Love and Feminine Virtue: Reconsidering the Women of Shahnameh Through Naqqāli

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Abstract

Shahnameh, written in Persian (Farsi) by Abolqasem Ferdowsi in the late 10th and early 11th centuries, is Iran's national epic poem and a renowned work of Persian history and mythology. The women of Shahnameh and "Mehr," a uniquely Persian notion of feminine virtue, has historically been important, with Mehr worship and rituals practiced by men and women in pre-modern Iran. Some critics, especially Western scholars, have ignored women and Mehr in Shahnameh except for examples of "bad women" in a few stories of Shahnameh. Mehr is both domestic and public, playing an integral role in the maintenance of humanity, culture, civilization, and moral values. There have been several studies in Farsi of the women of Shahnameh, documenting Mehr, myth, and feminine virtue. However, questions have been raised about Ferdowsi's view of women, and many of the studies of the women of Shahnameh, are vague when it comes to whether Ferdowsi was proto-feminist, anti-feminist, or merely a product of his time. This study aims to develop a narrative video game, using modern interactive tools, and applying the principles of Naqqāli, traditional single-performer theatre. The narrative game employs evocative techniques to retell stories, exploring women and the complex concept of "Mehr". Previous studies of traditional Naqqāli, have not dealt with expressing the absolute feminine virtue of Shahnameh, neither the hidden background of Mehr, nor another mythos which represents Mehr. In this regard, the study tries to implement an English-language adaptation of selected stories from Ferdowsi's Shahnameh that explore Mehr and womanhood. However, there are a lot of adaptation of stories from Shahnameh in Iran, but they tend to ignore women. This study provides a novel research approach, and makes Shahnameh accessible to contemporary women. Research methodologies explored in this exegesis include content analysis, descriptive-discursive analysis, and term and verses literary analysis.

Keywords: Shahnameh, Ferdowsi, Naqqāli, women, Mehr and virtue.

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by any other person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborations and discussions.

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Introduction

Persian ancient custom like Naqqāli are seriously at risk of extinction. Naqqāli is a traditional theatre form of Iranian storytelling which is informal and intimate. It is a way of traditional staging and performing originated in ancient Iran. Naqqāli is done either in verse or prose and accompanied by gestures and movements appropriate to the event. Dorji (2009) points out, oral tradition can be well-maintained through the use of digital media. In this study, I have attempted to demonstrate the use of digital media by situating Naqqāli as a Persian oral tradition and then I discuss the historical context of the Naqqāli in Persian. Narrative games are one of the digital technologies that are being used to preserve ancient tradition storytelling, the traditional literature and culture of the national epic poem of Iran. Over the past century, there has been a dramatic increase studies concerning Shahnameh and Naqqāli. However, lack of the dominance studies regards to women and feminine virtue have been existed and have not been indicated, how Ferdowsi demonstrates the breadth of women's virtue and how Ferdowsi portrays Mehr from different angles in Shahnameh (Langroodi,1990). Most studies regarding women of Shahnameh, have focused on some precious personalities of the stories and a few writers have been able to draw on Mehr and its mythical aspects in Shahnameh, however, mostly have been written in Farsi, so far. Some studies have been carried out on Mehr in Shahnameh (Nikoei, 2016) attempted to provide the influence of Mehr myth on Ferdowsi poetry. As regards to the lack of English language sources, in the literature review of this study, I have interpreted a few recent Persian studies in to English language to develop an understanding of the origins of myth Mehr and the Sun in ancient Iran.

This exegesis demonstrates the retelling of the stories of Shahnameh, through Naqqāli. The narrative game will employ evocative techniques to retell stories, exploring women and the complex concept of "Mehr". Besides, this study aimed to address the research questions: to demonstrate what does a modern, interactive, English-language adaptation of Ferdowsi's work look alike. In addition, how can those stories be retold to focus on their relevance to

modern women, especially Iranian women. Another question is how can the tradition of Naqqāli be applied to an interactive retelling of the stories of women from Shahnameh?

The methodological approach taken in this study is a mixed methodology considering both, the practical base project which demonstrates a digital Naqqāli and the content analysis, descriptive-discursive analysis, and literary analysis of terms and verses in Ferdowsi's literature. Data for this study were collected using literary analysis of noticeable couplets in which feminine virtue and myths may be interpreted. Moreover, I have applied two stories from Shahnameh, which have been developed as a narrative game. Following this, I have provided the historical context and origins of the Mehr and Sun myths in Shahnameh from main Persian sources in to English language. Therefore, the findings make a major contribution to the field of studies the status of women of Shahnameh due to prepared discussions and interpretations. Due to the interpretation's potential problem of early Farsi language terms used in Ferdowsi's verses, the reader should bear in mind that the myth and Farsi terms in this study are interpreted and translated based on the explanations of various sources; using Farsi dictionary of Dehkhoda, definitions that have applied by other articles, analysing the unit of words and metaphors, and reviewing other's critiques and findings. For instance, throughout this study, the term "Mehr" refers to the feminine virtue of Persian women in Shahnameh and the olden Iran. Last but not least, in particular, I would say that I became interested in the myth of Mehr and Shahnameh considering Naqqāli and I consider that, digital media assist the survival of the traditional stories and culture and maintain the culture, values and myths for the new generation and those who wish to engage with ancient traditions.

How can the tradition of Naqqāli be applied to an interactive retelling of the stories of women from Shahnameh?

How can those stories be retold to focus on their relevance to modern women, especially Iranian women?

Considering Ferdowsi's Shahnameh was written in Persian the late 10th and early 11th centuries, what does a modern, interactive, English-language adaptation of his work look like?
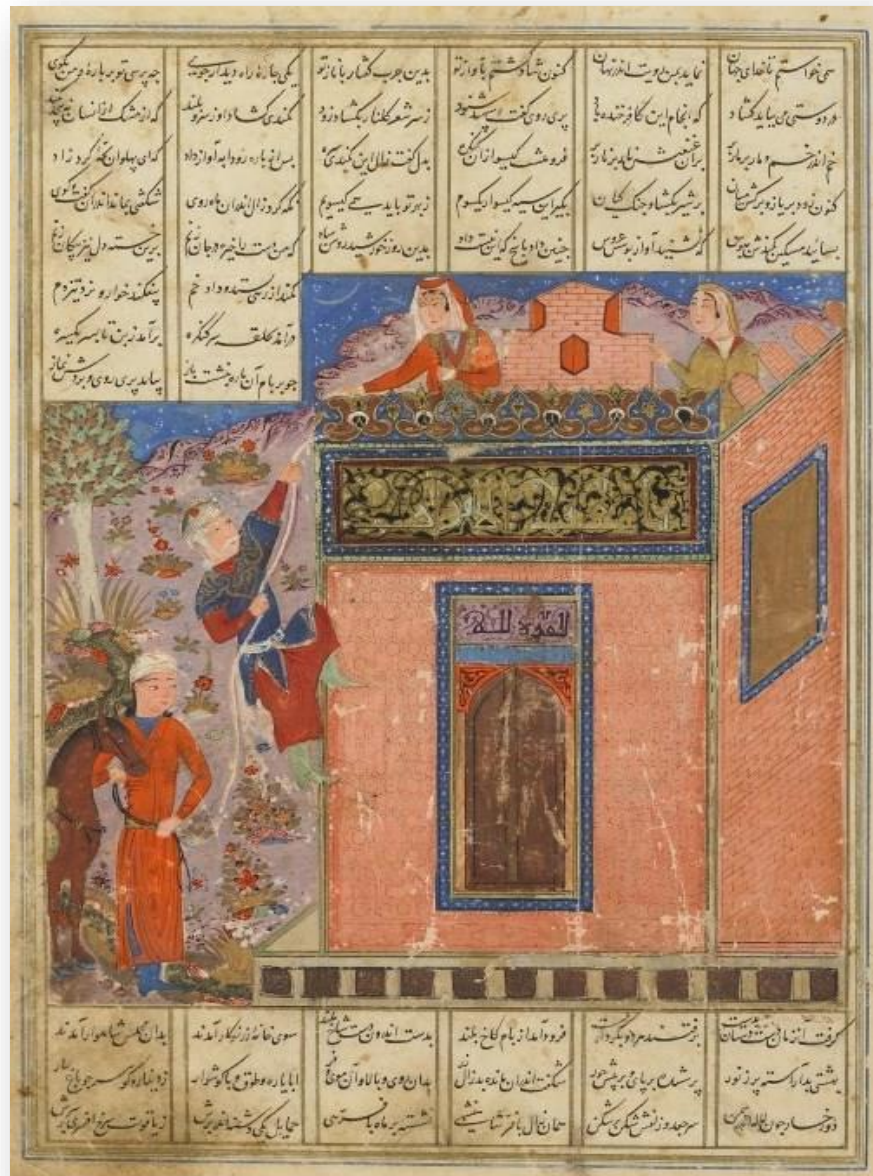
Figure 1Haviz

Folio from a Shahnameh (Book of Kings) by Ferrdowsi (d. 1020); Zal climbs to reach Rudabeh; verso: text: Zal consults with the priests about Rudaba; Iran, Timurid period, mid-5th century; ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper; Purchase—Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler.

Literature Review

Shahnameh is a classic of Iranian culture and history, considered a national treasure of Iran. While Shahnameh narrates events in ancient Iran and gives an image of noble Iranian womanhood in ancient times, there is disagreement about how and whether it remains relevant to women today.

Review: The role of women in Shahnameh

The role and representation of women in Shahnameh stories has been a subject of controversy among the experts, with some claiming the Shahnameh shows empowered women while others are critical of the "perfection" of these characters. Alinaghi maintains that the character of each Shahnameh woman is unique; their roles are not highly similar and women have different importance and frequency of appearance in each section of the Shahnameh (mythological, heroic-epic, and historical) Alinaghi considers the general role and context of women in Shahnameh stories and then reviews the various roles of women in the tales, analysing the character and functions performed by each woman in every story and tale (Alinaghi, 2011). Alinaghi points out Theodor Nöldeke's claim that women play an active role in Shahnameh but they only appear when there is lust, passion or love. Alinaghi criticizes Nöldeke's claim for cherry-picking, noting that at least 24 women play a significant role in Shahnameh. To examine Nöldeke's viewpoint, we must first determine what Shahnameh is being compared to. Ferdowsi lived a thousand years ago in an era when throughout the "western" and "middle eastern" world men played more vital roles rather than women. If Shahnameh is compared to Greek classics The Iliad and The Odyssey, one sees women play more significant roles in Shahnameh, far beyond what Nöldeke calls lust and love. Alinagi argues that women's roles and character development in Shahnameh are comparable to those in the works of William Shakespeare, Victor Hugo and Charles Dickens (Alinaghi, 2011).

Abolhassan Banisadr believes the women of Shahnameh demonstrate the responsibility and authority necessary to centralise power in intergroup marriages and to play a stabilizing role in power relations. In intergroup marriages, he emphasizes how women were able to expand

political power and network, creating balance between central and regional powers (Abolhassan Banisadr, 1984 cited in Bagheri & Mirzaeyan, 2014). In reference to politics and power relations, Hariri pointed the statement "women as a sexual commodity" in Shahnameh (Hariri, 1986 cited in Loveimi, 2016). In addition, Abolhassan Banisadr (1984) discussed the role of sexual relations in power transitions, inclusions and exclusions and exploitation of women as "sexual commodity". He focusses on two aspects of women in Shahnameh: one, women as a means of preserving the community and increasing its population through reproduction, and two, women who deserve protection (Banisadr, 1984). "Women as a sexual commodity" is an important issue that has received a lot of attention in feminist criticism. The author's ideas are to some extent similar to those of Marxist and socialist feminists, but he does not make any explicit connection to Marxist or feminist thought.

"The Life and Death of Heroes" written by Mohammad-Ali Eslami Nodoushan includes a section titled "women in Shahnameh." Where the author claims that "Shahnameh is not an anti-woman book." His analysis of women in Shahnameh stories emphasises their strength and decision-making authority. (Mahin Tajaddod, 1987 cited in Bagheri & Mirzaeyan, 2014; سنجولی, 2015). Nadoushan claims that readings of Shahnameh as anti-women are largely due to Sudabeh's story, wherein Sudabeh betrays Siavash, fitting the stereotype of women as dishonest and unrelaible. He believes that emphasis on Sudabeh story creates a misunderstanding of the Shahnameh as a whole. Shahnameh includes the most prominent and accomplished women in classical Persian literature Roudabeh, Sindokht, Tahmine, Farangis and Manije and others.

Additionally, literary critic Eslami Nadooshan highlights the sharpness and insight of the women of Shahnameh. Bagheri and Mirzaeyan (2014) emphasize these rational traits and their contrast with patriarchal stereotypes about weak, emotional women. Liberal feminists like Nadooshan have emphasized the sagacity of the women in Shahnameh. Mahin Tajaddod parallels this valuation of "masculine" rationality in women to the way suffragist Mary Wollstonecraft considers the emotional behaviour of women as their fault and weakness. (Mahin Tajaddod, 1987 cited in Bagheri & Mirzaeyan, 2014). Concerning this issue, Tajaddod

states that Wollstonecraft usually spoke in favour of reason over emotion. Wollstonecraft's priviledging of "male" rationalism may seem sexist to us today, but was important in making the claim that women were capable of reason, and that is the reason Wollstonecraft viewed emotionality as a weakness for women (Tajaddod 1987). Shahnameh can be considered "protofeminist" in light of the intelligence and agency it assigns women, even as they remain objects of desire.

In Shahnameh, the beauty and the figure of the women is regularly emphasized. For instance:

Lips sweet as sugar cane; she is a queen

Arrayed like paradise, a paragon

As pure and splendid as the vernal sun,

Fit for a monarch, if one should decide to choose this moonlike beauty as his bride

(Ferdowsi, 2016)

Feminism theories and women's image of Shahnameh

Feminist theories criticise concentration on appearance and objectification of women (Bagheri & Mirzaeyan, 2014). "For instance, Carolyn Korsmeyer regards the concept of beauty a controversial issue in feminist theories since it emphasizes the outer beauty of women" Korsmeyer, 2008: 94 cited in Bagheri & Mirzaeyan). Moreover, Bagheri and Mirzaeyan state, "The Life and Death of Heroes" is a book written by Mohammad-Ali Eslami Nodoushan, has a part entitled as "Shahnameh's Women and Men" which Nadoushan describes although some love stories of Shahnameh are characterized by nudity, they are pure and decent. Studies of "women's image in Shahnameh" by Dabir Siaghi revealed Shahnameh's women have their unconventional female advantages which describes women in Shahnameh faithful and devoted pursue their happiness and fortune through the happiness of their men and children. The sacrifice and solidity of personality, purity and loyalty are so natural in them that these qualities are inherent (Bagheri & Mirzaeyan, 2014; Loveimi, 2016). The paper "Women's Image in Shahnameh argues that the image Shahnameh paints of women is superior to that

given in all the other lyrical poems and states the qualities used in Shahnameh for characterizing women. Therefore, Siaghi divides the more well-known women in Shahnameh into four categories; princesses, noblewomen, nannies and witches, according to the higher status and more autonomy than other literary works (Siaghi, 1987 cited in Bagheri & Mirzaeyan, 2014).

Considering the notions of Hafiz, Molavi and Sanaei, the majority of the studies have shown that women take different social status in Shahnameh rather than women in Persian mystical literature (Ebrahimi & Alikhani, 2016). Some indicated in ancient Iran, Sudabeh has been presented as a negative character since she killed Siavash. Moreover, comparative studies conducted by Iranian researchers indicated that women had a higher status in ancient Iran than in ancient Greece. (Bagheri & Mirzaeyan, 2014).

Bagheri and Mirzaeyan (2014) mentioned in a study in terms of women in Shahnameh presents Theodor Noldeke's viewpoint on Shahnameh's women. The author began the sentence as "Women do not have high influence in Shahnameh". However, the opening sentence of the paper implies the Noldeke's view which seems not to be shared by many Iranian scholars. In a study, titled "The Words Shahnameh's Women Deserve" written by Khojasteh Kia, refutes Noldeke's claim. The author criticises Noldeke for referring to just a few cases, focusing on minor female characters and ignoring other significant characters in Shahnameh. This allows Noldeke to conclude that "major" female characters such as Penelope, Andromache and Nausicaa does not exist in Shahnameh, that there are no female characters who, even in "women's sphere" are equal to men. Kia highlights how Noldeke's view is opposed by the authors who have studied women's status in Shahnameh more completely, and that Noldeke's thesis shows how society influences research on women's issues (Kia, 1992 cited in Bagheri & Mirzaeyan 2014). Also, Rezaeifar mentions how past studies have focused on negative "feminine" characteristics such as selfishness and jealousy, with less attention to motherly emotions, let alone other positive traits (Rezaeifar, 2005 cited in Bagheri & Mirzaeyan, 2014).

The word woman is used nearly three hundred times in Shahnameh. Dabir Siyaghi states that thirty-two women were named and mentioned in Shahnameh, some of them were very prominent in terms of their personality and roles, for instance, Roudabeh, Tahmineh, Gordafarid, Sudabeh, and so on. Whether women are named or anonymous depends mostly on their social status. Loveimi (2016) write that Ferdowsi most often writes about women being "modest and gentle."

But not all the women in Shahnameh are chaste and sweet-tempered. There are some sagacious women in Shahnameh such as Faranak, Syndokht, Roudabeh, Tahmineh, Jaryreh, Farangis, Katayoon, Roxanne, and Alexander's mother who express Mehr through their ideas, insights and behaviours (Mozafari & Siyanat, 2016; Qonsuli & Varzeshi, 2018). The dominance of studies show how Ferdowsi demonstrates the breadth of women's roles and portrays them from different angles. According to Mozafari & Siyanat "Firdausi was pro-woman and whenever there is a sick detriment chant melody against women, he tries to compensate it elsewhere for the benefit of women" (Langroodi, 1990 cited in Mozafari & Siyanat, 2016). The paper "A Reading of woman in Shahnameh" includes examples of women proposing marriage to men, showing high social status in decision-making power and glory and the intellectual competence of women and girls (Paknia, 2006 cited in Bagheri & Mirzaeyan, 2014). Other studies, including "The Stories of Shahnameh's Women" and "Women's Rights and Status in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh" have referred to these cases and concluded that women in ancient Iranian society enjoyed higher status and more freedom than previously claimed. For instance, Tahmineh, Katayoon, Golnar and Manijeh (Zahmati, 1395).

An introduction to "Mehr"

There is a large volume of studies regards to women of Shahnameh. Additionally, recent studies give overviews of "Mehr" as a myth in Shahnameh, which similarly demonstrates the status of women and love in the stories of Shahnameh. Mainly research method in this area of research are content analysis and the method of analysis is descriptive-discursive and unit of word and the verses literary analysis.

Moreover, having reviewed a range of critiques, from (Qaemi, 2013) and (Amozegar,2003), concerning the Farsi term "Mehr," I have expanded thoughts on the opening couplets of Shahnameh. Basically, "Mehr" has a precious place and dignity in Ferdowsi's poems. It is shown the way Ferdowsi praises the Lord and Mehr in the opening lines of Shahnameh. Farsi opening verses are as follows.

بنام خداوند بخشنده مهربان

بنام خداوند جان و خرد کزین برتر اندیشه برنگذرد

خداوند نام و خداوند جای خداوند روزی‌ِده رهنمای

خداوند کیوان و گردان سپهر فروزنده ماه و ناهید و مهر

ز نام و نشان و گمان برتر است نگارنده برشده گوهر است

"In the name of God, the merciful.

"In the name of God, the creator of wisdom and souls, and mankind, notional is not able to go beyond, and thought cannot reach the reality of God's essence.

"In the name of God of being and universe, Lord, who has been being pleased livelihood to mankind, is the path to righteousness.

"In the name of the creator of Saturn and the revolving heaven, who has been illuminating Venus, Sun (Mehr), and the Moon.

"He's above all names, signs, and thoughts. God! the artisan of heavenly bodies." (Ferdowsi).

It's seen in the above couplets in terms of praising the God almighty, Ferdowsi praises God as the absolute artisan of the universe. I have translated the Farsi term (گردان سپهر) in the above verses into revolving heaven, since the bygone days of Ferdowsi, medieval astrologists and people were believed the sky was spinning, on account of studying the movement of the stars, the terrestrial and celestial events.

The myth Mehr and its place in Iranian mythology

Accordingly, one of the classic myths revealed by the poems of Shahnameh is the myth of 'Mehr", which has a unique place in Persian poetry and prose. Moreover, the eloquent image of the Sun reflects the myth of Mehr in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh. In addition, Mehr myth has penetrated in the realm of mankind, thoughts, love, territories, language, and life itself (Anousheh & Nazila, 2015).

According to Nodooshan Eslami's analysis of Nizami Aruzi poetry, Ferdowsi respectfully calls the idol Mehr as an eminent being and Nodooshan claims it likely relates to Ferdowsi's wife, that she is Ferdowsi's idol of Mehr.

In Iranian mythology, Mithra (Mehr) was one of the earliest Iranian lords, the manifestation of awareness and enlightenment, and a mediator between the creatures and the creator. Moreover, in the ancient Zoroastrianism philosophy and beliefs, Mehr is the most significant deity. In the Zoroastrian tradition, Mehr is less important, being considered as a living soul of Ahura Mazda (the God).

Sun worship is clearly seen in the story of Fereydoun in Shahnameh. According to Abolqassem Khamneipur in his book Zarathustra: Myth – Message historians now believe that the ancient Persian empire, namely in Khorasan, they were not Zoroastrians but mainly "Mehr Parast," worshippers of the Mithraic cult. Avesta also claims that that Mehr and Sun are not the same in Zoroastrian and Avesta theology.

Regarding the idea of the anti-feminist character of Ferdowsi, I have studied a Farsi article which is written by Abolfazl Khatibi, who is a researcher in the academy of Persian language and literature in Iran. He pointed out that, although critiques of Ferdowsi's "anti-feminist" ideas have been inspired by the main Farsi verses, he wrote, it should be noted that except for the ancient Persian stories, Ferdowsi was inspired by other "Pahlavi" language sources, in composing the epic poems of Shahnameh. The sources including "Chihrdad"which is a source

written before Ferdowsi, and versified oral stories Likewise, Ferdowsi was entrusted with preserving and with being loyal to the original sources and contents of the stories (Khatibi, 2003). Additionally, although Shahnameh and its characters were created by Ferdowsi's literary creativity, Khatini believes that the negative opinions towards Ferdowsi in terms of "anti- feminist character" are not necessarily the attitude of Ferdowsi as the storyteller, as if he had the right to create heroes who had some negative notions towards women contrary to the traditional stories. On the contrary, "anti-feminism thoughts" expressed by some characters in Shahnameh come from traditional stories and are merely preserved through the literature and language of Ferdowsi (Hassanabadi, 2015).

Figure 2 shows the Farsi script of a Shahnameh, which held in the London Museum (Vedad, 2009). It demonstrates Farsi term of "Mehr" which is repeated frequently in Shahnameh, remarkably in the story of Bizhan and Manizheh.

بيمای مــــی تا یـکی داسـتان   ز دفـترث بـرخوانم از باسـتان

بر از چاره و مهر و نیرنگ و جنگ   همه از در مرد فرهنگ و سنگ

بدان سروین گفتم؛ ای مـاه روی   مرا امشب این داستان بازگوی

مرا گفت؛ گر چون ز من بشنوی   به شـعر آری از دفتـر پهـلوی

همت گویم و هـم بذیرم سـپاس   کنون بشـنو ای یار نیکی شناس؛

گروهی از بیت‌هایی که نشانی از بزرگی و زیبایی عشق و مهر میان فردوسی

نه ماه دوران بارداری وی بوده است و این گویای عشقی بزرگتر از بیژن و منیژه می‌باشد که در زیر این داستان پنهان مانده است. واژه هایی همچون مهربان، بت مهربان، مهربان یار، ماه خورشید چهر، سرو بن، ماه روی، بت مهر چهر، مهربان سرو و مهربان یار نیکی شناس که فردوسی برای همسر خویش به کار می‌برد نیز گویای همین عشق، مهر و بزرگ داشتن هستد. اگر برای سادگی در محاسبه بجای واپسین ماه‌های ۳۶۲ هق.، آغاز سال

بخش زیادی از شاهنامه‌ی فردوسی را در بر گرفته است.

این گونه نهاده ها که در شاهنامه فراوانند، می توانند الگوهای بسیار ارزشمندی برای انسانها و دنیایی بدون جنگ و خونریزی و سرشار از عشق، مهر و همبستگی باشند.

هرجا سخن از شاهنامه ی فردوسی و سروده های آنست، بی درنگ نام پهلوانهایی همچون رستم، زال، گیو و گودرز، بیژن، فرهاد و ... و همچنین

که لبرا بـدوزی ز بهـر گـزنـد   زنـآن را زبان هــم نمـــاند بیند

منیژه از این گفتار خام، دلگیر شد و با پرخاش به بیژن یادآوری کرد که همه تاج و تختش و نیز مهر پدر و خویشاوندان را از برای عشق به وی از دست داده است. بیژن از او پوزش خواست و راز انگشتری را برای او فاش کرد. منیژه باری دیگر نزد رستم رفت و تهمتن در یافت که بیژن همه چیز را برای

Figure 2 Farsi script of Bizhan and Manizheh story

Mehr and the Sun in Shahnameh

Mehr as an image of love, embed and inherited feminine virtue, myth, and its nature expresses the customs and traditions of the medieval Persian tribes. Put another way, the myth intermediates and interrelates the literature, folklore, and communal culture of the societies in that era (Ghobadi, 2009 cited in Anooshe, 2015). Mehr, as a myth in Shahnameh, demonstrates interpretations of love surrounding the reality of the stories of Shahnameh. Besides, Mehr, has been perpetuated into contemporary philosophy and human thought, mind, and language and belief, thus finding a new life. That's the secret of the permanence of the myth of Mehr (Ismailpour,1998).

Literature has always been known as a constant rich space for the growth of myth and symbolism. In literature, the myth becomes the primary core for the use of symbols, as if "mehr" embedded in the mythical literature. Occasionally, in stories of Shahnameh, myth and real, historical characters and incidents blend and lose their original form, becoming symbols (Sattari, 2008).

Accordingly, Anooshe stated, concerning the symbolism of the Sun and Mehr in Iran and the status of Mehr in Shahnameh, it is said that God almighty placed the Sun on a high level for the human being. Similarly, Mehr revealed in the Avesta era and on the inscriptions of the Achaemenid monuments as a goddess and as well in the Sanskrit language. It was believed the Sun is born from the belly of Mehr (Pourdawood, 2001, cited in anooshe, 2015).

Along with research in Iranian Mythology in 1983, stated the meaningful friendship and promises formed through the tradition of worshiping Mehr. Besides, initially, "Mehr" is the God of commitment and faith. In Iranian mythology, the divinity that has arisen for the Sun Goddess has been formed through the mythical status of Mehr (Iranian mythology, 2003: 67). There are many reasons why Mehr was separated from the Sun at the beginning. In old Avesta epigraphs, there are special yasht for Sun and Mehr, and on the Iranian calendar, on the eleventh day of each solar month, is named Khorshid and the 16th day of each month, is called "Mehrsht" which in Pahlavi language is "Mehrisht or Mehryasht. Moreover, Taghi Bahar, the

mythologist and Persian historian, believed that the two were separate myths, and over time, they became one. Based on his understanding of mythology, Mehr was born from a rock. Mehr went to war with the Sun, and after she won over the battle, rode on the Sun and faded away in heaven. Since then, Mehr became a unique character. The association between Mehr and Sun was unique as if Mehr remained the rays and light of the Sun and both have been lived long together (Myths of Iran, 1983: 82).

Figure 3 shows a unique image of the association of myth "Mehr" and the "Sun" in 309-379 CE era. It also presents the narrations regarding the birth of Goddess "Mehr". This image shows the coronation of king Ardashir II. He appears in the middle, receiving diadem from Shapur II. The Goddess "Mehr" is standing on the left side, who holds a Barsom (symbol of divine power) in his hands and stands on a lotus flower. "Mehr" emerges from a Lotus flower and crowned by a lightning Sun (the Sun, Khorshid-MehrSheid-Aftab).

Figure 3 The coronation of Ardashir in Taq-e Bostan in Iran. From Dynamosquito, Created: 8 June 2010. CC BY 4.0.

The status of mythical Mehr in the stories of Shahnameh and legends

Mousavi and Seyed Rasoul (2009) indicate that myth is the key feature of Shahnameh's literary design, by which Ferdowsi was delightfully able to create rhetorical, mystical, and metaphorical images. Different mythological images and names of Mehr, such as Khorshid-Khoor-MehrSheid-Hore Aftab in the Shahnameh, are based on the poetic vision of Shahnameh Ferdowsi expresses, which demonstrates the ritual of "mehr parast" and Mehr in ancient Iran. It is worth mentioning to say, all these names, are still in uses by Iranian.

Divinity of Mehr and Sun in Shahnameh

Considering the previous study of Mousavi and Seyed Rasoul (2009) regards to the manifestation of the divinity of Mehr and the Sun in Shahnameh. Findings have revealed, in Persian faith, Mehr was the representation of lightness, the goddess of righteousness, the saviour of human beings, insight, truth, and honesty. Moreover, that the Mehr linked to philosophy, notions, and thought has become resident in Shahnameh. On the other hand, mythical Mehr is derived from the traditional stories and historical events of Ferdowsi's era, and explores women's beliefs, and explains practices or natural phenomena (Myths of Iran, 1983). Such as the story of Zal and Rudabeh. Thus, Mehr has been shaped the forms of the literary imagination. As an example, the story of Zal and Rudabeh, shows the status of Simorgh, the mythical bird, who is a clear symbol of myth "Mehr", and plays a vital role in creating rhetorical images of Mehr and feminine virtue to raise Zāl.

The connotation of the Mehr and Khorshid (Sun)

In a book on Avesta, there is an exciting interpretation of Mehr. A legend says there was a mythos known as "Mehr" that gave birth to the Sun, and after giving birth, she decided to evaluate her goodness, the Sun. In so doing, the Sun did not withstand the Mehr and fell on the ground. Then Mehr offered her hand helped her to get up. This became a symbol that Mehr

and Sun had pledged allegiance. Hence, Mehr put a crown on the Sun, and since then, they both have had a loyal companion, which ended the connotation of the Khorshid, which means Sun. That's the tale of how the Sun appeared and light up the world (Moālem, 1383 cited in Anooshe,2015).

Rhetorical image of feminine virtue in the poems of Shahnameh

In the story of Zal and Rudabeh, Simorgh, the mythical bird plays a vital role in creating rhetorical images of Mehr and feminine virtue. Vahed Doost declares that as have been analysed, in Persian art the illustrations that have created based on the myth of Mehr, express figurative languages (Vahed Doost, 2008 cited in the collection of Shahnameh Articles and Ritual Research, 2013).

Accordingly, signs of beliefs, appeals, glorification and worship of Mehr and Khorshid (the Sun) is seen throughout Shahnameh, representing ancient beliefs and virtues. Amongst all the stories of Shahnameh, verses, comments, and interpreters of Shahnameh, the manifestation of Mehr and Sun in the story of Zal and Rudabeh is perhaps the most brilliant. The mythical bird of Shahnameh, the Simorgh, raised Zal in the peak of the Alborz Mountain, where the Sun rises nearby. Simorgh plays a stunning role in the birth of Rostam and his dominance over Esfandiyar. In fact, without Simorgh's Mehr, Zal would never have survived abandonment in the wild, nor would Rostam have been born. Considering Simorgh's attachmeny to the Sun, her connection with this heroic family becomes more meaningful. In Shahnameh regards to Simorgh, Ferdowsi says:

یکی کوه بُد، نامش البرز کوه

به خورشید نزدیک و دور از گروه

بدان جای سیمرغ را لانه بود

که آن خانه از خلق بیگانه بود

It says, once upon a time, there was a mountain called "Alborz," nearby the Sun and far from any human being. Simorgh's nest was located so high and out of sight (The revised version of Shahnameh by Dabirsiyaghi, 68).

Vahed Doost (2008) stated that Simorgh manifests the power of Mehr in Shahnameh. Some couplets of Shahnameh, directly manifest the meaning of Mehr and feminine virtue; however, according to the Shahnameh, it's based on the ritual of Mehr idol, sun worship. These Persian verses of the Zal and Rudabeh story indicate the presence of Mehr with a sense of affection.

به جانش از مهر گریان بدی *** ز بیم جداییش بریان بدی

(29/1)

کنون هفت سال است تا مهر من *** همی خون چکاند بدین چهر من

(25/3)

This Persian verse expresses the feeling of Simorgh after separation from Zal. The highlighted word Mehr is repeated two times in the couplet. It says, Simorgh suffered so much from separation, as if she was burning in fear of separation. In the second couplet Simorgh weeping says, it has been seven years, that tears and blood dripping from my face (Vahed Doost, 2008: 436).

Moreover, Dabirsiyaghi has mentioned that in the second verse above, the "blood" is a metaphor for "mehr."

Since the Sun illuminates the world, it is the candle of the universe. It is worth mentioning that the myth of Mehr has adopted a literary colour through imagery. Most similes of Mehr in Shahnameh are metaphorical and have adorned and beautified the human features of Shahnameh. Basically, In Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, the mythical language of Mehr becomes symbolic and metaphorical as the term "mehr" embody the two meaning of love and the Sun. Makvand (2015) Points out that Simorgh personifies the love and feminine virtue in Persian mythology. This mythical bird also has associated with the Sun; in this regard, she is called sunbird by some literary authors. Simorgh also is the goddess of love in Shahnameh with the title of the ruler bird of the era. In the same way, the appellation of Zal is defined as the Lord

of Mehr since Zal grew up in Simorgh's arms and appreciated her Mehr (Makvand, 2008 cited in the collection of Shahnameh Articles and Ritual Research, 2013).

The meaningful role of Ferdowsi's wife in the epic poem of Shahnameh

Following Eslami Nodooshan's comments on the role and insights of Ferdowsi's wife, Jamaluddin Haeri highlights that Ferdowsi's wife has played a significant and meaningful role in the creation of the epic poem of Shahnameh. Haeri emphasizes, at the beginning of the story of Bizhan and Manizheh, Ferdowsi using his poetry has narrated eloquently and repeatedly praises his wife's personality and virtue with titles such as kind idol, Sarvin, Mahrooye, Mehr idol, and Mehrban. Haeri has considered that since Ferdowsi's wife knew the Pahlavi language, she could have retold some stories from the Pahlavi language, becoming the source for Ferdowsi's Pahlavi stories. Haeri finds these poems expecially beautiful and meaningful, something he attributes to Ferdowsi beinging inspired by his wife, a praiseworthy and devoted figure of the myth Mehr. However, there is no record of the real name of Ferdowsi's wife, we know her only through him.

Love in Shahnameh by Mohammad Ali Eslami Nodooshan

Shahnameh has continued to live among the people of Persia and has remained a vital, present work through history. Shahrokh Meskub has credited this, on the one hand, to the love and passions of the Naqāls in the contemporary era, considering the scholarly point of views, and on the other hand through the attentions and critics of the writers such as Eslami Nodooshan, Shahrokh Meskub, Abdolhossein Zarinkub, Mojtaba Minavi, Mohammad Mokhtari, Mehdi Gharib, Jalal Khaleghi Motlagh, Mohammad Amin Riahi, and Mostafa Rahimi. They have been kept Shahnameh alive in the world of Iranians and Persians. Through an interview and discussion, Mohamad Sadeghi raised some questions with Eslami Nodooshan, considering the story of "Bijan and Manizheh." The reviews are shown as follows.

1. An introduction to Bizhan and Manizheh's story

In the introduction to Bizhan and Manizheh's story, Nodooshan Eslami has presented this story, the most delicate one, among other stories of the Shahnameh. In an abstract of his literary works, Nadoushan mentioned the opening verses of Bizhan and Manizheh's story that It was a terrifying night. The "Mehr" Idol, "Mehrban" sets the candle as the Sun, bright and burning. She inspired Ferdowsi, and he wrote the tale of Bizhan and Manizheh down. This is how the Shahnameh rises in the dark night at dawn.

Furthermore, Nadoushan has been identified what basically, Ferdowsi has been tried to express for "Mehr" in this story. In addition, Nadoushan emphasises Ferdowsi's world of thoughts and notions. In the sense of his Excellency, he refers to the existence of the themes of mortality, jealousy, love (Mehr) power, loyalty, and torture in the context of Bizhan and Manizheh's story.

Nodooshan continued the discussion; Shahnameh is a book of lives and talks about the love which gives meaning to life. The word love, of course, did not come from Persian sonnets, but instead, the term "Mehr" and "attachment" express the love and virtue in Persian poetry. Basically, and naturally, we are faced with love in Shahnameh extensively, considering both the participation of the body and the soul.

The most prominent examples in the ancient are Zal and Rudabeh, Bizhan and Manizheh, Tahmineh and Rostam and Katayoun, and Gashtasb.

It is very noteworthy, in all these cases, it's clearly seen that the woman takes the lead in looking for the desired man, who is able to give her the child she wishes for. To achieve this goal, women of Shahnameh seek to set the fire of "Mehr" inside the man.

Eslami Nodoushan stated: basically, the woman of Shahnameh believes that "the warrior man, would be the perfect man for her arms."

He added, there is a significant difference between the love of Shahnameh and the love of Persian sonnets such as Saadi and Hafiz. However, they originated and inspired by the Mehr is known in Shahnameh. The presence of obstacles in the way of love is a common point that is seen in all poems, regardless of the poets and era they have lived. However, Nodooshan

declares love in Shahnameh flourishes through the obstacles and barriers were removed, and love reunited. While, in sonnets of Saadi and Hafiz in the Islamic era, due to restrictions, love lasts in the long run.

Mystical poetry expresses mystical thoughts, demonstrate the man (a creature) who detached from the earth belongings, and sought refuge in heaven to find a way for the problems. In addition, the man realizes that he is being captivated by social and ideological constraints and has to find a horizon where he can breathe freely. Therefore, seeking this ambition in the mysticism. Furthermore, man becomes a "demanding," and often "unattainable" creature, and in the destiny, his fate is going as if the bitter feeling never leave the man alone.

As we see, the story of Bizhan and Manizheh employs several natures and moralities of human beings; masculinity, femininity, and resistance, Gorgin's jealousy, Manizheh's loyalty, and eventually, after passing through the darkness, the light shines.

There is a couplet Shahnameh which says:

There is often hope in despair; the end of the night would be light.

<div dir="rtl">

در نومیدی بسی امید است

پایان شب سیه سپید است

</div>

In regards to women and feminine virtue in Shahnameh, some critics have been excessively influenced by Sudabeh's story. Sudabeh is an infamous woman, mainly because she tried, by deception, to seduce Siavash, her stepson, the son of Kavus. Due to Sudabeh's character, and her conspiracies and evil thoughts, Ferdowsi composed a couplet as a caption for her. Here is the Farsi couplet and the English translation:

<div dir="rtl">

زن و اژدها هر دو در خاک به

جهان پاک ازین هر دو ناپاک به

</div>

This couplet says: the women and the demon deserve to be buried; thus, the earth would be purified from these evils. This verse of Shahnameh is so well-known and the Iranian who

knows Ferdowsi as an anti-feminist character, judge Ferdowsi based on this verse regarding Sudabeh.

Shahnameh has placed high-minded women who are proud of being an Iranian woman. Self-sacrifice, dignity, solidity, purity, and loyalty are natural to them as if they were inherent in the female nature. Turanian women, Afrasiab's daughters, Farangis, and Jaryreh, as they mingle with Iranians, have manifested the most beautiful feminine spirit.

Nodooshan has praised that love (Mehr) in Shahnameh differs from love in other Persian Sonnets. He adored "mehr" alike a pure spring water flowing through Shahnameh. It flows not in favor of vanity, laches, instinct, or lust, nonetheless, for humanism, courtesy, warrior considerations. Roudabeh, Tahmineh, and Manizheh didn't begin to experience feelings of love towards their man unless they realized the existential power of Mehr in their man.

Mohamad Rabiei believes, the supreme feminine virtue is not only belonged to Iranian women of Shahnameh. Once a woman enters the stories of Shahnameh, she becomes a respectable, manifested personality. Women in other poet's masterpieces such as Nizami Ganjavi, Amir Khosrow, Jami and others, have no equality with women in the Shahnameh.

Nodooshan articulated that he has elaborated on the feminine and woman of Shahnameh in another context, such as Iran and Greece, in the ancient context.

Women of Shahnameh go hand in hand with their men in the battle against evil. Patient and diligent, they go on to the victory of good. Some of them are non-Persian women; however, as Iranian wives, they inherent Iranian nature. Farangis, Jaryreh, and Manizheh, the mother of Siavash, are Turanian. Sindokht and Roudabeh are from Kabul, and Katayoon is from Rome. The love, affection, and loyalty in the tale of "Bizhan and Manizheh" has a precious and pleasant aroma. Since Bizhan was imprisoned in the well, Manizheh also went through a venturesome path. She drove back from her family and her royal blissful life. She endures intolerance and feeds Bizhan, even though she was suffering from her tough and venturous life. Besides, Mehr, love, and loyalty mean life to her. However, not in all stories, it lasts. In the story of "Rostam and Sohrab," Gordafarid swiftly comes into the story, love between her and Sohrab builds, winds up, and then it disappears.

Sadeghi asked Nodooshan about a Farsi couplet in that story says;

ز گفتار او مبتلا شد دلش بر افروخت کنج بلا شد دلش

The couplet demonstrates that Sohrab was captivated in the Mehr that Gordafarid built. It has a devastating effect on Sohrab. The couplet says, his heart burns in her love with anguish. "Gordafarid does not respond to his Mehr because she knows Sohrab is Turanian, non-Iranian. She loves him, and she thinks, what if this young man was Iranian! In this story, Gordafarid's patriotism and zeal to Iran, overcomes the love lit up. The story rests on the premise that fatherland is beyond everything, even love! Therefore, this is how Gordafarid's love, lights, shines, and disappears." Nodooshan stated. It is the demonstration of Mehr.

2. The story of Mehr idol

"The final question is about the 'Mehr idol.' Is it possible to say with certainty that it refers to Ferdowsi's wife? I would like to know if he was mentioned the idol in other Shahnameh stories too? It seems Ferdowsi has been acquainted with the stories of the ancient period. Therefore, it is expected, been mentioned elsewhere!" Sadeghi asked. Nodooshan believes, "It cannot be said with certainty whether or not the idol Mehr is Ferdowsi's wife at the prelude of Bizhan and Manizheh story. But this assumption prevails over other presumptions. In the ancient culture, it was not prevalent to reminisce the lady of the house, among others and Ferdowsi, of course, had a wife. In the Shahnameh, he refers to a boy who has died at a young age. In addition, Nizami Aruzi poetry, recalls the daughter of Ferdowsi, the apple of her father's eye. Considering that in Ferdowsi's era it was not typical to speak about the lady of the house, Ferdowsi, calls his wife the idol Mehr with respectful and kind tone in the way to demonstrate that she is an eminent being, by his side, who has a precious feminine virtue. While Bizhan and Manizheh tale generated, Ferdowsi was in his youth. Hence, it would not go beyond the mind, that, the terrifying night, "mehr" Idol and "mehrban" is real and tangible and is not generated by his imagination."

Leila Erfaniyan has revealed, in "Rudabeh and Sudabeh: White and Black Women in Shahnameh," Ferdowsi juxtaposes good and bad deeds with light and darkness in the stories of Shahnameh. Ferdowsi invites readers to welcome the good and elude the evil through the

description of the mannerism, conduct, and fate of the book characters. Women are deemed so important in Ferdowsi's opinion; throughout Shahnameh, benevolent, vicious, villainous, and honourable women such as Rudabeh and Sudabeh are noticeable. A rational analysis of the lexis which describes the features of these women in terms of demeanour and destiny that leads researchers to determine that Rudabeh is a figure who characterizes values and feminine virtues. At the same time, Sudabeh is a lady with a tarnished reputation. Also, their names look similar morphologically; however, they imply what their characters are considering their Persian definitions (Qonsuli & Varzeshi, 2018). Despite Qonsuli & Varzeshi, regarding the meanings of Sudabeh and Rudabeh, there are different meanings.

According to Abadis literary lexicons and Parsi wiki, "Sudabeh" derived from "Sudaveh", "Sutapak" and "Sutapiyeh" in Pahlavi language which in Pahlavi language means a girl who resembles a pure water and gives meaning to the life. However, in a Farsi source Moghadam (2014) stated, at the end of the story of Sudabeh and Siavash, Sudabeh left a bitter end to this literary work of Ferdowsi. Regarding the feminine virtue of women of Shahnameh, reconsidering "Mehr" I conducted an interview with Hamid Rahmanian, the most recognized Iranian multi-disciplinary artist of traditional Persian art. Rahmanian (2020) states regarding "Mehr" regardless the story among Sudabeh and Siavash, on another part of her life she demonstrates Mehr at the time, her husband kay Kavus, condemned to jail by Sudabeh's father, who is the king of Hamavaran. she doesn't leave her husband alone and Sudabeh's father locked her in jail beside her husband, Kay Kavus.

Besides, according to Dehkhoda Dictionary, Rudabeh originally is a Pahlavi name and has two meanings; Paradise and shining child. Rudābeh consists of two parts; "Rud" and "āb", "Rud" means child and "āb" means shining.

Rudabeh, who takes steps along the road of righteousness and decency, becomes the mother of the most reputable strong warrior man in Shahnameh, named Rostam. Additionally, there is no demise for Rudabeh in the whole book. On the other hand, Sudabeh, a mother whose son ascends to the throne, takes the evil path. She plans to seduce Siavash; however, she fails and,

eventually, plans Siavash's death, as he is supposed to inherit his father's throne and become the king (Qonsuli & Varzeshi, 2018).

Regarding the influence of Mehr myth on Ferdowsi poetry, Nikoei conducted investigations into the faith and religion of Mehr in ancient era based on several researches that are authentic and noteworthy, such as; second international congress of Mehr, in 2006, research in the history of the Mithraism religion, written by Razi and Behjat in 2002 and a novel research on the origins of Mehr religion. Nikoei (2016) indicated, the ancient beliefs of Iranian, refers to the birth of Mehr. In Iranian stories, different narrations concerning the manifestation, and birth of Mehr, are mentioned:

On a black cold night, Mehr was born from inside a stone in a shallow cave among the Alborz mountains. Some people believed that the birth from the rock is a metaphor for the light from the collision of two rocks. Mitra (Mehr) in the time of birth, holds a sphere in her hand and holds Zodiac on another hand. Another narration reveals, Anahita, the fertility goddess, as a virgin, gives birth to her child, Mehr in a cave in Alborz mountains. In this narration, it is said there were three shepherds who witnessed Mehr birth in the cave. After giving birth, Anahita puts her Mehr on the lotus flower leaf. While, another legend states, that Mehr is born from a lotus flower on a blue pond which is belonging to the goddess, Anahita. It is believed, the manifestation of Mehr from the lotus flower has been revealed in some of the statues and icons. (Bahar, 1996 cited in Nikoei 2016).

The birth of Mehr

Concerning the above different narrations, the first story is emphasised in most sources; it is alleged, a mysterious power is thrown the Mehr out of a rock to the world; Mitra (Mehr) is completely naked and has raised her hand while holds a dagger and a torch. She is the child of bright and virtuous and is born from the heart of a stone, which gave birth to Mehr (Razi, 2002). However, Razi states, it should be considered that no statue has been found regards Mehr's birth in Iran, so far. There's only one monument which demonstrates the specifications

of Mehr's manifestation and birth, that is seen in Ahura Mazda's Kermanshah Bostan Arch at the scene of Ardeshir's coronation. It can be seen that the Mehr is standing on the lotus flower while holding a barsom and wearing a crown ornate by rays of the light.

Some believe that Nahid, Mitra's mother, was fertilized in water by the seed of Zarathustra. The seed was kept in the water of the Lake Hamun, thus, Mehr must have come out of that seed. The symbols of love develop a precious association with water, like the conception of the fertilization of oysters and pearls in water. So, some of Mehr worshipers believe, Mehr was delivered from a pearl inner an oyster which was kept inside a lotus flower floating on a pond. Hence, the lotus and the oyster are the two prominent symbols of the Mehr religion. Instead, some had notions, that Mehr was not born in water, but, in fire. This matter follows the same notions that old Persian who have Zoroastrianism religion, believe fire was an icon of love, purity and truth. Zoroastrian consider fire as a witness, since, Mithra is the goddess of justice and judgment. consequently, it is thoroughly allied to fire (Rostampour, 2003 cited in the origins of Mehr religion).

The story of Mehr and the Yalda night

Mehr is the Zoroastrian Angelic Divinity of covenant, light, and oath. Apart from how Mehr was born, the time of Mehr's birth is noteworthy, as well. As the birth of Mehr is an astronomical event, occurred one night, that so-called night is "Yalda", which has a history of several millennia in Iran. December 21 has the shortest day and the longest night of the year, however, immediately, at the beginning of January, days gradually will be longer and the nights, shorter. Therefore, this is how the nature of Yalda, formed which means the birth of the invincible sun, the goddess of Mehr.

Biruni (1942) believes, Yalda uncovers, the association of sun and the myth of Mehr, that overcomes the darkness and grows the integrity. The day of the sun, and the night of Mehr which is very cherished by the Iranians, and it has been considered the biggest celebration, which is the manifestation of Mehr and sun (Razi, 1992).

Mehr have mercy upon the soul after death. Her golden power crushes the evil and repulses the destructive spirit of all the supernatural evil goddess. She fights on white horses .In some verses of Shahnameh, the sun and Mehr, is portrayed holding a battle shield (Gaiman, 2002 the history of the Mithraism religion). In this regard Ferdowsi says;

<div dir="rtl">

چو خورشید زرین سپر بر گرفت   شب تیره زو دست بر سر گرفت

بینداخت پیراهن مشک زنگ   چو یاقوت شد مهر چهرش به رنگ

</div>

It says, as soon as the sun held the golden shield, the dark night covers his face with his hands, and threw down his black chador, then the face of the night became the colour of ruby (Gaiman, 2002).

Research Problems

How can the tradition of Naqqāli be applied to an interactive retelling of the stories of women from Shahnameh?

How can those stories be retold to focus on their relevance to modern women, especially Iranian women?

Considering Ferdowsi's Shahnameh was written in Persian the late 10th and early 11th centuries, what does a modern, interactive, English-language adaptation of his work look like?

Methodology

Ferdowsi's masterpiece, Shahnameh, has long been a source and inspiration for different kinds of arts; one of them is the live performance of Shahnameh's verses, wherein different approaches to the art of storytelling resulted in the formation of two types of traditional performing arts. The first concept is "Shahnameh-Khani," referring to singing the exact verses of Shahnameh from memory or the book without any changes. Second, Naqqāli of Shahnameh, traditional form of Iranian storytelling which is informal and intimate and can include music, art, and simple props to retell stories. Naqqāli refers to narrating the stories of Shahnameh using a unique or personal tone, feelings, expression, gestures, props and

movement. Although both are traditional performance styles, they have a noticeable difference in the theme of the poems, accompaniment or non-accompaniment of music and the expression of the narrators and singers (Jahandideh & Khaefi, 2017). Also, Jahandideh and Khaefi (2017) state there is a lot of evidence, such as Iranologists' statements, travellers' reports, and Iranian kings' considerations, that clarify the importance of Shahnameh Khani and Naqqāli. Shahnameh-Khani and Naqqali of Shahnameh have long had a prominent position in Persia. Recently, simpler modern forms of Shahnameh-Khani, have been seen. It includes the adaptation of cartoon, arts, such as music, crafts, paintings, and the voice of the narrator. Consequently, by applying multimedia sources, they perform the arts arisen from Shahnameh (Jahandideh & Khaefi, 2017).

Studies have shown that often previously scholars have been adopted as a descriptive approach to study women's status in Shahnameh. Some previous studies have based their research criteria on investigating the appropriate and inappropriate morals of women in the Shahnameh. Other scholarly articles investigate faithful women of Shahnameh. Some authors state that descriptive methods have been used to assess the status of women in the epic literature by analysing the context of stories. Shahnameh has been adapted and represented through different ways of digital multimedia such as exhibitions and collections. In this context, the heritage organization offers extensive multimedia exhibitions including a wide range of collections of paintings, art crafts, and poems.

This study has deployed a practice-based method using modern interactive software and tried to apply the principles of Naqqāli. The study employed English and Farsi language scholarship in development of the exegesis component. This exegesis covers critical points of other works from the past and present to demonstrate how they influenced the Naqqāli game performance. It also analyses the strengths, weaknesses and limitations faced in the course of developing the game. Additional academic, creative, and popular sources have used to comment on research findings.

As Modaberi and Sarvari (1387) stated, narrative structure is literary elements defined as the fundamental outline that is being presented to a reader, listener, or viewer. The narrative text structures are the plot and the setting. Elements of the setting include the culture of the context, the historical period, geography and location and time of the story.

This study utilised the "open souece" Twine platform: a visual creative environment for telling interactive stories. There is no need to write complicated code to create a simple section in Twine, and the Twine visual interface is user friendly. However, advanced Twine use is complicated by inconsistencies in the commands and syntax provided on different websites and Twine Forums. Twine enables to extend stories with variables, images, sound, GIF, CSS, and JavaScript when required. Crucially, the story publishes directly to HTML and can demonstrate the project nearly anywhere.

Several sources on the Internet were studied and consequently faced a quite high number of errors initially. Like any software tool or platform, learning the right syntax is crucial. At the time of developing the game for this study, there are two versions, Twine 1 and Twine 2. Also, it is essential to know that story formats are separate from the Twine editor, which determine the code to add conditional logic, display effects, and other interactivities. Developing a Twine story is limited to Harlowe, Sugar Cube, and Snowman story formats. This study did not apply Snowman since it is a format intended for programmers who have experience with JavaScript development. After investigation and referring to the Twin Wiki, this study employed Twine 2 and Harlowe, which is the default story format for Twine 2 to get the best out of the latest version. Twine 2 interface options and the markup syntax enable linking from one passage to another. Each passage can represent a single scene, prop, or action by the Naqqāli. Thus, it can resemble Naqqāli. **Table 1** shows the features of Twine 2.

Table 1 Twine 2 Features

Features	Theme	Coding	Programming	License	OS	Publish	Multimedia	Developed Year
Twine 2	Nonlinear stories	HTML5 JavaScript CSS	Code-free	Open-source Software	Mac Linux Windows	Publish to HTML	Music Sound Colour Graphic Images	2009

One of the most crucial tags in telling an interactive story is <img>. This study has applied this tag to develop the appearance of two Shahnameh stories. Then the plots and narration could finally have started viewing like a visual story, similar to the use of patintings and props in traditional Naqqāli. The tag <img> serves three primary purposes in developing the stories, including illustrations, background images, and GIF animations. Twine software-enabled story runs in a web browser and therefore any format that the browser supports can be displayed. However, only JPEG and GIF formats imported and referred using this syntax "[img[image name]]" and make images link to other passages using the Harlowe syntax "[img[image name][Passage name]]".

As of the latest version available, Twine 2 cannot embed multimedia into a story. So, some syntax has applied as follows:

<img src="the URL of an image" width="500" height="300" alt="Two foxes">

By the same way, the syntax for adding video and sound effects have been considered as follows:

<video src="the URL of video" width="640" height="480">

<audio src="the URL of sound effect" autoplay>

The width and height part of the code controls the size of an image or video on the page.

Similar to an HTML element <video>, it ends with </video> indicating a closing tag. In that sense, images, sound and hypertext are not diminished in this work. This is how the study has added visual text, Gifs and images to the Twine game to create a digital Naqqāli.

Walsh (2011) stated the plot of a narrative section is compelling because, they are elements which immensely relates the reader to the structure of the story (Walsh, 2011). Besides, ALLAMI & HEIDARI (2017) indicated, based on narratology theory, building the structure of a story has basics elements which make the reader interact into the story. Components in the narrative include the characters, the scenery, the background, the plot, and the purpose. These essential elements maintain the story flows well and allows the theme of the story to develop in a consistent way that the reader can follow (Walsh, 2011). In narratology terms, Naqqāli operates as a multi-level narrative, and its storytelling implicates the chemistry of different communicative levels which are being presented to the audience (Modaberi and Sarvari, 2008). **Figure 4** shows that Ghaemi (2017) suggests a narrative graphic based on similarities of Naqqāli and narratology theory.
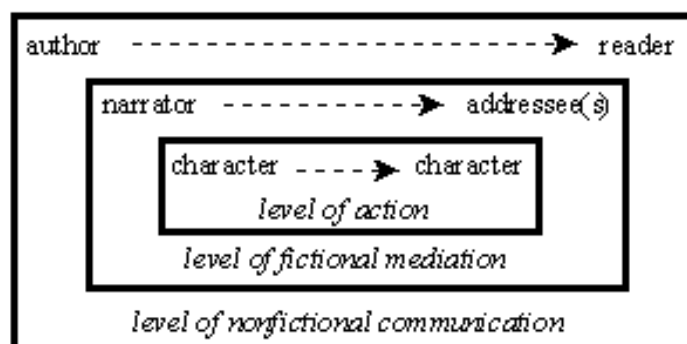

Figure 4 A narrative graphic based on similarities of Naqqāli and narratology theory.

Narratology definitions of storytelling structure, identify two main sections: the content of a story and the presentation of the story. The two stories adapted from Shahnameh for this study are the story of "Zal and Rudabeh" and "Bizhan and Manizheh. Considering the nature of Shahnameh' stories and the nature of Naqqāli, the Twine game implemented the linear storytelling. However, as part of the *fabula* of these stories a few nonlinear passages were planned and implemented. Naqqāli is a way of traditional staging and performing, with differences between performances but not within a given perfoemance. Digital Naqqāli is built

using mostly linear story model, rather than the multiple ending scenes common in interactive fiction (IF). Several Farsi sources of and about Shahnameh were reviewed to assess and plot out a cohesive linear story. Once a Farsi plot was decided upon, due to culture difference, some concepts and definitions could not translate well into English. In this regard, the study tried to consider the principles of Naqqāli to choose the best storytelling lexicons. In particular, reviewing a few other English translations of the stories was practical and useful.

Instead of trying to keep Ferdowsi's poetic style, following the prose storytelling model uses in other translations was useful. Thus, gradually, an English-language adaptation of the stories formed, applying English terms for translation as close as to the Farsi meaning as possible.

Considering the nature of Naqqāli, third-person point of view has used consistently in this study as the storyteller (or Naqqāl), is not present as a character in the story. The Naqqāl, as a traditional artist on the stage, interprets the source to express tone, feelings, expressions, gestures and movements to the audience, illustrating literary texts or poems. Thus, the role of the Naqqāl is filled by the interaction between the player and the narrative game. Therefore, this study applied traditional Iranian illustrations, Persian miniature paintings, classical Persian music and Iranian folk songs to create a digital transformation of Naqqāli.

This study has applied public-domain music made using two popular ancient Persian instruments; "Daf" and "Ney", which existed before the rise of Islam. The term "Daf" (Persian: دف), Persian frame drum, has been transformed from the Pahlavi name "Dap". This instrument has been popular since the time of Pahlavi (ancient Iranian language) and Ferdowsi. It is also used in religious and traditional ceremonies as a spiritual instrument. This ancient historical instrument has been played in Iran chiefly by women. Layne Redmond, a historian, mythologist and drummer, wrote When the Drummers Were Women: A Spiritual History of Rhythm which presents an empowering narrative history of Dap, the hand-held Drum of the ancient Goddess and civilisation. According to Daf Wikiwand, an antique image of Dap has been found in the stonecutting of Taq-e-Bostan in Iran. M. Arthur Christensen, Danish orientalist and scholar of Iranian philology and folklore, documented this image. It is named, large cave, hunting scene 2 which relates to 590 CE–628 CE, the Sasanian king era. I have

translated a summary from Farsi to English language, which analyses the Musical instruments that carved on the arch of Taq-e Bostan in Iran. Such as, Ney and Daf. The Pdf file which is the Farsi source, is available in Appendix.

Figure 5 shows, on the right and left wall of the arch, there is a picture of the king's hunting scene, measuring 3.8 X 5.7 meters. From the time of Cyrus, the Great to the end of Sassanid period, hunting was one of the most favourite activities of Iranian kings. The king stands with bow and arrow in hand while being serenaded by female musicians. In the next scene, another boat carries female harpists and shows the king has killed two large boars. The translation.is as follows:

In the bottom row of the deer hunting scene, a third person from the left plays a special percussion that is very interesting. The shape of this instrument, unlike other percussion instruments, is a drum that is narrow in the middle and is wide on both sides. The instrument was fastened horizontally to the waist so, the musicians could easily play on both sides. Most likely, it is the same as tambourine. On the right side of the hunting scene, six musicians in two rows are seen. Three people sitting and three people standing. Among the three musicians who are sitting, the second person plays "Ney" and among the musicians who are standing, from the left side, the first and second person also plays Ney. In the group of musicians, the second person from left holds a rectangular hand drum and the shape of the hands of the musicians represents that it is probably a kind of Daf. This type of Daf, is rectangular and is still common in parts of Egypt. Ferdowsi and other early Persian poets have included this instrument in their literary works. This instrument is the same as it was common in Pahlavi era.
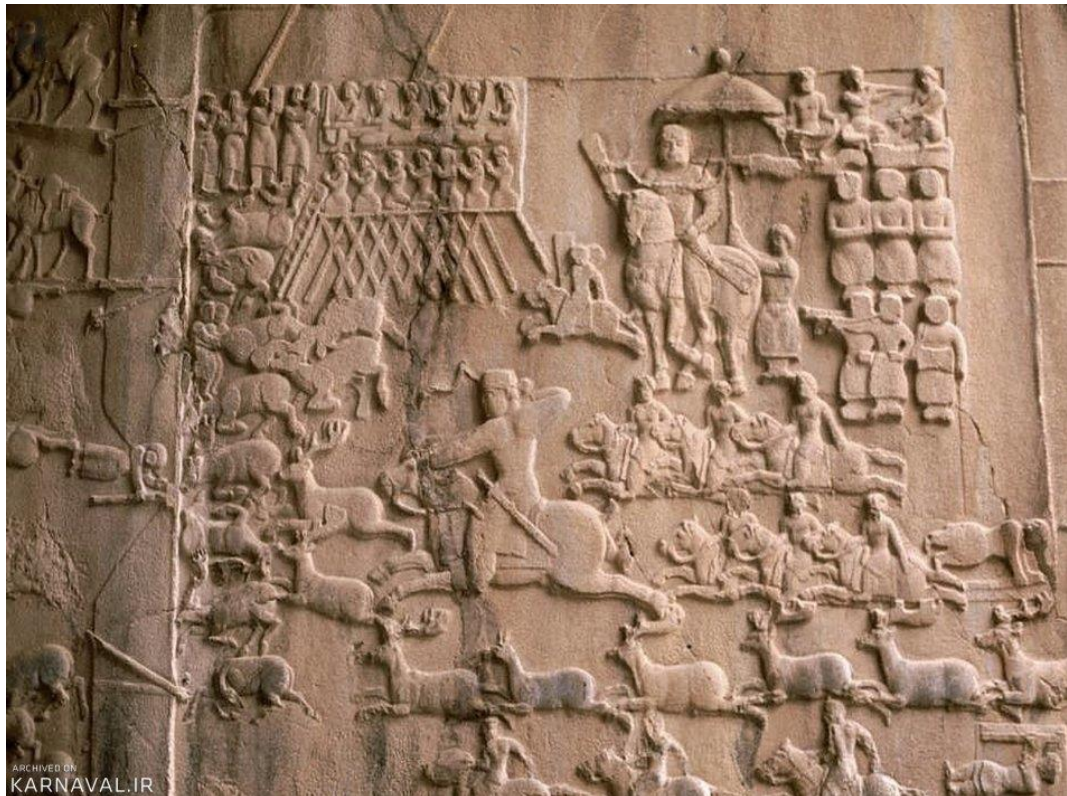
Figure 5 Large cave, hunting scene 2, stonecutting which relates to 590 CE–628 CE, the Sasanian king era. This image documented by M. Arthur Christensen.

Another popular ancient Persian instrument is "Ney" or "Nay" (Persian: نی / نای), an end-blown flute. The Ney has been played for 4,500–5,000 years, and is one of the oldest musical instruments in Iran. Besides, in Rumi's Mathnavi, (Persian: مثنوی معنوی meaning "The Spiritual Couplets,") there are verses that present Ney as the ideal instrument of the human soul. Opening verses in Farsi are shown as follows:

بشنو این نی چون شکایت می‌کند

از جداییها حکایت می‌کند

This opening verse of Mathnavi says: "come and listen to the Ney, hear what it means and flows with the rhythm. Ney narrates separation". Such as the separation of Zāl and Simorgh (Mirhashemi, 2016).

These findings and explanations about Dap and Ney, were applied in this study to demonstrate the dramatic performance of Naqqāl, express the tone, feelings, and movements to the audience. Recordings of these instruments, Daf and Ney, validate the state of narration of the verses, instead of the traditional musical performance by the Naqqāl.

Once audio fles of Daf and Ney music were picked, the study applied open-source software "Audacity" audio editor. The features of Audacity enabled the cutting, mixing, and splicing of the audio files. Moreover, it includes numerous effects and provides the ability to change the speed or the pitch of an audio file. This study has employed and edited 48 audio files of Ney and Daf, providing the short musical clips required to nest into the passages of the Twine game. In this regard, the editing of audio files was based on the feeling of the character, event, and the duration of the plot in each brief passage.

As the first impression in the background of the story of Bizhan and Manizheh, the study carried a dramatic scene to open the story with. The developed persona of a woman (Manizheh) having a traditional Persian instrument, next to Bizhan and playing music in the background. This portrays the strength, skill and confidence of a woman of Shahnameh. This study aimed to create short-animated Gifs, to demonstrates a few key characters in the stories. However, the animated Gifs created with the free tools were not good enough to include them in the final version of my Twines. In this study, problems and limitations affected the practical project (the Twine narrative game), and the exegesis. Considering that epic poems of Shahnameh consists of couplets, lack of English language proficiency affected my literary translation of the verses of Shahnameh from Persian to English. However, poetry can be translated. The translator interprets the work in a language based on what originally is written. The translator uses indirect language, phrases, metaphors and myths, each in its practical way. Then it depends on the translator's culture and literature on how to convey the translated poems.

This study primarily aimed to convey an appropriate translation of the verses into prose form. It was difficult to adopt the proper literary terms, words and phrases to express the most authentic interpretation possible. Consequently, this study took narrative storytelling to convey the two stories of Shahnameh. As a second language English speaker, it was quite

challenging looking up English terms and phrases to define the meanings, cultures and myths which are hidden in the Farsi verses of Shahnameh stories. Considering Shahnameh is written in early new Persian language, it was time-consuming to adopt modern English words. In this study, I have tried to practise the best English terms to represent the stories of Shahnameh in the form of digital Naqqāli.

Another primary source of uncertainty was the shortage of English academic publications and sources on Mehr as feminine virtue. Also, there are a few academic sources regarding Mehr. In some cases, providing and analysing data was hard, because I wasn't able to cite from the primary source. There were instances when authors stated their point of view and referred to a book I could not access.

Furthermore, having developed the stories in Twine 2, the study faced issues with nesting the codes to run the commands. At the time of developing the game, it was confusing to know that story formats are separate from the Twine editor.

Achievements

Having developed my research through the stories of Shahnameh, I have gained valuable knowledge and findings from studying various numbers of papers in terms of different stories and the characters of Shahnameh, specifically, studying women of Shahnameh. Also, in terms of identifying the status of women of Shahnameh, I explored different critical points of view of Persian literary authors, critiques, and interviews, which I gained a better sense of relationships between the women characters of Shahnameh. Women in Shahnameh play a limited role, however vital, and possessing and expressing love in various theme in the stories to demonstrate feminine love. Having reviewed Persian studies conducted on feminine virtue, the mysterious concept of Mehr unravelled to me. As it's mentioned in the literature review, Mehr in Shahnameh defines as the Goddess of inner light and tenderness. I found out that white and black women of Shahnameh, Roudabeh, and Sudabeh, revealing the intercultural concept of the society of that era and Ferdowsi's view of the role of the women, should be studied with respect to the Ferdowsi's period. Although other scholars have identified appreciated thoughts and ideas, excluding scholarly studies, I have considered non-scholarly sources, some famous author's interviews and critiques, regarding the status of women of Shahnameh. The combination of findings provides support that Ferdowsi cannot be considered misogynist for addressing a very few women in some verses, and his literature and poetry don't reveal anti-women thoughts.

This study engaged me in an unexpected finding, in particular, concerning the wife of Ferdowsi. However, her real name is unknown, I firmly state she is the primary source of Mehr and feminine virtue and plays a vital role in creating beautiful stories of Shahnameh. As I have explained in the literature review, Ferdowsi started the opening verses of the story of Bizhan and Manizheh, by praising and admiring his wife and in particular, in the verses he clearly expresses the status of that dark night, and how his wife inspired him to start writing the story of Bizhan and Manizheh. Therefore, I believe Mehr, as feminine virtue embedded in love, demonstrates precious virtue of the women characters of Shahnameh.

I have carried the women characters of Shahnameh by utilising twine software, I developed the persona of a woman (Manizheh) having traditional Persian instrument, next to her beloved (Bizhan) and playing music in the background as the first impression; thus, the reader of the story will realise how a woman of Shahnameh appearance and manner could be Portrayed. I have demonstrated the feasibility of a modern Naqqāli in the digital era for the new generation. Turning the two literary arts utilising suitable twine software, is the value of my work to other scholars and as well as the general public. Similarly, noticeable use of English and new media, communicate among nations and cultures.

This study aims to develop a narrative video game, using modern interactive tools, and applying the principles of Naqqāli, a traditional form of Iranian storytelling with a single performer. Additionally, the main valuable achievement for me is how I attempted to learn to apply the Twine software to develop and demonstrate the two stories of Shahnameh. Naqqāli is a single perform, informal and intimate, but is never fully staged. The narrative game is employed in these techniques of music, art, and simple props to retell stories exploring womanhood and the complex concept of "Mehr," in an interactive, English-language adaptation of selected stories from Ferdowsi's Shahnameh. It is a success, although I didn't have any background knowledge or fundamental principles of programming. While I faced further problems, such as lack of HTML and CSS knowledge; however, this weakness was an excellent opportunity for me to learn the basic principles of CSS and HTML. I have learned how to write simple basic commands, and it helped me with troubleshooting; as an example, for adding music or images, I used to search to find the right commands to run. Sometimes, it could fail due to using the wrong CSS tags or elements, and I was able to troubleshoot. Furthermore, the nature of CSS saves a lot of works. Custom CSS and HTML taught me the interactive experience to improve user experience.

I would say that another attainment is, this research resulted in me more confident and the improvement of self-study. Thus, its impact on my further goal is significant and helpful. I hope to advance this skill further to help me to achieve more knowledge embed various multimedia to develop of my narrative twine game. Besides, I was very interested in making

a short-animated Gif or characters, and I took different challenges. Meanwhile, I put lots of time and effort into learning from watching tutorials of those applications and tools which don't need any programming. I gained knowledge and some skills which would have a great impact on my further achievements. However, unfortunately, the animated gifs I was able to create with the free tools I found were not good enough to include them in the final version of my Twines.

Furthermore, considering Ferdowsi's Shahnameh was written in Early New Persian I made my best effort and time to adopt the best English synonyms for Persian poetic words to demonstrate a modern, interactive translation of Ferdowsi's literature in that millennium. However, Doostkhah (2001) states that studies and efforts have been shown that Shahnameh was written in Early New Persian, but efforts have not ended to make clear how many sources Ferdowsi inspired, except, the certain written literary works such as Nāme-ye bāstān, Nāme-ye-khosravān, Nāme-ye-pahlavi, Shahnameh of Abu Mansur and Abd-al-Razzāq. Also, it is not clear whether Ferdowsi inspired by other oral literature and stories among people, or not (Doostkhah, 2001). I admire translation since it allows literature and culture to travel across generations and cultures. Consequently, I acquainted an excellent range of literary vocabularies. In this case, I reviewed some notable Persian articles and sources which have been published in Iran. In order to understand and interpret a Farsi word of the verses of Shahnameh, I reviewed a website which is called "Ganjoor" and to realise the meaning of a Farsi term, I read through other people's comments, critiques and suggestions, and I tried to consider the comments of those users who interprets the verses of Shahnameh and have been analysed the terms, and metaphors based on their literary knowledge. Considering I haven't trained as interpreter or literary translator, I tried my best to use the right terms. Besides as mentioned in the literature review, I achieved unexpected findings that unfolded the origins of myths, Mehr, and the sun. I have studied a number of Farsi sources, and different narrations regard to the manifestation of myth Mehr and the sun. All the new terms and findings considering the strong relationship between Mehr and Sun have been reported in the literature review and the glossary of terms, such as "Yasht" and "Barsom".

I hope my research has a considerable impact and academic value for readers to reveal the literary worth of the Persian epic poem of Shahnameh and the value of traditional Naqqāli. Moreover, it is a worth value experience I have acquired, applying audio, images and using formatting tags for creating myths, folktales, stories, and literary treasures in the form of digital text, using twine software as a digital technology to create the first comprehensive digital Naqqāli. I hope the project I have developed, could provide a rationale for Persian culture and literature in the digital era. However, more research and skills on this topic needs to be undertaken in future, to preserve traditional values which transmitted by our literary texts and poems.

Conclusion

This study set out to develop a narrative video game, using modern interactive tools, and applying the principles of Naqqāli. In this investigation, I aimed to demonstrate digital Naqqāli reconsidering "Mehr," a uniquely Persian notion of feminine virtue. This practice-based study tried retelling the stories of Shahnameh by taking a descriptive-discursive, content analysis approach, and analysing Persian terms and literary verses.

This study has shown a significant finding concerning the term "Mehr" and feminine virtue, primarily, Ferdowsi's depiction of his wife in the opening Farsi verses of the story of Bizhan and Manizheh, a story which indicates the high status of women in Shahnameh. On the same verses, Ferdowsi praises his wife calling her Mehr idol, and Mehrban. He asks her to retell the story from Pahlavi language and asks her, bless him by her own Mehr (Bizhan & Manizheh story, Shahnameh). This indicates the importance of her role in the creation of the story of Bizhan and Manizheh. As explained in literature review, in the story of Zāl and Rudabeh, Simorgh, the mythical bird plays a vital role in creating rhetorical images of Mehr a as elevated, solar, and powerful but nonetheless feminine virtue in raising Zāl.

Other major interesting findings of this study indicate the influence of myths on Ferdowsi's poetry, especially the mythology of Mehr and Sun. Referring to the birth of Mehr in ancient beliefs of Iranian mythology, different narrations concerning the manifestation and birth of Mehr, are mentioned. Moreover, apart from how Mehr is borne, Razi (1992) finds that the time of Mehr's birth is an astronomical event called "Yalda". Yalda means the birth of the invincible sun, the goddess of Mehr, and Yalda has a history of several millennia in Iran. Yalda, the association of sun and Mehr, marks the longest night of the year and is one of the biggest celebration in Iranian history. It is the manifestation of Mehr and sun.

The current study has conducted by picking two stories from Shahnameh, and providing a scholarly background for considering women, Persian culture, myths and literature in digital age. This research extends literary discussions and critical views to women of Shahnameh by interpreting the main thoughts and discussions of several Farsi scholars and adapting them

into English particularly, the myth of "Mehr." The present study also makes a noteworthy contribution by exploring discussions concerning Ferdowsi's notions, whether he was proto-feminist, anti-feminist, or neither. The current findings add to a growing body of literature on Goddess, "Mehr", and womanhood.

Kazemi (2013) claims that Twine game does not resemble the experience that can be achieved through a modern game. However, he suggests that Twine games have been changing the concept of a game powerfully. He also claims that it enables the expansion and transformation of those voices, stories, characters and narratives that should be heard (Kazemi, 2013 cited in Salter, 2016). In this case, this study is the first time Twine has been deployed to demonstrate Persian traditional Naqqāli in digital form. This study shows that Twine games can be a platform for learning, personal creativity and storytelling. Also, it conveys emotional meaning through prose or poetry to the players.

In this study, a number of limitations had to be overcome. Initially, there was a lack of English-language scholarly sources on Mehr and women in Shahnameh. Then there was the challenge of finding Farsi articles that included proper references. In both languages, academic works have been done to preserve authentic literary criticism with regard to women and feminine virtue in Shahnameh.

The findings of this study provide insights into the mythology of Iran, such as, the myth of Mehr and the Goddess of the Sun. Twine offers an affordable, accessible space for personal creativity and traditional storytelling. Further study could investigate the mythical status of Mehr, and its relevance to the epic poem Shahnameh. Another topic for further study would be how "Mehr" has been shaped the Persian literary imagination. In addition, future study and creative works on the birth and manifestation of Mehr would enhance and preserve unique cultures and traditions through storytelling. Thus characters, folktales, myths and legends of ancient Persia can be preserved in the digital era.

The findings of this study provide some insight for future research on under considered myths of Iran, especially the myth of "Mehr" embedded in Shahnameh. Investigating feminine virtue unfolded several aspects of "Mehr" which has thrown up some questions in need of further

study. Future research might explore more closely the impact of Ferdowsi's wife as Idol Mehr on the creation of the story of Bizhan and Manizheh and possibly other Pahlavi-derived stories.

This study provides a brief analysis of the traditional values conveyed by national epic poem of Shahnameh and models the application of digital media to assist in the survival of traditional stories and culture. This is a way values and myths can be maintained for the new generation and those who wish to engage with ancient traditions such as Naqqāli. The last not the least, this research indicates myths, have been visualised human beliefs and emotions. Ferdowsi depicts "Mehr" and mythical aspects of women in Shahnameh. Besides, he represents feminine virtue through the Goddess of "Mehr". Similar to the way he articulates his wife as a Goddess of poetry, who inspired him to write the story of Bizhan and Manizheh.

Glossary

Mehr: The Goddess "Mehr"

Mehr Parast: A person who worships the Goddess "Mehr"

Zoroastrian: the ancient and primary religious of Persian Empire in Iran.

Chihrdad: Čihrdād, one of the lost nasks (Book) of the Avesta and survives only as a summary preserved It was an important source for literary works like the Shahnameh of Ferdowsi.

Khorshid: In Persian and Pahlavi language it means the Sun.

Yasht: In Pahlavi language, it means worship.

Pahlavi: The official language of Zoroastrian. It also spelled Pehlevi. The Sāsānian dynasty (224–651 CE) adopted Pahlavi as the official language and announced Zoroastrianism as the state religion.

Avesta: It is the primary collection of religious texts of Zoroastrianism, that composed in Avesta language.

Barsom: bɑːrsəm. A word from Pahlavi language and Avestan Bersman and derived from Barz meaning pillow. (the author's handwritten note). It is the cutted branches of a tree, each in Pahlavi language calls Tāk and in Persian, Tāi, and it should be made of plant, not metal. from a clean tree. It is said it's be made of pomegranate.

Appendix

A) Taq-e Bostan Rock Reliefs' Music Instruments

Appendix A - Taq-e
Bostan Rock reliefs'

B) The story of Bizhan and Manizheh (Farsi), Ganjoor website

گنجور » فردوسی » شاهنامه » داستان بیژن و منیژه » داستان بیژن و منیژه

Appendix B - The
story of Bizhan and

C) The twine Source file, information, and the View Proofing

Appendix C - A Love
That Triumphed Stor

Appendix C - Twine
View Proofing - A Lc

Appendix C -
Shahnameh.tws

D) The Twine Game, including HTLM file, image, and audio folders.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/144fZahjA4iZ4TnotdmljzU_I7VyWmKEA/view

A love that Triumphed in Twine by Somayeh Montaseri 9 items

- Audio
- Image
- ._A love that Triumphed.html
- A love that Triumphed.html
- Shahnameh.tws
- Story info.docx
- Story Passage Screenshot 1.JPG
- Story Passage Screenshot 2.JPG
- View Proofing - A love that Triumphed.pdf

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