1991) *Dar Saye-Ye Simorgh (Under Simorgh's Shade)*. Tehran: Barg, Print.

Mirshakak, Yusefali. (1990) "*Pedarkoshi, Pesarkoshi Va Baradarkoshi Dar Shahnameh (Patricide, Filicide, and Fratricide in Shahnameh)*." Soore: 6-10. Print.

Razi, H. (1992) *Mithraism: Cult, Myth, Cosmology and Cosmology*. Tehran: Behjat, Print.

Roemer, H. (1993) "The Safavid Period." *The Cambridge History of Iran*. Eds. Jackson, Peter and Laurence Lockhart. Vol.6-The Timurid and Safavid Periods. Northamptonshire: Cambridge University Press, 189-350. Print.

Safā, Dh. (1369 H. S./1990), *Hamāse sarāyī dar Irān*, Tehran.

Shamisa, S. (1990) "*Tarh-E Asli-E Rostam Va Esfandiar (the Main Pattern of Rostam and Esfandiar)*." *Dar Piramoon-E Rostam Va Esfandiar (on Rostam and Esfandiar)*. Tehran: Tehran University Jahad Daneshaghi Publications, 15-46. Print.