

## ARTICLE

# EPIC AND MYSTIC HERO IN PERSIAN CULTURE- A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE CHARACTERS OF HERO IN SHAHNAMEH OF FIRDAUSI BESIDES PERSIAN MINIATURES

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## ABSTRACT

This Paper deals with the nature and characteristics of the epic and mystic hero. A Persian epic hero should be followed in myths according to the primitive folklore ideas of these people. These epics could be found in Persian literature specially "Shahnameh of Firdausi". According to the social history of Iran, these epic characters were interpreted as mystical ones, literary visualization of which represented in mystic stories of "Sohrawardi" as well as pictorial imaginary is shown in Iranian miniatures for "Shahnameh" in all schools of Persian painting- specially Safavied school. After a brief summary of the mythical hero, this article will explain the various sides of the epic hero's structure and analyzes the character of a mystical hero based on traditional theories of art. In the case of heroes, there are some differences between mythical and mystical views. For mythical view, a hero is a superman who overcomes personal limits and leaves his normal life and succeeds to travel through a risky path. An epic hero is also a superman who struggles for the pride of a nation. His battle is a battle of good and evil and his character is based on the dualism of which epic stories represent carefully. But in mystic view of miniatures, a human is the God-Almighty successor on the earth displaying a prototype visualized by the perfect human.

## INTRODUCTION

**Issue and aims' explanation:** The purpose of this study is the implication and comparison of two kinds of hero's features- epical and mystical hero- those of which are personage of epic and mystical narratives. The hero is the major character in epics upon whom the structure of epic narratives is based. The most reliable version of Persian epics been reflected in Shahnameh of Firdausi, the great Persian poet. Shahnameh is a complete set of myths and Epical narratives through which the fictional history of ancient Persia before Islam become unveiled. In subsequent periods, these epics and their characters appeared in a different way as we may observe in mystic stories, including the symbolic legends of Suhrawardi- the illuminationist philosopher- and other pictorial narratives of Persian miniatures. This essay is going to explain features of the hero in these two types of narrative, considering structural systems and mystical theories.

### Research questions

- What are the structural characteristics of an epic hero in Persian literary?
- What are the structural characteristics of a mystical hero in Persian literary and painting?

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This investigation is a comparative study which is done and presented by qualitative and descriptive-analytic method. This research is based on a literary review into original texts- Shahnameh of Firdausi, Persian miniatures and Sohrawardi's stories- as well as secondary texts which are written on Shahnameh, epic and mystical heroes and analysis of their characters- considering the difference between contexts, in order to analyze epic narrations, constructional methods based on the oppositions of narrative elements, as well as ideas of Muslim traditionalists who consider human as *Divine vicegerent*, are supposed to be addressed.

### The nature of the epic hero; the hero and his signs in the Shahnameh of Firdausi

The Persian heroic poetry, from its beginning till now, has passed several stages. In the first stage, the protagonist is a god or a mythological personage. Mythology is related to custom, fiction and history and deals with the divine beings as well as semi-divine and supernatural beings and explains how a new civilization or a heroic act created by supernatural actions. In mythological view, human's activities become significant due to interferences of supernatural creatures [1]. The mythology of ancient Persia deals with not only cosmic battles and abstract concepts and personalities associated with religious rituals, but also legendary heroes and primary kings [2]. Generally a mythological hero is a man or a woman who overcomes individual limitations and leaves routine life. He has a perilous journey toward the territory of supernatural wonders and eventually wins. The mythological hero has specific benefits and his greatest action is taking hold of the epitome of unity in multiplicity and introducing it to others [3].

### KEY WORDS

Heroism, Persian Painting and Book Illustration, Epic Hero, Mystical Hero, Heroes of Shahnameh

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Accordingly, such themes are narrated as stories with heroic actions. Prominence of the subject and the protagonist, who has to be perfect in all aspects, is one of the characteristic of this genre. Even his errors are heroic somehow. The epical hero is a superman who seeking fame, fights to gain glory or to draw honor for a nation. According to the Persian mythology, epical hero carries symbol of moral and emotional values indicating high wishes of an ancient nation [4]. In ancient Persian illumination, the good human and *Ahura Mazda*, the creator of goodness, are the same and inseparable, like the sun and its light; and the hero is a good human [5]. Reading heroes of *Shahnameh*, discloses how the spirit of ancient duality has been preserved [2].

Based on historical interpretation, one can state that the creative epoch of national Persian epic is Parthian period. Apparently the *Parthian* chivalrous spirit created a tradition and by which any bravery or heroic fighting has been considered by their name. (Hero in the Persian language is called *Pahlavan* which is derived from *Parthava*- the Parthian original country.) This tradition possessed not only martial but also moral aspects that could be called brigandage and chivalry. One of the most important examples is *Arash* the archer whom was considered as a great-grand father by many Parthian families. According to them, *Arash*- who gave his life to protect Iran's borders- was known as an archetype of heroic rituals and behaviors. A Parthian community of heroes was composed of *Kings* and *Princes* [6].

According to *Pahlavi* texts, some of heroes are also immortals. These tales of chivalry spread in Arsacide era. The heroic and epical spirit of the time placed Parthian heroes beside mythological prototypes. Heroism as a tradition, that is an arrangement of chivalry and generosity and quoted in *Shahnameh*- the book of kings, has some principles and properties which are discussed in the rest of the article.

### The opposition of the good and the evil

An epic is a battle between opposites [7]. Actually, all battles are challenging with the evil; that of the Devil, falsehood, injustice, fighting, ruination- and this fact represents the Aryan historical attitude [8]. In *Avesta*- the *Zoroastrian* holy book- one can read about some great battles between good and evil elements, Iranians and the devils, Iranian heroes and *Transoxanians* [9]. and this is an origin of the national epic of Iran. The belief in two poles of *Ahura* and *Ahriman*- the God and the Devil in ancient religion in Persia- might be considered as the fundamental cause of ancient Iranian identity. In the framework of the religious beliefs of ancient Iran, two eternal contrasting elements are imagined as two primary partenaire elements. One of these two primary elements is the symbol of goodness and luminosity and another is the manifestation of decay and dimness which of both the world is created as a result of their conjunction.

Actually the battle between good and evil would take place always been destined until the end of the world. The eternal dualism in ancient Persian world-view, which has social and religious basis, has also been effective in the development of Persian epical traditions so reflected by them. In Persian epic, the opposition of good and evil has been appeared in the figure of a battle between two hostile nations, Iranian and *Anirani* (anti-Iranian), in the *Avesta*, as well called as *Iranians* and *Transoxanians* in *Shahnameh*. All of the *Shahnameh* unveils the narration of the true war between these two tribes, one of whom auspicious and *Ahuraian* and another blameworthy and *Ahrimanian* [10]. It's worthy of mention that the myths deserve categorically reveal dualism in human existence and contrasting powers of the world. As a result, the light and the darkness have always been mentioned as two contrary phenomena in Persian literary.

In *Shahnameh*- the story of a battle happened between *Keykhosrow* and *Transoxanians*- depictsthe phenomena of the light and the darkness; in such a way that the darkness becomes dominant on the sky before the war and gradually after the victory of Iranians the light appears. Iranian famous heroes in *Shahnameh*- such as *Rostam*, *Sohrab*, *Keykhosrow*, *Siavash* and *Foroud*- from Persian fathers (of *Ahura*) and *Transoxanian* mothers (of *Ahriman*) presented all together. They are manifestations of the coexistence of two contrary numinous and temporal essences- the spirit or the light and the material or the darkness; the existence of these heroes, the combination of which carry two contrasting natures [11]. Sometimes, in the battle of opposites, the evil forces overcome, but the blessing forces try to take back the *Royal Charisma* (*Farrah*). All of the heroes take part in battles in order to achieve the *Royal Charisma* [12].

The rank human in *Shahnameh* is so transcendental such a sublime higher than the nature and sphere. The perfect man, who is a symbol of greatness and goodness, becomes incarnated in heroes whose mission is achieving historical ideal. So idealism is a main aspect of spiritual lives and the war is a battle of good and evil obviously persisting in mythological and epic era.

The first battle is between *Tahmoureth* the king and the demons, then *Fereydun* the Persian prince and *Zahhak* the evil king. Then the war of good and evil is incarnated in revengeful battles between Iran and *Transoxania*. The last fight of the heroic era happened between the Persian royal family of *Lohrasb* and *Transoxanian Arjasb* over religious reasons [13]. After the reign of *Fereydun* and from the *Manuchehr*'s age, one group, whom are called the heroes, rose up to confront all wickedness; *Sam* and his son -*Zal*- and his grandson -*Rostam*- all relate to this era which continued until the death of *Rostam*. At that time,

even the kings were honored with their heroic level [6]. Meanwhile, the heroes has dyadic in their nature mirroring fusion of good and evil, the equal domination of Ahriman and Ahura on the world. This fact implies dualistic insight of epics. For example mother of Rostam is from the descent of Zahhak- the evil king; and mother of Keykhosrow is a daughter of Afrasiab- the king of *Transoxania*.

As a general rule, the heroes of Shahnameh, whom are the motives of the battle between good and evil, could be divided into three groups: The righteous heroes, some of whom are the completely innocent prototype of human, such as Freydun, Siyawash and Keykhosrow and some are not devoid of shortcomings and deficiencies, such as Rostam and Tuss; the evil heroes who in nature are the source of decay and mischievous all over, such as Zahhak and Afrasiab and some who represent unions of good and evil, such as Piran and Esfandiar- the Persian prince whom killed in a battle by Rostam. Such senses as acuteness, strength and manly solidity are considered common properties in all three groups.

### The opposition of good reputation and disgrace

One of the most important concepts in heroic ethics is the honor and reputation. In the world of epics, dignity is more important than civil values, as the anger of Rostam with king Kawoos and the battle of Rostam and Esfandiyar indicate no motivation but name and shame. All human transcendental values and attributes are symbolized in the word of "Name" which is implicitly comprised of some values like justice, generosity, honesty, religious faith, loyalty, bravery and even patriotism. The heroes of Shahnameh always care about their own *Names* and defend their dignity which is the national conscious. The honor is the center of hero's existence so he fights and dies for it because a dishonorable man is no longer considered a hero, so he always worries about his dignity. Rostam kills a wise king like Esfandiyar for he couldn't accept to be under chains because self surrounding doesn't agree with the *Name*, and the infamy is the death of the championship [14]. Therefore, even the oldest heroes consider the failure as a shame. The refraction and escape from the enemy cause shamefulness.

This property isn't of the same importance in any kind of epic; for example in Greek epics, *Name* isn't the only stimulant and there are some other motives like seeking gratification, greediness and capriciousness; for example, in the Iliad of Homer, Ajax killed himself just because he had failed in competition with Ulysses for the possession of Achilles weapons. Or Achilles left the army because his female slave was kidnapped. And even the great battle of Troy occurred on the ownership of a beautiful woman [7].

### The revengefulness

In heroic epics of Iran, the revengefulness battles happened not to satisfy selfishness and hegemony, but to fulfill a sacred duty, so becomes the main axis of the narration. The hero always sets the wise advice before his eyes: "Anyone who does wrong will be punished".

From the heroic perspective, revenging on wicked people considered as the sacred duty of a hero [4]. The revenge for blood of kings and princes is incumbent on Iranians. Everyone who does evil, particularly to the royal family will be punished and even his descendants might be affected by the result of his guilt. Anyone has the duty of taking his father's or ancestors' revenge.

Manuchehr takes his revenge for Iraj (his granddad); Keykhosrow took his revenge for Siyawash (his father) and heroes have a share in this national vengeance. Rostam destroyed Transoxaniatorevenge for blood of Siyawash. Besides, after falling in the well made by his brother, *Shaqad*, Rostam hit him into a tree with a shot to take revenge for his own death and punished that evil in his life [9]. Sometimes in taking revenge, even the kinship loses its value; Keykhosrow kills his grandfather- Afrasiab- while Farangis- the daughter of Afrasiab and the mother of Khosrow- indeed backs this revenge [15].

### The heroic narrative

#### Birth and childhood

According to an old custom, the epic's narratordonates powers somesurprisingly to the hero from the moment of his birth or even earlier. The whole life of the hero is pictured as a pageantry of miracles, the climax of which is its central great adventure. The heroes are already chosen and this affair isn't acquired [3].

This fact had been predicted by Zoroastrian priests before the birth of Rostam and the marriage of his parents- Zal and Rudabe [13]. As a matter of fact king Kawoos wasn't killed after all the stupidity and boldness by him unless to bring up a son like Siyawash (Ibid, vol2, p308, verse414-415).

In most narrations the hero has a surprising birth like Rostam who was born through a miracle of *Phoenix*. Sometimes he is nourished by a symbolic nurse, like Freydun whose nurse is a well nourishing cow and Zal whose trainer is *Phoenix*[7]. Some of these versions show this theme in another different way as "banishment of the newborn child and his return". The end of the cycle of his childhood unites with the return or recognition of a hero and causes a crisis in the narrative [3]. The examples of this theme could be found in the story of Freydun and Zal [13].

## The responsibility and examination

The hero should accomplish a great task in his life and leave behind him a better world than he set foot in. According to *Josef Campbell*, a hero appears when a great devilish enemy would have caught the kingship oppressively. And his first task and destined test is repression of the proud despotic king and purification of the society. According to history, apparently the heroes not only have been receiving the charter of sovereignty from the king but also have been crown-givers. It was customary during the Parthian period that one of the seven great Parthian families- *Suren*- put the crown on the king's head. This thesis suggests that the king's power has been taken from the great heroes (however, it isn't applicable in the case of despotic Sasanian kings who considered the kingship as a gift from the Lord, so they used to be crowned by themselves or by the high priest of the Zoroastrians) [6].

Also in epic poetry, the heroes contributed to the kingship and provided protection for him, taking revenge for the king, advising him and saving the country; as Rostam who attempted to find king *Qobad*, support *Siyawash* and *Keykhosrow* and revenge for *Siyawash* and *Nowzar*[9]. The mystical journey of the hero for his initiation and evolution is portrayed as traveling to marvelous lands, such as the seven exploits of *Rostam* or *Esfandiyar* [13]. In *Shahnameh* there are different examinations for achieving the heroic position, kingship or immortality. But the greatest and most difficult one is the seven exploits. The target of such an examination is coordinated with godly custom and moral values of the championship. The hero tries hard in a power manner to delegate a high name in accord with the ideal life and suitable death.

**The Death:** In the mythical and epic sections of *Shahnameh*, the longevity of some kings and heroes is more than 100 or 500 years; Such as *Manuchehr* who lived 120 and *Kawoos* who lived 150 years. *Zal* lived so long that he is present in the first book of *Shahnameh* until the sixth one; and *Rostam* has lived for more than 500 years [11].

The last action of the hero, which is presented in his biography, is his death or departure which surely doesn't scare him at all [3]. However, the painful death of a hero is sometimes accompanied by some kind of new life under the auspices of a change and transformation. An example of this subject is the death of *Siyawash* that led to immanence in a new corporal frame- a planet which was originated from his blood while his mission has been followed by his son- *Keykhosrow*.

In fact when son follows his father after the transformation to a sublime condition, one of the main themes in *Shahnameh* become disclosed throughout stories of *Siyamak*, *Iraj*, *Abtin* and *Siyawash* [11]. The epic hero submits himself to death because no one can dare to face the death. Nevertheless the death is the end of his journey and the top of his life. The meaning of a hero's life is completed by the style of his death [15].

## The opposition of love and war

Some stories of *Shahnameh* talk about female characteristics hidden in love, tender and feelings and the descriptions of the beauty and purity where as the glory, dignity and the descriptions of mane, varnish and the chivalry belongs to heroes. In the story of *Zal and Rudabeh*, there is a great battle between love and racism and hostility which causes the parting between the two lovers. Most of the love stories -such as this one, the love of *Bijan* and *Manije* and *Ardeshir* and *Golnar*- end in favor of the interest of the country nation and prepare the way for the emergence of the heroes or new victories against the enemies. Therefore loves constituted as part of championships.

The story of *Rudabeh* and *Zal* is an introduction to the emergence of *Rostam* and his battles. The love story of *Tahmineh* and *Rostam* causes the greatest heroic story- *Rostam* and *Sohrab*. In *Shahnameh* love and epic stories can't be separated, because in this book there is no melancholic love or a kind of infatuation that leads to weakness or insanity. The heroes, who are in love, keep their manhood and heroic virtues. Sometimes a political event or war is prefaced by a love story. The love between *Kawoos* and *Sudabeh* created as the preface of the great battle between *Rustam* and the king of *Hamavaran* and the love of *Sudabeh* to *Siyawash* regarded as the basis of the Iranian- *Transoxanian* battles. Thus *Golnar's* love to *Ardeshir* resulted in *Sassanid* dynasty. The kingly love is accompanied by glory and official ceremonies; *Kawoos* officially brought up his marriage proposal with father of *Sudabeh*. Heroes keep the customs in their love too, as *Rostam* didn't refuse to call a priest and marry to *Tahmineh* officially[9].

## Power Vis-à-Vis wisdom

The heroes had sacred and spiritual statues and superhuman powers. They prevail over evils with the help of supernatural agents, like the Divine glory, the messenger angel and Phoenix. From the spiritual point of view, they were considered symbols of wisdom and justice spiritually. Although they often worked by their mussel not rely exclusively on the powerful hands of god and immortal beings like as what we see in ancient Greek heroes [8]. However, there are many miracles among them; they fight single-handedly with an army and kill their hostile rivals all. Each of them- *Rostam*, *Esfandiyar*, *Geev*, *Bijan* or any other hero- is equal to a military. Also *Rostam* is so tall, looks taller than any standing man when he sits; is so strong that grubs up a tree like the grass and takes the stone, which seven heroes can't lift, from the top of *Bijan's*

well; takes away the rock that Bahman hurled at him by his foot. The stones break into pieces under his feet. He fights with a lion, a dragon, a wizard and a demon. The Persian hero doesn't recognize the fear. Rostam went to sleep among the enemies and demons in the meadow. According to Shahnameh, the human virtues include: art (acquired virtues), substance (essential virtues), the race and wisdom which are the best divine blessing [16]. The heroism is not limited to courage in the battlefield, but requires wisdom too. The bravery and knowledge are associated with the nature of a great hero such as Rostam, Keykhosrow and others. The coordination among the success, wisdom and justice is the goal of heroism. The seizing of time and escaping to the world of love and wine- that even Rostam in his moments of boredom resorts to- is a heroic feature[8]. The Persian champions are more powerful than usual even in drinking so that they never become drunk. The heroes always live wisely and never become a slave of the greed or a plaything for the whimsy.

### The opposition of the reality and hyper-reality

An epic hero is shown as a mixture of reality and imagination. An ordinary man sometimes shows extraordinary aspects. The heroes, while being human, have utopian traits. An epic hero is a representative of his nation reflecting the best national characteristics. While the superhuman heroes are fallible, they have exceptional traits. However, all heroes in Shahnameh are presented with realistic human feature[14]. Although the heroes of Shahnameh have imaginary properties, they reflect nothing but the great contemporary spirit of the people [8]. The epic human is natural and he fights with natural and supernatural powers because of his nature. The idealization of the hero in Shahnameh doesn't mean that its stories are devoid of realism and dramatic features. Firdausi tries to express the complicated contradictions in the personality of some heroes, for example the contrariety of brave traits and emotional features in the personality of Eskandar (Alexander the Great) [17].

### Magic in front of destiny

The magic is very important in the epic poetry. An Iranian hero is afraid of the lie and magic therefore he antagonizes the magicians. He never lies except for saving Iran and the king or for keeping his good reputation and only if he finds no other way. But the enemies resort to magic and deception, just to save their own lives and they don't refrain from cowardice and escape, especially against the great Persian champions. In Shahnameh the greatest magicians are the demons. These creatures are so skilled in magic that the forces of nature are under their control. To fight against demons is the most difficult stage of the battle. The greatest hero of Shahnameh- Rostam- fights against Akvan the demon, White demon and Arjang.

Although the human beings conjure too, fighting against the magicians is one of the duties of the Persian kings and heroes. One of the seven exploits of Rostam and Esfandiyar is the murder of the witch. The war with the magicians is more evident in the Mythical part of the Shahnameh. The wizards are skilled human beings who are able to control the nature or make the cold and rain. But the good heroes rarely resort to magic; so that Rostam did magic- on Esfandiyar- only once because of the fame with the guidance of Phoenix and finally confessed his sin in front of him [9]. The adventures of Shahnameh are influenced by the fate; so that a human attempts to change his destiny but isn't able to succeed. The fate of kings and heroes shows the invalidity of the world. The long lives of Jamshid and Zal and Rostam come to an end. The manly powers on earth are disappeared while at the same time the innocent youth caught in death. For his glory, Rostam is not only the embodiment of the lost power of the Iranian nation, but also he is the symbol of the being-Iranian which is broken by the historical fate. The heroes are selected to endure their destiny with satisfaction. The athleticism and power of Rostam against his powerlessness and uncertainty show his abilities and associate the mental context of a nation who is doomed to decay. The greatness of a hero narrated besides human grief for the instability of the world, which provided the glory of Shahnameh by their opposition, are the main elements of the Persian epics[18]. Thus, the prediction is very common in epic stories. In Shahnameh, many great events unveiled to the kings and heroes by the discoveries of astrologers and fortune tellers and interpreters of dreams. Zahhak became aware of the fall of his kingdom through the reports of interpreters of dreams. Sam, in his dream, discovered that Zal is hidden in the mountain of Alborz. King Manuchehr asked the priests about the marriage of Zal and Rudabeh and the birth of Rostam. Also king Afrasiab heard from the astrologers that Keykhosrow will destroy his kingdom [13]. In general, the prediction was revealing the secrets to the heroes inspiring them to seek a remedy, but it was of no use to conquer the fate and destiny. A hero surrenders to the fate and recommends joyfulness and utilization of the life and forgetfulness of the sorrow; not withstanding that the wine is considered as a healing material by the heroes and when they are sad they remember the wine and drunkenness.

### Accessories for champions

In Shahnameh, the artillery weapons include things like: helmet, caftan, armor, wand, sword, bow, arrow, lasso, shield and ax. The military musical instruments- such as Indian bells, brazen pipes, bounds, horns, clarions, trumpets, golden bells, cymbals and drums- all were used in the battles. These instruments used

for gathering the army, the order of movement or attack and so on. The fighters have to protect their weapons very carefully because it would be a great shame if their weapons even a scourge of them is taken by the enemy. The horses were very important in the battlefield too; of which some enjoyed a great dignity; such as Rakhsh, the horse of Rostam, Shabrang-Bezhad, the horse of Siyawash. The usage of the elephants also possesses a high attention in Shahnameh. One may observe in some famed battles, how the elephants move with the golden thorn and the elephant watch.

### Other important heroic characters

Most heroes of the Shahnameh mentioned to be Iranians. They are rarely found in the army of Transoxania. If there is one, he must be from a king's race- means the family of the son of king Fereydoon, Tour, who has inherited the championship from the royal family of Iran, or he might be an ordinary man who is a little faster and stronger than the normal persons. But the Iran, as Shahnameh insists on, is a place of the robust and manly heroes. The heroes of Shahnameh have all national good traits; like patriotism, obedience, manliness and greatness of spirit. But the heroic glory or fortune is also a divine gift, which is the source of strength and success of the hero [9] [16].

## RESULTS

### The nature of hero in Persian mystical literature and painting

In the history of Persian painting, there are many works of different themes- epic, lyrical, mystical and ethical- which generally describe the universal man. There has been a common or general convention in portraying the characters pictured in paintings[19]. The paintings don't show an accurate image of the physical appearances of the individuals; as one may conclude that only public types are considered here, especially in the Timurid school of Herat and the Safavid school of Tabriz, a significant differentiation in the methods of the human's description can be seen. The heroes of the poems and then the paintings become more abstract. By replacing individual ideas with philosophical thoughts, the artist gets away from the concrete thoughts more than ever. Thus neglecting the individual personality of the human spreads. We may recognize here some specific criteria for portraying the kings and important people. In the meantime, the sample hero either in the battleground or in the court scenes is incarnated with his weapons, often with a great physique and a beard, but without the peculiar characteristics that are indicative of a particular physical strength. And the addressee of the work is able to estimate the hero's power just through considering the expressive signs of motions. The soldier is pictured while he has picked up his sword or he is cutting off the enemy's neck or he is fighting with a demon or a giant dragon. While this pitched battle, according to the text, ends with success of the hero [17]. In general, traditional arts, including Persian painting, are kind of apocalyptic vision of the world intended to connect the essence of the temporal existence of man to the eternal truth. In Islamic art, the soul and soil interaction considered to be an axiomatic principle.

In the art of painting, the man's dual substance associates another disjunctive theme of proximity and estrangement. A human who lives, fights and dies, is always a stranger who tries to conjoin his origin. This idea leads to a conscious movement; or you may say a sacred journey. The utopian abstract human of the Persian painting is an embodiment of this travel. In visual epic narratives, including the miniatures of the Shahnameh, the hero's humanistic character embodied in a structure, influenced by philosophical ideas of Shi'ism. Here the hero is apparently a different personage from the mythical and epic hero the performance of which needed different signs. There is a special and different interpretation and definition of the human being in any idea of faith. The human is the addressee, as well as a part of the theme of the art. The myth, the epic and mysticism are related to experiences and aspects of human worlds.

The mythology, according to its first editors, has been carrying a sacred content. That means it has had mystical and theological content or has contained a kind of cognition which relates human to the Gods. A myth is a symbolic fiction of adventures which the seeker deals with on his spiritual journey. All the elements, in this realm, have allegorical roles for expressing the process of interior journey of the seeker. In this semantic realm, the myth is a sacred tale of the seeker's interior journey. For example, the battle between the heroes of Iran and Transoxania points out a metaphor of the war of heavenly forces of the psyche against the corporal powers of the self. There seems a story of the battle of the Gnostics against the evil powers [16].

The Iranian world, which is geographically located between the subcontinent and the Arabic world, is the country of *Zoroaster*, *Suhrawardi* and *Hafez*. This land is a scene of the combination of all kinds of wonderful ideas connecting that of Zoroaster and Plato as of Abrahamic traditions. In this world, the Zoroastrian religion has become the circle of brotherhood and chivalry and the ancient heroic Persian epic has become a mystic full of emanative stories of the Islamic period.

### The mystical vision of the human being

**Human as the vicegerent of God:** According to the Holy Quran, God has created the man as a trustworthy successor for him: "And when the Lord said unto the angles: Lo! I am about to place a viceroy in the earth..." [33].; "Lo! We offered the trust unto the heavens and the earth and the hills, but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it. And man assumed it" (Ibid, 33/72).

The man became the most noble of all creatures through his acceptance to the speech of "Am I not your Lord?" ["And when thy Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their reins, their seed and made them testify of them: Am I not your Lord? They said: yeah..." (Ibid, 7/172)]. By the advent of the human, the sacred effusion emerged and God appeared.

The human lives in the world as the interface of the earth and the heaven, and as the vicegerent of God from a unique origin and center. This means the viceroy of God presented subsequently by traditional man of the Persian painting, the hero of the miniatures is different from the epic hero who lives in a dualistic universe with the endless struggle of Ahura and Ahriman.

The traditional man, being aware of the origin of the life, possesses a central reflection of life. According to Islam, human considered as being the exclusive vicegerent of God and the protector of the earth as long as he is loyal to the eternal covenant and aware of his duty takes his way of fulfillment. The man's statues- as a mediator between earth and heaven- seem fated fallen on the earth. The perfect man, who as the first exemplar of the creation mirrors the Divine names and attributes, is a human archetype[20]. The destiny of a human, a spiritual wayfaring for his fulfillment joins hereby the earth and the heaven toward an eternal unity.

### The mystical relation of the man and the world

The world is a unit created by God. The visible multiplicities disclose his names and traits. Ibn Arabi, the great Sufi mystic (1165- 1240 A.D) says: The world was not completed until man came into existence [21]. In Sufism, the overall levels of being named as the five Divine existences in which the bodily world included, as well as the realm of imagination, the intelligible world, the realm of Divinity and finally the station of uniqueness. According to mystical view, the rise of man happens in the realm of Divinity first and for this reason he can experience annihilated in God while achieving the supreme unity; then it happens in the heavenly realm and at last on the earth with his mortal earthly body.

The man as is shown in mythology reflects the basic plan of the world and his concern about world depicted in the myth of the sacrifice of the first human. In Zoroastrian Persian mythology the sacrifice of the first man- Kumarth- is related to the creation of the world, and different parts of his body relate to different levels of the creature, like animals, plants and inanimate objects [21]. God -the Absolute good-is the Creator of universe and man, yet while the universe is intrinsically good, it also appears as a battleground for good and evil. The man considered to be a confederate of god so performs increasingly his religious duty through self realization of goodness, although he is free to make a choice between truth and falsehood.

A human, who must be good as a whole, accordingly in the ideas of Shi'ite and Sufism, represented as a special creature, an indivisible component of the great united system of the creation, travels toward God through universal system. This discipleship is based on the Islamic religious law by which the creation of human and world matched together [31]. According to the mystical tradition, the first man is an archetype of the creation so regarded well an example of perfection. In Muhammad Divine tradition, Allah says to Mohammad (peace be upon him), who is essentially considered the highly transcendental creature the light of whom appeared first: "I didn't create the world unless for you". The human -the microcosm- and the universe- the macrocosm reflect each other like two mirrors. The prophet Mohammad says that Allah has created the human in the form of God. However, this concept applies only for the perfect man who is single apparently but, united with the universe [20].

### The perfect man

Any human can be considered as perfect man potentially but the prophets and saints are actually perfect. The human being essentially is perfect, but all the human beings are not the same and there are levels. The primordial nature of man deserves to be the transmitter of the revelation to the world forming the noble paradigm of the spiritual life. According to Shi'ism, the world will never be empty of the perfect man to perform worship of God perfectly so His grace is the means of achieving high spiritual stations of human beings. Following the path of perfection is not possible except through the guidance of the perfect man who is a surmounting friend of God [22]. In his *Fusus Al-Hikam*, Ibn Arabi said that the unity with God means being- qualified by Divine attributes in a manner understood as attending the five Divine transcendental stages by which exemplified the perfect man[23].

In his book- *Mersad el-ebad*, Najmuddin-e Razi- the Persian Sufi of the 13<sup>th</sup>-century has mentioned some essential attributes for the perfect man such as: knowledge, faith, wisdom, generosity, courage, modesty, patience, good mood and glory. According to Attar of Nishapur- the Muslim Persian poet and theoretician of Sufism (1110- 1221 AD), the perfect servant of God must go through the steps in order to leave illusory and sensible, which is the stage of lust and covetous desires; also has to be over with the intellectual

concept which is a source of pride; while he must forbear the nonexistent which is the source of fraud in order to achieve the unity and the perfection and the vicegerency of God [4]. Meanwhile according to illuminative philosophy, a human is a microcosm and a God's manifestation and if he removes physical appearances and effects, he will be the God's vicegerent and the God himself. Nasir al-Din Tusi, the Persian Muslim philosopher, says: The human perfection and his virtue are from his thought, sight, and intellect in order to shine upon him the lights of Divine commandment therefore becomes near to the high heaven and the plane of divinity (1968: 31). According to the Mysticism, in general views anyone can become a real luminous (Utopian) human by ascetic arrangements.

### The Utopian human in epic and mysticism

The ideal or godlike man is a symbol of supernatural power who would realize in heroic stories his nation's dreams by the extraordinary actions. The Persian ideal human is the symbol of the moral individualities of the Persian Utopian nationalism. His Idealism is limited to the borders whereas his world-view is based on sacrificing oneself for the sake of nation. But the perfect man of mysticism doesn't know a range called homeland means he is from the country of the soul. The epic ideal man is a servant of God nevertheless the ideal mystic man has a romantic quality. The perfect man of the epic represents an extroverted being whose objective world is the nature, the battlefield and the castle's ceremonies- the characters that can't be examined by a dissociable mystic hero. Whereas the perfect man of the epic transfigures in the face of kings and heroes yet his glory comes from the material powers; the perfect man of the mysticism is expressed seeming like prophets and saints whose greatness comes from the spiritual sources. The epic ideal man is rationalist, but the mystic perfect man believes in love too. The epic man is a hero in contrast to the enemies; the mystic man is also a hero in contrast with the devil and the impulsive soul. The epic man relies on the divine glory and the mystic man on the providence. Whereas the first believes in the phoenix, the oracle and the magic the second man relies on miracles. The sensuous is important for the epic man, but the mystic man passed them. Both of the epic and mystic heroes have been two great men in two stages of the history of the cultural development. The first stage occurs in the ancient Iran whereas the second belongs to the period of Islamic culture during the evolution of Islamic Sufism.

### The mystic hero

According to the Christian, Jewish and neo-Plutonian gnosis and mystic anthropology of Suhrawardi, a human on one hand is terrestrial while on the other hand a numinous. In this sense the numinous champion is synonymous with the word of chivalrous and hero [32]. According to the mystics, a human being has both a putrefying body as well as a spiritual bright body. The body itself is a temple; the sacred place where the Divine presence makes its appearance [24]. In Zoroastrianism, the wrestling belt has an allegorical meaning. They thought that the devilish pollution can only reach up to the man's waist and a believer is pure and providential from the chest up. So the wrestling belt defines the boundary of the pollution and the purity [25]. The battle between gods and demons presents also a parable of the contrast between good and evil desires of the human. The cosmetic battle is a war which any human being has to do it inside him to drive the evil out of the world of God. Such an interpretation of the mythological and epic battles between good and evil, would lead to a discussion that can be founded as a mystical epic.

### The mystical epic

The illuminati have made the mystical epics from the Persian heroic epics begins a period of allegories in which an interpretive method is used in the case of the great heroic figures. By doing this the heroic acts of the epic champions have become sacred somehow. Suhrawardi turned an athletic event into a mystical experience [26]. Through his illuminationist wisdom, he looks into the story of Zal and the battle of Rostam and Esfandiar in a mystical way. According to him, the birth of Zal and the death of Esfandiar are codes of two important events in the history of the soul; means the descent of the soul on the earth and her process of ascent to the source. He considers kings and heroes as mystics. And he interprets the phoenix, world-viewing cup and angles as the inner guides. Thus the hero's actions happen in a different existential realm. This causes the heroic epic leading finally to the mystical epic.

Aziz ad-Din Nasafi- a Sufi of the 7<sup>th</sup> century as we mentioned his name earlier- believes that the world is made from two mixed seas of the light and the darkness and it's the perfect man who separates this light from the darkness completely [25]. The mission of every mystic or hero is to return to a world where he belongs. The illuminists interpret the Shahnameh through the hidden vision by linking between the mystical thought of return and the related heroic actions [26]. The transforming of the heroic actions into a mystical story requires an intermediate world which is called the spiritual realm. Incidentally, the spiritual realm is the same placeless and timeless atmosphere of the Persian paintings. Here it can be interpreted that the heroic and epic images of Persian paintings are embodying mystical epics in somehow colorful mysterious illustrations.

### The hero-Philosopher

In his book "The Proposals", Suhrawardi talks about the Persian sages or the Royal sages and the great tree of sagacity. He threatens Kumarth- the first mythological king of Iran- as a Pahlavi sage. Then he mentioned Fereydoon and Keykhosrow and the royal sages and leads this series to himself through three masters of the Sufism- Bayazid Bastami (804-874 AD), Mansur al-Hallaj (858-922 AD) and Abul-Hassan Kharaqāni (963- 1033 AD). Keykhosrow is a heroic king and a sage whose magic cup is considered as a microcosm or a mirror and decoder of the world. He is the cause of the transition from the heroic to the mystical epic. According to Suhrawardi, all of the ancient Persian heroes have been contributed in a spiritual destiny. He has a mystical interpretation of the heroic characters of the Persian epics. Meanwhile, he distinguishes a synonymy between the champions, the knights and the kings of Shahnameh on one hand and the mystics' hidden hierarchy, means the Saints, the Substitutes and the Poles on the other hand [26].

He came to the holiness and received the Divine grace through meditation, isolation, thinking and righteousness. In the end, he withdrew from the reign and ascended to the heaven to maintain the lordly light [25]. If this royal wisdom is the throne, its carpet will be another kind of wisdom which can be called the heroic wisdom. These two types of wisdom are distinct, so that the heroes lag behind Keykhosrow in the end; but the nurturing of prince Siyawash by Rostam the athletic shows that there is a connection between these two kinds of wisdom. One would say Siyawash as a martyred, is the heavenly face of Rostam. As Keykhosrow takes the path of isolation and prayer himself, but advises the heroes to have fun [6].

### The wayfarer hero

The mystic's journey is passing through the existential circles and ranks, from the creation to the truth and from the truth to the creation. In this interior journey, a mystic passes through the seven cities of love in order to join to the eternal perfection of the Divine essence, but unlike him the epic hero has an external journey in the time and place to rise to the heroic status. He has to go through tough experiments. The seven exploits of the hero are a reminiscent of seven steps or passageways, as like as the seven levels of the Mithraism remind us the seven steps of the sacred journey of the Sufis. A hero goes through the seven exploits apparently with a goal similar to that of the mystic journey, but in a different way. The epic journey starts from the physical world to the soul and the mystic journey begins from the soul to the material world. The hero's battle is against the fate, the nature, the enemy and the demon which can be an associative of the stages of the soul as myatic endeavors among different levels of existences [27].

In recent times, the mystics have interpreted the seven exploits of Rostam and Esfandiyar as the seven realms of the spiritual wayfaring (the request, the unification, the knowledge, the independence, the love, the astonishment, the annihilation) or the seven practical steps of the mystical path (the self, the nature, the breast, the heart, the secret, the hidden, the most hidden) [28]. Also in Mithraism, it was obligatory for the beginners to pass seven hard experiments, because it is so believed that the man's soul has been infected seven times when it has come down from the heavenly position to the material world, so it has to be purified in seven stages[6]. In the final analysis, the epic seven exploits of human traveling to the death and his rebirth has been apparently associated with the ceremony of the hero's intuition to the mysterious semi-epic and semi-mystical ceremonies. In the Shahnameh, this is represented as the hero's pass through the seven exploits in order to save the king or his family from the enemy or the demon [29].

### The heroism and the rules of chivalry and generosity

From the late Achaemenid period till the end of the Parthian era, the Zorvanists had underground temples which were similar to modern gymnasiums. The temples of Mithraism were also like them. In these temples the followers have been raising their body and soul to reach to the stage of the master which was a spiritual and heroic station. The championship and chivalry were not limited to the reinforcement of the body but also included personality, cognitive and moral dimensions. Traditionally the heroism has been a moral-cognitive system and an educational manner which combined with the Sufism later. The link between the heroism and the mysticism is an ancient connection and the transition from the heroic to the mystical epic is a feature of the Persian culture. The chivalry, which is a sign of the doctrine of the spiritual generosity in Islam, is an official of the Sufism and an expression of the spiritual ideal of the heroism in the Islamic society. But it goes further and seeks to regulate a sacred ritual for all professions. The initiation of chivalry takes place through a ceremony and turns into a spiritual tradition in which every traveler is a chevalier; a person whose spiritual power has been activated. Also the allegiance means the eternal covenant with God. The chevaliers appeared in the tenth century AD. They were the same as the heroes of the past who had traveled from the materiality to the spirituality. Even in later times, the Sufis, such as the first generations of Muslims, participated in the holy wars and the distribution of Islam in other countries; then converted to this saying of the prophet Mohammad: "We have succeeded from the minor holy struggle, now it's the time for the major holy war". The minor or lesser holly struggle is the war against the non-believers and the major or greater holly struggle is against the concupiscence. The mentioned speech of the prophet implies the essence of the transition from militarism to spiritual bravery and chivalry. In Futtowat-Nameh (the book of chivalry), Vaez Kashefi (1436- 1506 AD) says that the saints are followers of

the prophets in one hierarchy the founder of which is Abraham whereas Imam Ali considered to be as its Great pole and Imam Mahdi as the seal of it. So the idea of chivalry after converting to Islam totally depends on Shi'ism. From the chivalry's view, the mission of the prophets and the leadership of the Imams and the Saints reflected in the system of heroism and knighthood fun [30]. Seventy two moral conditions is mentioned for the chivalry, including kindness, honesty, goodness, virtue, loyalty, Generosity, humility, wisdom and piety. In general the spiritual figure of a chevalier reminds us the heroic attribution of the national epics. According to the absolute dominance of Shi'ism inspired the Persian thoughts, the heroes of Persian paintings introduced in the visualization of the chevaliers or the heroes of the mystical epics.

## DISCUSSION

In this research, the features of some types of the heroes- mythological, epic and mystical- were studied analytically according to Persian literary references- specially the Shahnameh (the book of kings) and the stories of Suhrawardi. The results are briefly as follows; there are some differences among mythological and epic and mystical views of the Persian painters about the heroism. A Mythical hero is a Superman or a Demigod who has overcome the personal limitations, leaves the normal life and travels on a dangerous path and finally achieves the victory. The epic hero is a seeking fame superman who fights for the honor of nation, the character of whom is based on the duality and the contrast of the good and evil.

There are conflicts associated with the hero include these items: the opposition of the name and shame, the power and the wisdom, the war against the love and the conflict of the reality and the hyper-reality and also included the contrast of the magic and the destiny. Fighting for revenge and going through difficult experiences a hero carried with himself a horse, armor, a wand, a sword and a bow and some other weapons, the Divine grace, the fortune, the wisdom and the chivalrousness accompanies the hero this battle. In terms of mysticism, the hero is somewhat different and his depiction requires different signs. In the realm of mysticism, the myth or the epic is a story of the inner journey of the wayfarer and the hero's battle is an allegory for the war against the impulsive soul. In this world view, the human being is a vicegerent of the Divine, a mediator between the heaven and the earth lives while been aware of the unity of the universe embodied as the perfect man. In this way, the hero is a visual embodiment of the ideal human of mysticism or the perfect man. The heroic actions have sacred aspects in a way that the features of hero could be interpreted in the manner in which his wisdom as the Lordly wisdom and his charisma as the light of the supreme being of the Divine. The experiences and the heroic seven exploits associate the mystic journey and the seven steps of the perfection. Thus, in the mystical literature and Persian miniatures, the heroic regulations are linked with the Islamic chivalry which is rooted in Sufism. The Muslim chevalier resembles a hero of the faith and owns ancient moral principles combined with the Abraham's tradition, the Shi'ism and the Sufism.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

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None

### FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

None

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