

Introduction to *Shahnama* and Its Impact on Persian Literature

¹ **Nahida Fida**

¹ Ph.D. Scholar, University of Kashmir

² **Dr. Shadab Arshad**

² Assistant Professor, University of Kashmir

³ **Dr. Shafaat Hussain**

³ Ph.D. English, Amity University

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ABSTRACT

The *Shahnama* an epic poem composed by the poet Firdausi in Persian in the early eleventh century, is the most-popularly copied and circulated epic poem in Persianate societies. In it, ancient history and myth mix and converge around themes of kingship and ethics. Verses of the *Shahnama* and visual imaginations of many of its episodes appeared on medieval ceramics and metalwork and covered the walls of palaces in Islamic societies from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. From around 1300, illustrated manuscripts of the *Shahnama* were key items in royal and elite households. The purpose of the present research is to study and analyzes the structure of *Shahnama* and highlight the importance of *Shahnama*, its aim, content and execution.

Introduction

The *Shahnama* is an incredibly lengthy and exquisite poetry that was composed in Persian ages ago. It narrates tales of legendary figures and heroes from antiquity, including fallen civilisations. Firdausi, the author, put a great deal of time and effort into making it flawless. For generations, people have cherished and appreciated it. It serves as a kind of unique book connecting Persian speakers worldwide. They even give the story's protagonists as names for their kids. Thus, the *Shahnameh* is much more than just a poem; it's ingrained in many people's history and culture.

The Shahnama, in its archetypical version of sixty thousand verses by the poet Abu al-Qasim Firdausi of Tus, Khorasan (northeastern Iran), is often defined as the “Iranian national epic”; yet it deserves special mention in its South Asian iterations. The work’s cultural-geographical proscenium encompassed the Iranian world, from the western Caspian Sea to Sistan in southern Afghanistan, and from the Persian Gulf to the borders of Turkmenistan and India.

Firdausi’s epic recension was probably the continuation of an earlier version started in the mid-tenth century at the court of Abu Mansur Muhammad ibn Abd al-Razzaq, the ruler of Khorasan under the Samanid dynasty (ca. 820-1005) by the poet Abu Mansur Ahmad Daqiqi (d. ca. 976). In the end, Firdausi’s well-known Shahnama was divided into two main, varying-sized sections: the first, which was longer, concentrated on the mythical hero Rustam and his adventures with supernatural allies and antagonists as well as human, moral dilemmas; the second was a brief digression on Alexander’s conquest of Iran, which marked the end of the Achaemenid dynasty (c. 550-330 BC), and it continued with a quasi-historical treatment of the reigns of various Parthian/Arsacid (c. 250 BC-AD 225) and Sasanian.

The stories of the Shahnama, which were passed down orally throughout Iranian society prior to the collections started by Daqiqi and subsequently finished by Firdausi, juxtaposed the cultures of India and Iran. For example, the Indian realm is central to the greater work of the well-known and much illustrated Rustam tales since the hero’s maternal ancestors lie in Kabul, which by the Shahnama’s own geographical calculation was part of the eastern regions of India. The Shahnama, a literary-poetic work, not only parallels the growth of Persian poetry and literature in India, which at first grew out of Iranian trends but eventually became an independent corpus, but also highlights the political and cultural diversity across the subcontinent during this period.

The Ghurids (c. 1150-1215), a dynasty with aspirational Persianate cultural ties, launched successful military conquests in north India during the 1190s, strengthening the long-standing ties between the India and Iranian cultures. Although there were early thirteenth-century Shahnama manuscripts from Iran, the oldest surviving copies in India are from the fourteenth century, and there seems to have been a genuine proliferation in the fifteenth century. Additionally, the work did not command the same political, cultural, and linguistic importance throughout India as the illustrated Shahnama manuscripts, at least from the Ilkhanid period (ca.1250–1350), which were frequently commissioned by Iranian royalty.



Though proportionately the Deccan may have produced more royally commissioned instances (as represented by cats. 84-85, the bulk of surviving north Indian Shahnama manuscripts and folios are of nonimperial patronage (as in the manuscripts represented by cats. 86, 87, 90, and 91). The massive work was summarized in Persian prose and prose-verse, which started to emerge in India in the twelfth century and became increasingly common by the fifteenth century. By the nineteenth century, copies and printings of the summaries were made in Urdu.

India's already astounding array of epic and didactic narratives in prose and poetry, both in Sanskrit and vernacular, was enhanced by the addition of new themes for illustration in the Shahnama's stories. For instance, by the fourteenth century, certain Jain manuscripts, whose style was generally highly conservative and changed little over time, had very extravagant border illuminations that included scenes from the Shahnama. The works in question were instead commissioned by extremely wealthy Jain merchant communities, indicating that the general public was familiar with some of the most famous scenes from the Shahnama. The works were created in royal ateliers using an abundance of luxury materials like gold pigment and were typically of very high quality. The Shahnama, which transcends cultural boundaries with its universally appealing stories inspired by historical events, sociopolitical confrontations, and moral struggles, was eventually absorbed as another great epic cycle to India's long-standing literary and poetic history in both religious and secular domains and in multiple languages.

Furthermore, the Shahnama illustrations in Persian style are credited to India as early as the 1420s, during the late "Sultanate" period that was characterised by the arrival of Afghan leaders and their supporters and the political disintegration of Muslim rule following Timur's 1398 conquest of Delhi. After losing control of Central Asia, the Timurids shifted their focus to northern India, where one of Timur's grandsons, Babur (1526-1530), established the Mughal dynasty (1526-1858) by overthrowing the Lodi sultans from his stronghold in Kabul. The Mughal emperors were voracious readers, their courts were dominated by Persian culture, and their libraries contained exquisite reproductions of the Shahnama. After northern India was lost and then reclaimed by Babur's son Humayun, an incredible number of illustrated manuscripts were produced for Akbar, the third Mughal emperor (1556-1605). The primary artistic traditions of Safavid from Tabriz, Hindu from Vijayanagar, and European forms introduced to the Mughal courts by Jesuit missionaries and diplomats were blended to create the Akbari style. Western influence was prevalent by the seventeenth century, particularly in the way landscapes were shown, and by the eighteenth century, it had spread to portraiture as well.

The Shahnama persisted as a princely guide to righteous and prudent monarchy. The opportunity to depict Mughal emperors and courtiers hunting, fighting, participating in diplomatic rituals, feasts, and passionate affairs was excellent. It also kept up its topical commentary on current affairs and people, broadening its applicability to both the recent past and the present. Above all, the conflict between good and evil is a timeless theme that transcends space and time, which is why it continues to be appealing.

Shahnama was written by Firdausi in the tenth century in a beautiful, expressive language. Abul Qasim Mansur, also known as Firdausi (d. 1020) was born in the hamlet of Baz, which is part of Tabaran of Tus. Tus was a city in the Khorasan province of eastern Iran. Firdausi was a member of the landed aristocracy known as the Dehghan. The Dehghans, an educated group of Iranians, were concerned with preventing Muslim invasions of Iranian cultural values, traditions, and customs. When Firdausi lived, Iranians were living under Arab domination, and Shahnama writing was deeply ingrained in Dehghan culture. In actuality, all poets aspired to narrate Persian history in a way that honored its achievements and honors its people. Banani states the following about the poet's inspiration for writing his epic: Firdausi was certainly influenced by the emerging Iranism of the Samanid era and might have even thought of his masterpiece as a tribute to that distinguished house, only to see it destroyed by the Turkic Ghaznavids. The Shahnama's dramatic intensity stems from the bitterness of the fabled Iranian-Turanian epic conflict, which is an urgent phenomenon of the poet's own day. The little that is known about his background and schooling is confined to his writings, which demonstrate his familiarity with the Arab philosophy and literature of the period.

Furthermore, Despite being well-born, Firdausi is reported to have spent his money on finishing his task and ended up impoverished. In his later years, Firdausi made the decision to give Shahnama to Sultan Mahmud, who did not treat him or his contributions with any dignity. In Chahar Machaleh, Nizami Aruzi recounts what Mahmud said to Firdausi: "Shahnama is nothing but the story of Rustam, and there are thousands like Rustam in my army." As far as I'm aware, God did not create in the same way as Rustam, Firdausi said, Mahmud informed his minister, "He called us liars in an ironic way, so we should kill him." However, Firdausi had fled from Ghaznein, so while they searched, they were unable to locate him. But there was quiet another politics at play to explain why Mahmud refused Firdausi, while Firdausi was Shia, Mahmud was Sunni. They belonged to two different faiths of Islam.

Furthermore, the Shahnama paints a poor picture of Arabs and Turks during Mahmud's time as a Turk. The fall of the Persian Empire and the Arabs and Turks subsequent occupation devastated

Firdausi. In this context, Diankonoff notes that the Book of Kings (also known as the Shahnama) had some anti-Arab and anti-Turk sentiment while being officially flawlessly Muslim. Iran and Turan have a never-ending rivalry throughout history. It is understandable that Mahmud Ghaznawi, to whom the book was dedicated, could not find success with it. Firdausi's Book of Kings bears evidence to the emergence of Persian self-consciousness. The historical Sasanid dynasty and the legendary Kayanid dynasty of Zoroastrianism symbolized the magnificent past for Firdausi. It's interesting to note that the Achaemenid Empire had completely disappeared from historical records. Years later, Mahmud wanted to make up for the treatment he had received. Mahmud gave Firdausi expensive presents befitting a king. However, Nezami Aruzi tells us that Firdausi's body was being transported out of the city when Sultan's presents arrived in Tabaran. Firdausi's daughter declined the presents when the royal emissaries tried to offer those gifts to her, claiming she didn't need them.

The Epic's Origins: Firdausi's primary sources were an earlier prose version called Shahnama Abu Mansoori, which was a collection of historical facts, fables, and old Persian legends based on an even older source called Khvatay- Namak, which dates back to the Sassanid empire. The Shahnama Abu-Mansoori was put together by decree of Khurasan's governor, Abu Mansoor Tusi, with assistance from certain Zoroastrians in Sistan and Khurasan, as well as under the guidance of his minister, Abu Mansoor Abdul Razzak Tusi. This work was inspired by Khvatay Namak as well as a few other works, such as Ayatkar Zariran, KarNama Ardeshir Babakan, and the story of Bahram Choobin. The history of the Sasanians, Khvatay- Namak, was written in Pahlavi and translated into Arabic by Ibn Muqafah during the reign of Khusrow Anooshirvan. 1,000 verses of the previous poet Daqiqi-e Balkhi, a Sasanid court poet, were included by Firdausi. Based on Shahnama Abu Mansoori, Daqiqi began the versification of a history of pre-Islamic and mythical Persia. But his slave killed him before he could finish writing his shahnama, bringing about his horrible demise. These lines, which describe the ascent of the prophet Zoroaster, were used by Firdausi with acknowledgement in his writing.

Firdausi's Shahnama is blatantly influenced by oral literature. Davidson writes: Firdausi discusses his pre-Islamic poetic roots in language that suit both oral and written traditions in his extensive essay on Persian epic. Written traditions are traced to an archetypal Book of Kings written in Pahlavi, the language of the Sasanian empire; oral traditions are expressed as stylised performances by learnt men known as mobads and dehqans. The claim that Firdausi's poetry is the result of an oral tradition appears to be at odds with Firdausi's own allusions to an archetypal Shahnama. However,



considering the Shahnama's cultural context, oral poetry and literacy are essentially compatible, as evidenced by the typical book. Language and style Persian prosody and rhyme follows Arabic model.

Classic Persian poetry has quantitative meters that are based on recurrent patterns of short, long, and extended syllables. Firdausi's rendition of Shahnama has the shape of an eight-foot line divided into two hemistiches. Every line has a different end rhyme for each of its hemistiches. There is a consistent caesura between hemistiches, but not inside each one. "There is usually no enjambment either. Shahnama is written in the meter motaghareb:

Definition of the meter of Motaqhareb:

fa-ū-lon / fa-ū-lon / fa-ū-lon / fa-al ∪ -- / ∪ -- / ∪ -- / ∪ -

Here is an example of two couple lines:

1. *Be Nama / khodavan /d-e jan-o / kherad*

kazin bar /tar andi /she bar nag /zarad

2. *khodavan /d-e nam-o /khodavan /d-e jay*

khodavan /d-e roozi /deh-e rah /nomay

The language of Shahnama is simple and strong and Firdausi used fewer Arabic words. Shahnama itself was a reaction to Arab conquest and Firdausi as a nationalist poet tried to free his work from Arabic influence. This is noteworthy as it is a known fact that it is difficult to write in Persian without using Arabic loanwords. Other poetry of Firdausi's time has considerably higher percentage of Arabic words."

Regarding Shahnama's language and style, the Encyclopedia of World Biography section on Firdausi provides helpful information: His inspiration blended well with the elements he took from historical sources. In terms of style, he is excellent at succinctly and clearly expressing facts or feelings, whether it is through the fantastical aspects required by the epic or the elegance of his depictions of ordinary life. His writing is forceful yet elegant; it never veers into absurdities. The only times he used Arabic terms in his poems were while describing Alexander the Great, and even then, they were mostly taken from Arabic sources. He was in his day a popularizer of vernacular literature, much as Dante was with Italian, Chaucer with English, or the Gutenberg Bible with the Latin Vulgate. Just as Latin served

as the Catholic Church's common tongue, Arabic was designated as the sacred Islamic language by Allah in the Qur'an. The Persian language was resurrected by the Shahnama of Firdausi into a cohesive force that quickly became the court language for the majority of the Islamic world (website). Firdausi's language is strong and supple because the poet used the rhetorical devices available in Persian poetry. This stylistic point reinforces the genre of the poem as an epic.

An epic need to have heroic deeds and equally excellent words. However, its splendor is diminished by the overuse of rhetorical tactics and metaphorical language. A great epic poet always strikes the right balance. As a result, Shahnama uses concise language rather than long words. Notable is the poet's use of metaphor. The heroes are endowed with the attributes of strong creatures such as whales, dragons, tigers, and lions. Put another way, because the hero of an epic is superhuman, his actions and interactions with others are not normal. Rustam in Shahnama survives for a few hundred years by eating a zebra at every meal. Additionally, there are instances of epic similes and heavy hyperbolic use.

Furthermore, several Persian poets adopted Shahnama's style and methodology. Studying this masterwork was necessary in order to become proficient in Persian. As the renowned poet and mystic Sanayi puts it, "The great master who laid the foundation of poetry is me." The Shahnama is a primary source used by the renowned Persian storyteller Nezami Ganjavi (1141-1209) in Eskandar Nama and his two other volumes. He says: The wise eloquent of Tus Who decorated the words like a bride. It should be noted here that Eskandar Nama of Nezami consists of two formally independent works, both in rhymed couplets and in the motaqareb meter of the Shahnama."

The first section is commonly referred to as Iqbal Nama and Sharaf Nama. Major Persian poet and prose writer Khaghani Shervani (c. 1127-1199) states: "His pure sense is an angelic birth; He is a candle of wises ceremony in darkness of despondency, The pointer of Firdausi." When Firdausi is the poet, the animals are celestial. Sa'adi (c. 1213-1291), the famous poet remarks: How sweetly has conveyed the pure natured Firdausi, May blessing be upon his pure resting place: Do not harass the ant that's dragging a seed, because it has life and sweet life is dear. c. 1126-1189 Anvari comments, "appreciate done to Firdausi's spirit." Being endowed with a sublime disposition, He was more than simply an instructor to us, his pupils. We are his slaves, and he was like a god. One could include many more poets here. For example, Shahnama but imagery was widely used by Rumi and other mystic poets in a mystically symbolic manner. Rumi famously says, "shir-e Khwoda o Rustam Dastanam Arezoost"

(The lion of God, Ali as the first Imam of Shia, and Rostam of Dastan is who I seek). Rostam is a symbol of the perfect man who has achieved God.

Structure and Content

1. **Epic Scope:** “The Shahnama covers the mythical and historical past of Persia from its legendary origins up to the Islamic conquest in the 7th century.” It is divided into three main sections:
 - **Mythical Age:** “Includes the creation of the world, the rise of the first kings, and the mythical heroes such as Rostam.”
 - **Heroic Age:** “Focuses on historical and semi-historical figures like the great hero Rostam and his adventures, including his interactions with other kings and heroes.
 - **Historical Age:** “Covers the real historical events leading up to the fall of the Sassanian Empire and the advent of Islam.”
2. **Themes:** The epic explores themes of heroism, justice, fate, and the conflict between good and evil. It celebrates Persian cultural values, including bravery, wisdom, and honour, and is filled with moral and philosophical reflections.
3. **Characters:** The Shahnama features a vast array of characters, from divine figures and mythical heroes to historical kings and legendary figures. Prominent characters include:
 - **Zahhak:** A tyrannical king whose story symbolizes the struggle between good and evil.
 - **Rostam:** A central hero known for his extraordinary strength and bravery, whose adventures form a significant part of the narrative.
 - **Kay Khosrow:** A just king who plays a key role in the epic’s later sections.

Language and Style

- **Language:** The “Shahnama” is written in Persian verse, utilizing a rhymed couplet form called “masnavi.” Ferdowsi’s language is classical Persian, rich in vocabulary and poetic devices, and it reflects the grandeur and complexity of the epic’s themes.
- **Style:** Ferdowsi’s style is characterized by its grandeur and formality. The poet employs elaborate descriptions, vivid imagery, and a rhythmic flow that enhances the narrative's epic quality.

Post- Shahnama Epics

Other Iranian poets were influenced by Shahnama of Firdausi to use the same meter and vocabulary in their epic poems. The visuals and the adventures that the heroes go on show how previous epics have influenced them. After Shahnama was finished, more than sixteen additional epic poems were composed. Every single post-Shahnama epic in the Sisatn cycle is centered around the exploits of a single titular hero. These epics are listed below, along with brief research of each:

- **Garshasab Nama:** Approximately fifty years after Shahnama, Asadi Tusi's Garshasab Nama is regarded as the second-best epic. This epic, which tells the tale of Rustam's ancestor Garshasb, has between seven and eleven thousand lines. The poet said that the narrative is a supplement to the Shahnama stories and that it was taken from a written work that may have been Garshasab Nama of Moayyed Balkhi.
- **Bahman Nama:** Six thousand lines that tell the account of Bahman son of Esfandiyar's retaliation against Rustam's clan are included in this work, which is attributed to Iranshah Ibn Abul Kheir in the eleventh century. There is a prelude and four chapters in Bahman Nama. In his introduction, the poet thanks Sultan Muhammad and requests premium.
- **Kush Nama:** another piece credited to Iran Shah Ibn Abul Kheir, it was most likely written in the twelfth century. The epic story of Kush the Tusked, also known as Pil-gush, or "The Elephant-eared" in Persian, is told in Kush Nama. Kush is the brother of the monarch Zahhak, who reeled during Feridon's reign.
- **Farāmarz Nama:** penned in the eleventh century by an unidentified poet, it tells the tale of Faramarz, Rustam's son, who invaded India to aid the Indian monarch Nowshaad. Nowshaad paid Iranian taxes. Sultan Mahmud has been bestowed with this epic.
- **Banu Goshasp Nama:** A heroine, Banu Goshasp was Rustam's daughter. Rustam married her to Giv, the son of Gudarz, despite the fact that she had many admirers.
- **Borzu Nama:** this epic, which may have been written by Atayi, describes the deeds and adventures of the mythical warrior Burzu, the grandson of Rustam and the son of Sohrab, who shares a nearly identical backstory with his father. Sohrab fell in love with Shahru in Shangan prior to the war with Iran, and Borzu is the result of this love. After Rustam seized Burzo, he joined the Iranians after the secret was revealed.
- **Bizan Nama:** this epic, which consists of 1400–1900 lines and recounts the exploits of the fabled hero Bižan, son of Giv, son of Gudarz, was written by Amīd Abu'l-Alā Aṭā b. Yaqub Kateb



Razi, who is also believed to be the author of Borzu Nama. The story's original source is Shah Nama's Bižan and Gorzan tale. Matini thinks that Bizan Nama is essentially a copy of Ferdowsi's narrative with certain poems added by the writer and some left out.

- Susan Nama: Burzu Nama includes Susan Nama. Afrasyab dispatched Susan, a Turani jigger and mermaid, and Pilasam to combat Rustam.
- Shahriyar Nama: Serajeddin Osman-ebn-e Mohammad Mokhtari Ghaznavi wrote this epic in the eleventh century. It is significant because it describes the exploits of Rustam's clan up to the third generation. The final guy in Garshab's lineage is Shahriyar, son of Burzu, son of Sohrab, son of Rustam. He fought his family without realising his descent, but the conflict ended in peace.
- Izarbarzin Nama: During his father's battle with Bahman, Azarbarzin was the son of Farāmarz from the daughter of Sur, the ruler of Kashmir, who resided in India. He hurried to assist his father, but Bahamn caught him and brought him along. The narrative begins with Azarbarzin's birth and concludes with his passing.
- Kak-E Kuhzad's Story: Kak-e Kuhzad was an Afghan fighter. This tale, maybe composed during the Mongol era, describes how he was fascinated by the Sistani people. where Rustam was younger, Milad quickly attacked him, and that is where his notoriety began.
- Lohrasb Nama: Another epic poem, this one centres on the hero Lohrasb.
- The Story of Shabrang: the epic poem tells the tale of Rustam's battle with all the Mazandaran gnomes as well as Shabrang, the son of Div-e Sepid.
- The Story of Jamshid: this tale, which has been linked to Shahnama, describes Zahhak's revolt against Jamshid. This poetry, which was composed following the Mongol invasion of Iran, is replete with Arabic phrases.
- Jahangir Nama: The epic poem Jahangir Nama tells the tale of Jahangir, son of Rustam, and his conflict with Rustam. The poet is an unidentified composer from Harat by the name of Ghasem.
- Sam Nama: This poem appears to have been written in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, and it may have been authored by Khaju-ye Kermani. The narrative spans Sam's, Nariman's son, whole life.
- Zafar Nama: The 14th-century epic chronicle Zafar-Nama, often known as the "Book of Victory," was written by Hamdallah Mustawfi. This 75,000-scouplet epic tells the chronicle of Iranian history from the Arab conquest to the Mongol era. It took Mustawfi fifteen years of life

to finish this lengthy historical epic.

Conclusion

Nonetheless, Shahnama has inspired innumerable authors, poets, and painters for almost a millennium, and its impact on literature and culture cannot be overstated. This study comes to the conclusion that, despite the existence of other Persian epics, the Shahnama of Firdausi is regarded in Persian culture as the best Persian epic, and it is Firdausi who has earned the moniker “Homer of Persia.” Furthermore, the Islamic conquest, which marks the end of the epic, emphasises the change from pre-Islamic Persia to the new Islamic period. Ferdowsi’s conclusion reveals a mixture of resignation to the decline of the old Persian customs and acceptance of historical inevitability. Ferdowsi highlights the need of conserving the cultural memory of the Persian past in addition to the enduring legacy and magnificence of the Persian heritage.

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