

Research Article

THE UNPARALLELED LITERARY AND HISTORICAL ROLE OF FERDOWSI'S SHAHNAME IN SHAPING AND CONSOLIDATING PERSIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY OVER THE CENTURIES

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ABSTRACT

Iranian identity is one of the issues of great historical and sociological significance. The Shahname, also known as The Book of Kings, is the most phenomenal book of identity as well as a national document of the Iranian people in which almost all aspects of Iranianism and Persian spirit have been illustrated and scrutinised so much so that it claims the secret of the nation's permanence and unity is in preserving and glorifying the original Persian transcendent values and traditions. Additionally, it is the clearest evidence of the glory and prosperity of Iranian culture and civilization. The Shahname depicts the history of a nation throughout centuries and mirrors the culture, thought and goals of great Persians. A nation that spread all over the world the meaning of freedom, chivalry, magnanimity and self-sacrifice. Indeed, this masterpiece is the largest epic and historical poem ever written in the world and is regarded as one of the most beautiful and greatest epics of the world literature. The Shahname is one of the most inseparable pillars of Persian language and literature which rightly manifests the national spirit of Iran and Iranians to such an extent that even over 1000 years later, still remains more resolute and in the spotlight of Persians' attention. This analytical research is based upon how the Iranian identity, culture and civilization were formed and regained through this magnum opus.

Keywords: Ferdowsi, Iranian Identity, National Solidarity, Persian Literature, Shahname.

INTRODUCTION

National identity means a sense of belonging and loyalty to common elements and symbols in a nation and within defined political boundaries. It is composed of different elements, components and, more precisely, has different historical, cultural, social, geographical and political dimensions. Land, history, religion, language and literature, symbols and myths, customs, values and beliefs and government are the most important criteria of the national identity of the people of a country. Among these, the cultural-historical dimension of national identity, which includes the components of the historical land, events, myths, symbols, ancient language and cultural heritage, is more prominent. In line with this, Niditch (2015, p.105) stipulates that "national crises lead to cultural loss". The transfer of these mainly historical apparatuses to the next generations is very necessary in order to fortify and recreate the national identity. Additionally, the literary, social, cultural and historical works of thinkers are an essential source in this regard. Among the great Iranian works, Ferdowsi's The Shahname is an exception in terms of the existence of historical-cultural components of Iranian identity. As Steingass (1963, p.917) puts, "Firdausi, A famous Persian poet, is the author of the great epic poem, Shahnama". This article tries to scrutinize the role and position of Ferdowsi's The Shahname in strengthening and reproducing national identity with a descriptive-analytical approach. Identity means what and who. It arises from man's natural need to be known in connection with something. The identity of a nation is primarily a matter of political geography and relates to how a nation originated and survived. Thus, a country is alive and independent when it has primarily an independent national characteristic. The national feature and identity of a nation come into being when its constituent phenomena - the specific cultural and spiritual institutions specific to that nation or country - exist. These institutions in each region are a special product of the exchange of

ideas, tastes, beliefs and social approaches of the people of that geographical area, which originate from the specific human, social and spiritual conditions of that environment and rule the same setting and at the same time, guarantee the integrity of the same situation. Iran is a country with thousands of years of turbulent history, which due to its geographical and geopolitical location and cultural issues, has always been invaded by other tribes, ethnicities and countries throughout history or has been at war with them, to a lesser extent. This long history has been a period of peace and tranquility, but despite these attacks, it has always maintained its integrity and permanence by preserving Persians' solidarity. The endeavors and initiatives of the inhabitants of this region, such as Ferdowsi the Great, have caused the nation to continue for thousands of years in spite of massive conflicts, wars and invasions. The national identity of any nation is primarily born of the geographical environment of that nation and the plateau of Iran is undoubtedly the cradle of Iranian identity. Iran is like an old tree with very deep and wide roots, which has its roots and branches throughout history; also, due to its geographical location, especially its political and geopolitical features, it soon became strong and fertile. This kingdom has been plagued by floods and storms for an exceedingly long time and with the adventures that have passed over it. As a result of these historical plagues and disasters, its foliage and sometimes its body have been hit, but since it has deep roots, gardeners and the irrigators who have taken diligent care of it, new leaves have sprouted from it which have made this tree grow stronger again and remain old and entrenched. This is the oldest tree in the history of Persia whose branches were broken, but it has never been uprooted or lost; therefore, its identity is totally unblemished in history. Throughout the centuries, in spite of the invasion of the Romans, Muslims and Mongols, the Iranian national identity has been preserved and even imposed on the tribes invading Iran at certain points in history. Numerous factors have played a role in bolstering, reproducing and perpetuating the national identity of Iranians among which, this matchless work of Ferdowsi, The Shahname, is definitely the best when it comes to enlivening the Persian identity. "With all its poetic majesty and literary elegance, Ferdowsi's The Shahname is the beneficiary of this long and enduring

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tradition of epic poetry" (Dabashi, 2019, p.38). The Shahname is a rich source of common Iranian heritage in which the steadiness of Iranian identity can be observed from the world of myths and epics. Ferdowsi has undoubtedly played a vital role in reviving the Persian identity. The content of The Shahname is of features that have triggered national identity to continue to this day. In The Shahname, as expect of an utterly epic poem, nearly all aspects of Iranian life, civilization and culture have been presented along with the ideals and aspirations of its people. The Shahname is the manifestation of the ethnic life of a nation that has accumulated experiences, taste and intellectual capital for many years. It has gained a tremendous amount of spirituality during its continuous and glorious history. Iranians, whether as a nation, Persian, Tajik, Ajam or any other name, have long had their own identity and originality. They owe the perpetuation and survival of their national identity to their great scholars such as Ferdowsi. In this article, an attempt has been made to analyze the unique role and impact of Ferdowsi's The Shahname in consolidating, recreating and propagating the modules of Iranian identity with a descriptive-analytical approach. With respect to the rich nature of The Shahname, Daryae (2002, p.1) upholds, "The text contains much information in regard to the Persian epic, the Xwadaynamag, "Book of Kings." The Shahname, Book of Kings, a thousand-year-old epic poem holds the record of the longest poem by a single author and is considered the most influential book in Persian language as it helped its survival against the Arabic language. It is about 60,000 rhyming couplets. Additionally, there is a metrical rhyme to it which lends itself for all sorts of occasions for describing battle scenes, romances, banquets, hunting, etc. Furthermore, it helps the audience memorise this poem which was crucial for its inner longevity and passing it on. It is twice as long if not longer than Iliad and Odyssey put together. There have been always questions about Ferdowsi and The Shahname some of which are as follows: Who was Ferdowsi? Why did he write this book? What is The Shahname about? Why is it so important for Persian speakers? Why is it almost impossible to translate completely? De Blois (2004, p.100) argues, "Abu1-Qasim Firdausi, the author of the Iranian national epic, is arguably the greatest of all Persian poets". He was born in 940 and died in 1020. The year 2020 was his 1,000th anniversary. It is interesting to know that Ferdowsi means "Paradise" and both words are from the same root. When the Arab Muslims took over, there was a shift from P to F because there is no P sound in Arabic. So, Pardisi or Paradise in English became Ferdowsi Parsi became Farsi the Persians who fled to India, still call themselves Parsis and practice the religion of Zoroastrianism. Ferdowsi was born in the city of Toos near modern city of Mashhad in Northeastern Iran in a well-off family of landed gentry and he spent his entire adult life writing this book showing remarkable patience and dedication. By the time 30 years later when Ferdowsi had finished his book and was ready to present it to the monarch, there was a new King on the throne named the Sultan Mahmood Ghaznavi. There are also many accounts that, say, Sultan Mahmud had promised Ferdowsi that for every verse or line, he would give him a gold coin which makes it 60,000 gold coins altogether. It should also be noted that Ferdowsi had many enemies in the court. For instance, when he came to present the book in the court, some courtiers warned the ministers to make sure that he received 60,000 silver coins. Ferdowsi was extremely insulted that he went to the bath house and ordered some drinks all around and gave away all the silver coins to those who were there. It can also be hypothesized that politics and courtiers were involved. Of course, Sultan Mahmood heard of this and was furious and Ferdowsi went into his hiding. By the time people told Sultan Mahmood that this is an extremely precious, unique book and you really ought to put your name to this since this book will immortalise your reign, he sent his courtiers to Ferdowsi to make amends. A caravan of gold coins and silver spices were sent by the cortege; however, once they arrived at

Ferdowsi's home, they saw people taking Ferdowsi's corpse out to the graveyard. It was too late indeed. Subsequently, he never saw that promised fortune and died a poor man although he did not start life being poor because he was a landed Gentry, but that's the account we have today. Ferdowsi collected these events or stories and put them into verse to make it easy for people to memorize. Today, we have about 60,000 rhyming verses. He also filled the missing part to make it into a single coherent narrative form by fictionalizing some historical events to fit his somewhat nationalistic viewpoint. For example, Ferdowsi claims that Alexander is half-Iranian. As for Ferdowsi, it might be asked, "Why would he spend his entire life on a single project?" As a matter of fact, this is 10th Century. There is no TV or the internet. Ferdowsi said, "I suffered past 30 years to build a palace of words and no wind or rain can damage; people will praise my name for generations to come." A Thousand years later, he is not only remembered, but loved by millions of Persian speakers all over the world. Nevertheless, more than a personal legacy or financial awards, Ferdowsi had a greater motivation. Two hundred years before he was born, The Arab Muslims had conquered Persia and most people were converted from Zoroastrian to Islam. Arabic replaced the Persian forcibly as a formal language and local cultures and customs were slowly dying out. Persian myths and stories were replaced by myths and stories from the Quran. Grogan (2014, p.24) delineates that, "the biggest cultural shift in Persian history was undoubtedly the Arab invasions of the seventh century which ended the reign of the Zoroastrian Sassanids and brought a new religion, new dynasties and new formulations of Persian identity". Thus, Ferdowsi had a really serious job in hand. He had to save the language, the myths, the stories and customs. Today, he is considered the father of Persian language more important than Shakespeare in English. If you compare the Persian language and Iran with Arabic and Egypt, you will find out why Ferdowsi is so revered and held in high esteem by all Persians. Egypt completely got Arabized while Persian language is still spoken by more than a two-hundred million people all around the world. In fact, The Shahname is written in the Khorasani dialect, which is in Eastern Iran, Northwestern Afghanistan and Central Asia, close to modern-day Dari Persian spoken in Afghanistan or Tajik in Central Asia. The amazing thing about The Shahname is that modern Persian speakers have no problem understanding this one-thousand-year-old book. Some attributed this to The Shahname itself for keeping the language pretty much the same. On the other hand, in English, Beowulf was written around the same time, but looks like a completely different language, closer to Icelandic than English. Canterbury Tales was written four centuries later. Even Shakespeare's language is rather baffling for most English speakers today; nonetheless, Persian speakers today have no problem with the language of The Shahname so much so that they can understand it almost 90 to 95 percent. Considering the ever-living attribute of this book, Talattof (2015, p.204) underlines, The Shahname is living proof that the Persian past had remained alive in the national collective memory and it was only awaiting a genius like Ferdowsi, who crystallized it in a poem of unsurpassed vigor and beauty and gave the Persians a monumental national epic and a sturdy pillar of their identity. Ferdowsi's language, its music and its meter provided the model for the epic poetry of heroic kind in Persian poetry that was imitated by a large number of poets in different ages as late as the twentieth century. As a whole, Persian is associated with Iran, but modern Persian as we know today developed in the area known as Bakheria or Balkh region close to the Oxus River. Ferdowsi lived during the Samanids dynasty, which was based in Bukhara, modern-day Uzbekistan and later Ghaznavid, which was based in Ghazne, modern-day Afghanistan. In both courts, the Persian language was spoken, perhaps due to its distance from Baghdad, which was the center of Islamic culture. The Shahname covers some six thousand years of history of Iran and Central Asia

from the first humans to the arrival of Muslim Arabs in 650. It has three sections: mythical, heroic and historical or beginning, middle and end, so to speak. The mythical section is pretty short and deals with creation of first people and the discovery of fire, Zoroastrianism and Agriculture. The interesting thing in this section is Zahhak, the Arab King, with two snakes growing on each shoulder feeding on human brain, a bit similar to Lord Voldemort in Harry Potter. In this section, people live for thousands of years similar to those in the Jewish Bible. Another main Iranian historical event The Shahname turns to is the celebration of Nowruz. The origin of Nowruz, the Persian New Year, is explained in this section. As for the content, The Shahname mirrors multiple Persian battles with their enemies, as Swietochowski & Carboni (1994, p.86) stated, "much of the Persian epic is taken up with the wars between Iran and Turan (Iran stretching to the Oxus River and Turan consisting of the Turkic populated region east of it". The world is divided into three kingdoms: IRAN, which is Central Asia, Turan, which is Anatolia and the Caucasus. The conflict between IRAN and Turan takes center stage in the next section which is the heroic part containing 60% of the book that is mainly about one family of heroes. The historical section deals with historical events from Alexander's Invasion to The Arab invasion in 650 AD. Western readers might jump to the section of Alexander, of course fictionalized by Ferdowsi as half-Persian and half-Greek. According to Ferdowsi, Alexander's mother is a Greek princess, but after the Iranian King sleeps with her, he is repulsed by her bad breath that the king decides to send her back to Greece. Here, Ferdowsi is really taking revenge on the endless insults from The Greeks over the centuries about the Persians as their cultural-historical rivals. The young man, Alexander, takes revenge a few years later and conquers Persia. In this section, the main hero is Bahram Choobin along with some good and terrible kings. It ends when the Arab Muslims show up to replace the throne with the religious Altar. Ferdowsi at this point is 65 years old and tells that he will not die for people will remember him forever as in:

Az in pas namiram ke man zende'am = From now on, I will never die for I am alive

Ke tokhme sokhan ra parakande'am = Since I have spread the seeds of speech everywhere

This is what Ferdowsi said when he submitted this masterpiece. This guarantees my immortality. It seems as if he wanted to make a name for himself; he was very conscious right from the beginning. He says I am going to do this, and my name will live on forever and of course, he ends that way to this great monument. Put it differently, Ferdowsi accentuates that he built a high Palace that will never disappear; no rain no wind will destroy it. In reality, he knew what he was writing; he was writing for posterity; this is just another wonderful literary tapa to create the sort of idea that the ruler has to patronise the poet because they are mutually dependant. He believes that the ruler needs the poet and the poet needs ruler. As mentioned above, The Shahname literally means book of Kings dealing with a lot of glory, pride, violence and wars. Despite peaceful periods, war appears constant in this book due to Iran's geographical setting. The Persians were at the crossroad between Rome, China, Arabia, Central Asia and India. Therefore, anyone moving between these places had to go through Iran. It is like living in a corridor. Thus, keeping your land from invasion becomes the most important priority. In actuality, the narrative centers on keeping the Persians safe. The land seems quite barren for the most part except Cypress trees. All the handsome men are like Cypress tree and gorgeous women are like the Moon, Ferdowsi puts. As for being in time, Ferdowsi believes in dualism, good and evil. Iran and Turan, just and unjust Kings. He believes in cyclical nature of life as kings come and go. Despite his fatalistic view, he also believes in change through wisdom. His message is: life

being so short and good times end quickly. It is clear Ferdowsi thinks of legacy as a very vital property in life as he spent all his life to do just that. As for Mazdak, the Socialist, who lived in ancient Iran thousands of years before Marx, Ferdowsi introduces Mazdak as an egalitarian philosopher and informer; he demands justice and equality for the poor, nevertheless, he is killed ultimately for his modern views.

Theoretical Discussion And Research Concepts

Identity

The need for dependence has intrinsic or instinctive roots in humankind and the fulfillment of this need leads to their individual self-awareness. The term identity refers to particular values that arise with a person's exclusive past on which he relies. To further, identity is a set of characteristics and signs concerning material, biological, cultural and psychological components, which result in the identification of an individual, group and culture from others. What is more, identity is divided into four parts: first, Myth which includes a series of beliefs, the most obvious of which are religion and nationalism. Second is Symbol that represents the expressive, meaningful and permanent aspect of culture and is passed down from generation to generation; its most telling example is language which shapes identity. The third one is History dealing with the reconstruction of the past based upon documents and proofs to provide awareness. Institutional factors as the last constituent part of identity includes organizations that contribute to the development of various aspects of language and culture; thus, forms a sense of identity. The Shahname is regarded as the Bible or Quran for Persian speakers. It is even more than that. It is central in the modern notion of Iran and Iranian national identity. Iranian secular intellectuals considered this book sacred and their proudest treasure and a thread that connects modern Iran with Pre-Islamic Iran, but also a source of anxiety and nostalgia as to what they have lost to a degree that it can keep you somehow stuck in the past. Sadegh Hedayat's masterpiece, *The Blind Owl* draws a lot on The Shahname as a source of Persian psyche, prior to the Arab Invasion, which he considered one of the three disasters for the Persian civilization. The other being Alexander and Genghis Khan. Post-Islamic Iran romanticized by Iranian nationalists was not a delightful place for the majority of people as slavery was rampant; women were subjugated, and the rulers were pretty brutal. It should also be pointed out that the Mongols considered by most Iranians as destroyer of their culture actually loved The Shahname and adopted and promoted Persian language against Arabic and even took it to India. As for Translation, The Shahname is greatly tied to the Persian language in its musicality and rhythmic sound that makes it really hard to translate that effect into English as it loses that magic and becomes a bit bland. Persian speakers love its epic verses so much so that all the great Iranian poets from Molanaa/Rumi, Hafiz, Saadi and Khayyam took inspiration from this book to create their own masterpieces.

Nation and National Identity

A sustainable human community that has been formed throughout history and is based on the common language, land, economic life and psychological formation that manifests itself in cultural commonality is called nation. "Nation" depends on a specific land, that is, it is a concept of "within the borders". I am of the opinion that nation refers to the people who have been united by a common cultural heritage. The national government is the most important unit of political life in the modern world. Hence, the group of people who live in a higher political order than the tribe is a nation. National identity is in the realm of collective identity. Collective identity is the identity of a group that separates them from other groups. National

identity is a set of common characteristics and values of an independent nation whose people are aware of and through which they feel sort of belonging to each other. Moreover, national identity distinguishes a nation from others and provides the means to introduce that nation. Identity is a response to the natural need of man to identify himself with a series of cultural, historical and geographical elements and phenomena, such as a common political land, religion, language, political memory, social views and a series of customs, traditions, literature and common arts. Indeed, a set of these concepts creates national identity that establishes the national identity of a human, group or a society. Specifically, Iranian identity is rooted in the myths that their ancestors created and perpetuated thousands of years ago. It also springs from epic stories about ideal Iranian kings and heroes such as Kaykhosrow, Garshasp, Arash and Rostam in the history of Iran. Ferdowsi was a strong intellectual and spiritual figure who firmly strengthened national solidarity. From the dawn of history until now, despite the fact that Iran has been repeatedly invaded by its enemies, sometimes suffered terrible defeats and all the country fell into the hands of foreigners, the Iranians have never forgotten their identity and in the most difficult times, when everything was thought to have been destroyed, the visible and invisible circles of national identity connected them so much so that they could rise like a phoenix from the heap of ashes.

Components of National Identity

Once established, governments need national unity to survive, and this can only be achieved if the government, due to its political existence or ideology, attracts the citizenship of the people of different parts of the country, even those who do not have commonalities. This creates a national identity. Factors of nationality or more precisely the components of national identity cover common ethnicity, race, literature, language, land, history, pains and sufferings, awareness, sense of belonging and commitment to a specific framework. Some scholars also enumerate different constituent elements of national identity as a single political organization, a common historical and cultural background, language, religion and land. Others specify the four basic elements from which national identity comes forth: Primary factors such as language and literature. Developmental factors such as government, modern army and constitution. Inductive factors including higher education, edification and cultivation; ultimately, reactive factors which encompass defending the mother land, self-sacrifice and patriotism.

The Shahname And Iranian National Identity

Persian identity is one of those traits and values that are common among Iranians and is considered specific to them. Based on these characteristics, they are distinguished from other nations and recognized as Iranians. Iranians are one of the few cultural groups in the world who have a clear and accessible identity and their thoughts and collective behaviors are known and definable. Iranian identity is the result of social, political and geographical factors along with bitter and sweet experiences that over time have made this old country stand at the crossroads of the world. Whether we like it or not, the Iranian national identity contains a mosaic that has existed for centuries; but throughout history, a kind of national solidarity has been maintained in Iran through common languages, religions and customs. Iranian people have always accepted their national identity beyond their ethnic, linguistic and local identities. However, one can never deny small and large identities in the shadow of Iranian national identity. Of course, this does not mean the destruction of subcultures, ethnic and local identities; rather, amidst this plurality, it attaches great significance to unity. In fact, the Persian national identity is a broad and all-encompassing umbrella that, in addition to unity, has

included all Iranian ethnic groups under it. The Shahname is also the anthem of Mehr-e-Iran Zamin (Love of Iran) and the ups and downs of Iranian life with all its good and bad times, victories, failures and transformations. Besides, Ferdowsi, who has undertaken the honest narration of this adventurous story and his definition and interpretation of Iranian identity, naturally, corresponds to the totality of written, oral, historical and mythical narratives that are used in The Shahname. Nonetheless, the value of Ferdowsi's work is not simply in composing highly epic stories, but the main greatness of his work is in the discovery and preservation of stories that show the formation of rich Iranian civilization and history. It also shows the future record of the existence of a nation that seems to be standing in the center of the world and has faced a series of peaks and valleys throughout the millennia.

Az ân pas barâmad az Iran xoruš = After that, roars were heard from Iranian army

Padid âmad az har sui ĵang-o ĵuš = The roaring came from everywhere

Ke Iran behešt ast yâ bustân = Iran is like a Paradise or heavenly garden

Hami buye mošk âyad az bustân = Where the strong smell of musk is scattered all over the place

Honar nazd-e Iranian ast-o bas = Art can be abundantly found among Persians

Nadâdand šir-e ĵiyân ra be kas = They have never surrendered by giving anything to anyone

Put it another way, the identity of nations is composed of different and common integrants such as language, culture, religion, ethnicity, customs, political history and geography. In addition, "An awareness of community and shared cultural identity is present in all religious cultures" (Niditch, 2015, p.24). As a matter of fact, these elements and components lead to the creation of a more stable national identity. Therefore, such a nation will remain with its unique identity for centuries, and the events of the time and the passage of time will not disrupt the identity of those people. The people of Iran are considered such a nation. In the following, while examining the various sections of Iranian identity, the role of The Shahname in introducing and reproducing these elements will be scrutinized.

Culture and Language

Culture and language usually help each other to form the character of a nation. However, none of them alone is a determining factor. For example, the Frenchness of the people of France is not only due to the common language of the people of this country, but also because of the culture that has distinguished this nation from other nations; otherwise, the people of Finland and Switzerland also spoke French, but they do not. The French have their own particular customs and traditions, which have been formed over the centuries. Furthermore, most identity-building factors are transmitted through language; be it spoken or written, and this is where the importance of language in building social character and identifying people in society becomes transparent. The Shahname was written in Persian, which is a sequel to the Pahlavi language; a language that could bring all the cultural and historical manifestations of Iran to life in front of the eyes of the eager Persians and attract others with a fiery expression and pleasant order. By composing The Shahname, Ferdowsi played a vital role in introducing the Persian language as the main component of Iranian identity as well as its stability. He built a high Palace that will never disappear; no rain, no wind will destroy it:

Bar afkandam az nazm kâxi boland = With this epic, I built a high Palace
Ke az bād-o- bârân nayâbad gazand = That no rain, no wind will destroy it

He knew what he was writing; he was writing for posterity; this is just another wonderful literary tapa. Indeed, it was really after his valuable work that Persian became an indicator of Iran and Iranians both in terms of linguistic structure and content. In addition to language, Ferdowsi has done an excellent job in the field of culture. His knowledge of the culture, history and civilization of Iran's past as well as his wise and wonderful attachment to Iran and the fate of its people is truly admirable. This master of Persian language puts the culture and living memory of the Persians in a position to narrate stories from the past with complete freedom and chivalry. Also, by observing the principle of truthfulness and preserving the basic skeletons of the stories, directly or indirectly, he outlines the moral origins and behavior of the Persian era. Besides, culture plays an indispensable part in this regard. Cultural heritage includes all cultural dimensions of any social system, in a way that affects our conscious or unconscious mind and is regarded as a historical landmark of a culture and a nation. Ferdowsi does not see Iran only as a geography, but as a culture, a spirituality, a civilization and a well-known tradition. For this reason, in the first stage, he tries to make his book a symbol of this culture. He recounts the life of the Iranian nation, history, honors, cherished traditions, as well as the behavioral and moral privileges of his people. On the contrary, he reckons the plagues of pride, selfishness, deception, tyranny, lust, individual and social misguidance and jealousy. This masterpiece, The Shahname, celebrates purity, justice, happiness, kindness, family and national interests. The Shahname is a very precious and honorable source of Iran's enduring heritage. A source through which the continuity of Iranian identity and its tribes, from the world of myths and epics to the last years of the rule of the Sassanid kings, can be observed along with their collective consciousness. By composing The Shahname, Ferdowsi paved the way for Persians' cultural independence and political borders. This book was written at a time when Iran, after the collapse of the Sassanids Dynasty, still did not have recognized geographical and political borders, and there was no such thing as Iran at all. In such a period, Ferdowsi mentions Iran and Iranians more than one thousand and two hundred times in The Shahname and sings the glorious song of the Iranianism in the ears of Persian souls so as to bring back the past splendid national identity of Persia to the people after centuries. To illuminate, Persian language seedlings were first planted in Khorasan and Transoxiana, then grew and spread all over the place much sooner than expected. The effect of this magical language was so incredible that foreigners, who for historical reasons ruled in parts of Iran, had to use the same language as a lingua franca, cultural tool and a unifying factor. Turning to Persian or Farsi language means that an Iranian wants this language to be the basis of his thoughts and emotions. Ferdowsi and other Persian poets strove to revive Iranian culture and civilization, so to speak. Persia was a very interesting place because this was the time when local dynasts all over Persia, known Iran today, in the South, in the Centre, in the North, and in the Northeast created a national identity for themselves. Besides, this is where the setting of The Shahname comes in since at the time of The Shahname, the Samanids were ruling over Northeastern Iran and what is also Central Asia in Northeastern Afghanistan. The Samanids were very keen to revive the Persian language, tradition, history and even created an ancestry for themselves which linked them to the Sassanid Kings of Pre-Islamic Persia. Thus, it is a flourishing time for Persian literature particularly Persian literature; we also have the emergence of poets both male and female ones in this era. It is also important to note that new Persian has developed out of the middle Persian of the Sassanid

period. Thus, a wonderful interesting and vibrant period they have. Nonetheless, it has to be mentioned that Iran had been occupied and taken over by Muslim Arabs. Islam had swept in at the end of 7th century, that is a few centuries before Ferdowsi started to write The Shahname; a few hundred years of occupation are quite remarkable. Indeed, it is absolutely notable, but the Islamization of Iran did not happen at once. The Muslims came in, however, they left often local governors in the country and also local rulers in the area and then a lot of areas actually converted quite late to Islam and kept their Zoroastrian faith going. Nevertheless, it is interesting and noteworthy of Iran that this revival happened because when one looks at it, it is the only country in the whole region that retained its identity and its language, the Persian. Persian is one of the few languages in the world that has not undergone major changes even after a millennium. Essentially, The Shahname is a 1000-year-old book and Persians still have almost no problem understanding it. Although it goes back further to 7th century, most of the words are common that literate and the elite obviously use today. Perhaps he has borrowed words from a couple of centuries earlier which was middle Persian, but most of the vocabulary is what would have been used. It is a sweeping masterpiece full of battles and bloodshed, Kings and Queens, love and hate, heroes and villains; but The Shahname is more than just a story book or a poem. Indeed, it is sometimes described as the encyclopaedia in Iranian culture and the identity card of the Persian people. Today, The Shahname occupies a place at the heart of Iranian culture. A documented proof whose message and symbolism are just as resonant in the 21st century as they were a millennium ago. Ferdowsi was the product of his time. This was a time when perhaps the familiarity with Persian culture, customs and traditions may have been hanging on in threat of dying out as people converted more and more to Arabic culture and it became more and more acceptable at court. The Shahname is partly a book of education and political ethics. It uses stories to recall the glorious ancient past. Ferdowsi constantly insisted that we are still Persian; this is our culture; this is what we are going to hold on to despite foreigners attempts to convert us that has been quite unsuccessful throughout the centuries. He asks Iranians to go back to what they were and hold on to it. What is more, he gives us the material with which we can. In fact, Ferdowsi was not thinking of overthrowing the whole of the Islamic ruling; rather, he was doing it culturally. His obsessions were sort of a call for the revival of Persian language, civilisation, rituals and traditions.

Religion

"Ferdowsi's poetic metaphysics is always cosmic, proverbial, invoking the power of reason and reasoning, of existential being there, and the necessity of righteousness, none of which is reducible to any known or institutional religion" (Dabashi, 2019, pp.85-86). In some parts of the world, religion has been a leading factor of national solidarity because it has a tremendous impact on the culture and customs of some countries. To exemplify, the role of Catholicism in the formation of Armenia, the Republic of Ireland, Lithuania, Georgia, etc. or the role of Islam in the establishment of Muslim governments such as the Arab countries, some African countries, Pakistan and so on. Among Iranian poets, Ferdowsi has a special place when it comes to religion and worldview. Ferdowsi, as a monotheist, invites man to worship God and considers it as a sign of wisdom and a way to reach genuine happiness:

ĵâhân xâsti yâfti xun mariz = You wanted the world and you got it, but do not shed blood
Makon bâ ĵâhândâr yazdân setiz = Do not fight with God, the owner of the world
Or elsewhere Ferdowsi states:

Mani kard ân šâh-e yazdân šenâs = The king, who used to be a God-believer, became arrogant
 Ze yazdân bepičid-o šod nâsepâs = He turned against God and became ungrateful

Ferdowsi believed in the Persian God (Ahura) rather than Allah of Islam. This can be seen in the words of Davis, who was a The Shahname researcher, as in: "It is God who keeps us all" (Davis, 2007, p.251). In The Shahname, it has been many times underscored that Iran - the land of Ahura - has never been devoid of religiosity and godliness. Put it differently, Iranians have always followed the path of God under Zoroastrianism, but not necessarily Islam or any other religion. Ferdowsi also insisted that any ruler or king in Persia has a special Farreh-e-Izadi (the Grace of God) that makes him remain faithful to this culture and not seek separation from it or break their bond. Ferdowsi, as the awakened conscience, recognizes the national values of his society; in the meantime, he finds it his national-historical duty to bravely recite the past and present values of his nation in The Shahname in a highly transparent and expressive language. Considering the influence of The Shahname on Iranians, suffice it to say that Ferdowsi, in the full sense of the word, is the most leading national poet of Persia. Iranians' ideology, religion and language all draw its power from this universal masterpiece. As a matter of fact, Ferdowsi was fully cognizant of the fact that with newer religion, you get new festivals, new ceremonies, new culture, new language, etc. He was obviously reasserting the importance of ancient Persian customs particularly Nowruz, the Persian New Year celebration. Indeed, Ferdowsi stresses that we must not forget our historical, cultural as well as ancestral rites. Besides, we do not necessarily have to think it is superior to what we've got now. According to the notes, Ferdowsi seems to have gone and interviewed people, checked these sources quite carefully, the historical things insofar as every King mentioned was a King that can corroborate and so on. Of course, we do not really know almost anything except what is in the poem itself. Whether he was actively going around, I slightly have the feeling that people were coming to him as there is no evidence either way; he was certainly collecting materials. He may have gone round in a relatively limited scope in Khorasan which is where his base was. The Shahname is divided into three parts: myth, heroes and history. The first part starts with the first man who is a cave-dweller, the human being who hunts, collects animals and then gradually tames animals. Thus, there is a series of personalities; then we come to the first ruler who introduces religion. It is a very important point and there is this ruler who introduces Zoroastrian traditions and festivals. The King, Paraxylene, in the mythological section, of course is Jamshid, who is the same as Verdic Hema. He introduces the throne, religion and Iranian New Year, the Nowruz, which is to this day celebrated on 21st of March; but as it often happens in The Shahname, the King becomes too full of himself and arrogant so much so that he starts to see himself as the absolute power and that is when evil strikes and the symbol of kingship, the Farreh-e-Izadi (the Grace of God) abandons him. Even though Ferdowsi does not specify any dates and covers thousands of years in the mythological section, it can be certainly figured out that the time when religion did come into the lives of the Persians is probably sometime around the 6th century BC. This does not mean that Zoroaster himself lived around that time, but according to chronicles, Zoroaster was living around 1000 BC; nevertheless, the introduction of Zoroastrianism is probably the time 6th century BC.

Social Customs

Special celebrations and ceremonies, national costumes and common symbols such as flags, national anthems, national monuments and epics are important factors of nationality in The Shahname. They provide a means of solidarity and closeness

between the people of a nation. Although many ancient Iranian cultural and social customs have been invaded by foreign cultures to this day, a great amount of them, still retain their progression and continuity. It is understood that again The Shahname has played a vital role in this regard. It probes into not only the smallest, but the most general, internal and external issues of Iranian society in different eras despite the differences in historical, social and cultural conditions in a society that is constantly exposed to aggression, natural disasters, rivalries, wars and megalomania. Moreover, the selfishness of those in power can be seen everywhere in the positive behavioral motives and the most obvious temperaments of the Iranian people in the diverse geography and eventful history of this nation in the four principles of godliness, rationality, justice and happiness. Ferdowsi has not neglected any point about the culture and civilization of ancient Iran. In this epic masterpiece, one can see Pre-Islamic Iranians from the perspective of culture and customs. Studying The Shahname gives the reader the opportunity to put a question to the origins of festivals, the emergence of fire, glorious scenes of feasts and battles, how to bury the dead and the mourning rites of that time, as well as the marital customs of the ancient Persians. In a nutshell, Ferdowsi, recalling such events, has turned The Shahname into a large museum of studying Iran and Iranians. The heroes, events and stories of The Shahname represent daily events, public thoughts, personal actions and goals of Persians such as Rostam and Sohrab's battle, Rostam and Esfandiyar's battle, Siyawush's pass through fire as well as the romance of Bijan and Manijeh.

... They tethered their horses and once again, they grappled in single combat, each grasping the other's belt and straining to overthrow him. But for all his great strength, Sohrab seemed as though he was hindered by the heavens and Rostam seized him by the shoulders, and finally forced him to the ground. The Brave youth's back was bent. His time had come, his strength deserted him. Like a lion, Rostam led him low but knowing that the youth would not lie there for long. He quickly drew his dagger and plunged it in the lionhearted hero's chest, Sohrab writhed, then grasped for breath and knew he had passed beyond concerns of worldly good and evil. (Davis, 2007, p.71) Regarding this excessively heartbreaking battle between Rostam and Sohrab, Ferdowsi melodramatizes the scene as follows:

Čo bešnid Rostam, saraš xire gašt = When Rostam realized he is going to battle with a young unknown hero, he got astonished

Ĵahân piše češm andaraš tire gašt = As if everything went black before his eyes

Beporsid zan pas ke âmad be huš = After Sohrab came round,

Bedu goft bâ nâle vo bâ xoruš = Rostam asked him in a state of moaning

Ke aknun če dâri ze Rostam nešân = What sign do you have from Rostam?

Ke kam bâd nâmaš ze gardankešân = That I wish Rostam's name will be crossed out of the names of heroes.

Konun band bogšây az Ĵošanam = Now, untie my armor

Berehne negah kon tane rošanam = To see my naked and bright body without armor

Čo bogšâd xoftân-o ân mohre did = When Rostam took off Sohrab's armor and saw his necklace

Hame Ĵame bar xištan bardarid = Rostam tore up all his own clothes

Hami rixt xun-o hamî kand muy = Rostam injured himself, lost blood and tore his hair

Saraš por ze xâk-o por az âb ruy = His head was full of dust and his face drowned in tears

Bedu goft Sohrâb kin badtarist = Sohrab told Rostam, this is wrong

Be âbe do dide nabâyad gerist = You should not cry and ruin yourself

Az in xištan koštan aknun če sud = There is no use and benefit in killing yourself

Čenin raft-o in budani kâr bud = What is done is done and nothing can be done

As for the combat between Rostam and Sohrab, this part is written with so much emotion that really breaks your heart. Rostam's grief is so overwhelming as if his world has turned into a complete and utter darkness. This giant of a man is reduced to gut-wrenching sorrow. Here, the verses are absolutely amazing and poignant. The core of the story is when the battle between Rostam and Sohrab takes place where the father kills the son by mistake. Rostam's father was Zaal, an albino man raised by a mythical bird, Simorgh or Phoenix. Rostam is like Hercules or Achilles in Homer's Iliad. He is the bravest and noblest Iranian. Rostam is always called for when the kingdom is under attack. Hence, he is a king saver and sometimes even kingmaker. Notwithstanding his invincibility, as a human, he sometimes makes terrible mistakes. The most heart-wrenching part of The Shahname is when Rostam kills Sohrab, his own son by mistake which he finds out later. Siyawush is another tragic hero accused of rape. "And Siyawush increased in might and beauty, and you would have said that the world held not his like" (Zimmer, 2000, p.251). He goes through fire to prove his innocence, but later murdered by the Turanian King and becomes a symbol of innocence and absolute victim. At some point, Rostam is too old and refuses to save the king from another Turanian attack. However, Iran is saved by another hero, Esfandiyar. He challenges Rostam to become the ultimate hero in Iran. In this epic battle, Rostam shoots an arrow into Esfandiyar's eyes, nonetheless, he is devastated for killing another Iranian hero. Indeed, this is a bad omen. He knew it. Soon after, Rostam's half-brother with the help from the king of Kabul whose mother is also incidentally from Kabul, plots against them and kills him. This is the end of heroic section. Consequently, here are a few interesting things that can be noticed in The Shahname. The first one was trash talking. There's so much trash talking before every fight. It is quite funny how Ferdowsi allows his characters to sell their thoughts and feelings boasting and showing off their arrogance. It is said that modern Iranians have a similar tendency to see themselves above everybody else. I guess that can be true about many people in the world. Maybe the influence of The Shahname had something to do with it. The second noticeable thing is that horses have almost God-like qualities for the Iranians. Rostam's horse, Rakhsh, for example, is smarter than him most of the time. This horse has a well-developed character and treats better than humans and almost having a divine power. When Rostam is fooled at the end, Rakhsh knows the plot but has to obey Rostam despite knowing that they are plunging to their debt. Thinking of Iranians today, we tend to associate horses with the people of Central Asian steppes like the Turks and the Mongols. There is a theory that the Iranians might be from the steppes of central Asia themselves who came down a few thousand years ago; then, the Turks followed perhaps thousand years later and finally the Mongols in 13th century. As for women, most women are paper-cut characters, but occasionally you come across female warriors or strong women mostly in Kabul, Turan, Balkh or Rome. They take initiatives and try to get in touch with the strong handsome men.

Incidentally, all the major Heroes have known Iranian mothers. Rostam's mother is from Kabul. Sohrab's mother is from Samangan, north of Kabul. Alexander's mother is Greek and finally, Esfandiyar's mother is Roman.

Common Land

The existence of a common land is one of the substantial factors of unity among individuals. People living in the same land, whether they like it or not, gradually find linguistic and cultural solidarity. Thus, it is correct to say that political borders over time give rise to the emergence of nations. Place and space are the main prerequisites that meet the needs of human identity. It is also said that geography is the objective and tangible crystallization of national identity. The land, which is intricately linked to economics and politics, determines the unit of survival for the individual. This means that only with that specific land will it be possible for a nation to achieve its goals and meet its needs. On the other hand, the components of national identity need to be formed in a spatial context in order to ultimately lead to national integration. This platform can be called a common land that plays the role of identifying and perpetuating national identity. Most thinkers consider the existence of a common land as a component of unison among the people of a country because the individuals living in a joint geography inevitably find cultural and historical harmony with one another; consequently, no people can be considered a nation without belonging to a particular land. With a little speculation in the creation of The Shahname, it can be perceived that Ferdowsi is an earnest lover of Persia and this can be found in every single verse of this splendid work. The best example can be seen in his defense of the homeland where the enemy intends to attack Iran. Regarding Rostam, Abdullaeva & Melville (2008, p.72) believe that "Firdausi's descriptions of Rostam are so hyperbolic that he hardly seems human: his constant epithets are 'mountain' or 'elephant-bodied,' due to his size and invincibility". Ferdowsi creates Rostam to both bring the Iranian cry to the ears of the enemies and awaken the Iranians. To make it more tangible, The Shahname encourages people to protect their borders and sovereignty from the clutches of foreigners. The stability of this land, Iran, in spite of all the troubles and wars as a country along with a definite range of civilizations in history, demonstrates that there is an inseparable and unbreakable bond between this land and its inhabitants. Hence, we see in many stories of The Shahname, in the balance of love and affection for Iran, life is not valuable and measurable. Even the honor and gallantry of the heroes is due to their protection of Iran. In other words, if the issue of Persian Kingdom is removed from the verses of The Shahname, there will be no need for all this self-sacrifice and patriotism. According to Ferdowsi, the freedom and evolution of the Iranian nation depend on a full-fledged struggle against the elements of destruction and aggression. By composing epic poems, Ferdowsi creates the spirit of nationalism and defense of the land in the hearts and souls of every Persian. In his words, the land of Persia is the place of courageous and wise men and it is a pity that it becomes a hotbed of jackals:

Dariq ast Iran ke virân šavad = It is a pity that Iran is destroyed

Konam-e palangân-o širân šavad = And become a place for the barbarians and beasts (leopards and lions)

Common History

People, who have a long, rich recorded history and have gone through major historical transformations, take advantage of a principal factor of solidarity and justify themselves in that they must remain a nation and form a government. Iranians, Romans, Chinese and Egyptians are among the nations whose historical antiquity leaves no

doubt that they are historically and culturally great nations. This element can be used as a potential national power when faced with problems and can strengthen national unity. Iranian identity has been crystallized since millennia BC. With the arrival of Aryans in Iran and the formation of The Aryans, The Madi, The Achaemenid, The Parthian and The Sassanids dynasties, Persian identity has been formed coherently and has continued until the contemporary period. Ferdowsi tries to extract the Iranian identity from the depth of Iranian civilization, history and behavior; it also criticizes it in dealing with other cultures and civilizations. This precise and wise view causes not only the reader to discover his identity in the path of The Shahname stories, but also to know the identities of non-Iranians such as Chinese, Indians, Turks, Romans, Tazis (Arabs) and other ethnic groups. Ferdowsi considers Iranians as Azade (Liberal) and Iran as the cradle of liberty. Dabashi (2019, p.84) furthers this by saying that "Ferdowsi's The Shahname reads on the porous borderlines of myth, heroism, and history— all brought together into a seamless epic narrative. It is precisely on the fluidity of those lines forming and feeding on one another that his life and lifetime achievement need to be read." The Shahname is the battlefield of the Iranian nation in the struggle for destiny - on both the political and cultural fronts and in the external and internal arenas - to stay and boast in the face of all kinds of hardships, hostilities and aggressions. This book also encompasses a wide range of heroic encounters; from the war of Tahmurth with Divan, Fereydoun with Zahak, Kaykhosrow with Afrasiab and Rostam with Esfandiyar, to the scientific and thought-provoking challenges of Persian sages with the scholars of ancient Rome. This masterpiece grapples with the themes of oppression, valor, loyalty and anti-authoritarianism. That is, reading The Shahname, especially in the stormy periods of history, has always strengthened the spirit of battle and resistance against the foreign hegemony and domestic dictators. Over 1000 years ago in 1010, the Persian poet, Ferdowsi, finished writing his epic poem, The Shahname or the Book of Kings. It had taken him 30 years to complete. This book consists of some 60,000 verses. It is the longest poem ever written by a single author. Ferdowsi's aim was to narrate the history of the world from a Persian perspective; from the beginning of time until the Muslims' conquest in the 7th century and to preserve the myth and legends of days gone by. It starts with Sassanids dynasty that is from 224 AD and finishes with the Islamic conquest of Iran and the death of the last Sassanid emperor in 651 AD. Moreover, it gives us a very accurate list of Kings about their rules and their deeds. It incorporates heroic as well as mythological section. The Shahname is all about keeping Iran, the idea of Iran and the territory of Iran intact; this is the theme that goes through The Shahname and is also very evident in the last section when all these different things are talked about. The significant point about The Shahname is that in order for every single ruler to have the symbol of power or the glory of God, he has to be a legitimate ruler; once God realised that he's either lying or is not telling the truth, the divine glory abandons him. A question that can arise here is: Is Ferdowsi instructing Kings? In this setting, he depicts a eulogy of the traditions of the pre-Islamic Kings, and it is definitely a sort of book that tells the rulers how to behave. The point is Ferdowsi is not trying to write a history. His book is really didactic and informative. Every ruler comes to the throne trying to set out a blueprint, but they have this throne speech about what they are going to do; how they are going to rule. The Shahname is truly educational; it is about wisdom, practical politics as well as ruling justly and effectively. Ferdowsi does not teach history, rather, he uses history as an example and draws on it for the present time. He is not going through events; that is, there is no chronological sense or dates on this book; thus, it is not history in that sense. The Shahname has taken some time to find its place and audience. To illustrate, there is evidence that it was obviously survived for afterwards; even then, it did not get a great reception

perhaps at court; but other poets were aware of it. There are references to it scattered; for example, the palaces of the rulers had scenes from The Shahname on their walls. Another notable point regarding The Shahname is the coming of the Mongols which ostensibly would be disastrous, and a lot of Iranians think it is the end of civilisation after the Arab invasion, but in fact, the Mongols were coming from inner Asia who ironically made contributions to the preservation of Persian language, culture and civilization. Mongols were barbarian and needed to be educated. This is absolutely a critical thing and some of the Persian bureaucrats especially a man called Atamolk Jovayni wrote a chronicle of Chengiz Khan invasions liberally filled with quotations from The Shahname and used it as a sort of paradigm for Mongols. The Shahname was truly educating the rulers. Having read The Shahname and been acquainted with Persian civilization, Mongols adopted Persian language for their ruling as they had nothing superior to Persian culture and language. "Traditionally, Persian culture was an elite, high-culture art and consisted of written works only". (Yarshater, et al., 2009, p.44). Simply put, Persian literature and culture was of such a high status that absorbed many foreign cultures and rulings in itself rather than be immersed by them. With the arrival of Safavids in the 16th century, there were productions of magnificently illustrated The Shahname and the glorification of ancient Persia during the late 18th century. For example, when the new King comes to power, they also look back and use The Shahname as the epic that tells them all about Persian Pre-Islamic customs and traditions which have continued to this day. From my personal viewpoint, The Shahname has kept its relevance with Iranians, and it has saved the Persian language. What is more, it has created new artistic drawings, wall paintings and ceilings painted with scenes from The Shahname. What must be remembered is that The Shahname is recited and understood by both literate and illiterate people to such a degree that Persian readers, having read this book, are captivated by its miraculous verses calling Iranians for patriotism, as in the following:

Čo Iran mabâšad tan-e man mabâd = If it were not for Iran, then my body would not exist
Bar in bum-o bar zende yek tan mabâd = Nor does any Iranian

The Shahname is of very nationalistic sentiments for Iranians. It is also regarded as a linguistic heritage for them. In other words, it really exists as an encyclopaedia of Persian linguistics as well as a Glossary of all the words we have today. In the 13th century, Iranians began to create Persian dictionaries. An amazing feature of The Shahname is that it defies literacy, which is to say, you do not have to be highly educated and literate to comprehend it. Persians feel so proud to recite the verses of The Shahname publicly as it is immensely concerned with their patriotism; thus, linguistically, it remains as the high Persian for them. Of course, Iranians do not talk as The Shahname language, but it is extraordinary how they are at ease with The Shahname.

Common Race

Another facet of nationality, especially in the past, has been the common factor of race and ethnicity. The Shahname, as a trans-ethnic work, has best introduced the characteristics of the Iranian people and Persian race. It is a happy anthem of a courageous nation who have not been safe from any incursion and plunder. Persians' eventful history is replete with constant struggle for freedom and peace. Nonetheless, they have accepted this destiny not with lamentation and sorrow, but with joy arising from magnificent souls. Despite threats to Iranian identity and culture, Ferdowsi's message never went out of style, nor did he go into oblivion. He turned an ethnic text away from extremism into a trans-ethnic text. The Iranian identity in The Shahname does not aim to humiliate other nations to

gain color and polish for itself; rather, it is based on strong intellectual, spiritual and moral foundations. Therefore, Iranian nationalism throughout history has never turned into hateful racism such as Nazism and Fascism in the twentieth century. In fact, what distinguishes The Shahname from extremist ethnic texts is its admiration of eternal themes such as praise, courage, bravery, integrity, heroic purity and leadership alongside ethnic and national concepts. By extension, this masterpiece laid the foundation for the formation of human identity, to be exact. It can be concluded that Ferdowsi had both a national and a universal mission. His national mission was to introduce Iranian glorious ancient history and civilization along with the spread of the Persian language. However, his universal mission was to promote human morality individually and socially. A large number of his epic stories are concerned with human morality regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, ideology and nationality which appeal to every liberal and noble human in the modern world. Another significant aspect of The Shahname is pertinent to mankind's instinct of selfishness and narcissistic propensities which arise from his intrinsic desire to prove his originality and the glorious lineage of himself. Majority of Persians consider themselves as the descendants of Kaykhosrow, Dara, Zoroaster, Shapur and Anoushirvan. For Iranians, Rostam, Esfandiar, Giv, Goodarz and Goshtasb are their ancestors. Last but not least, Ferdowsi's The Shahname is the story of the period of grace, greatness and rule of their ancestors against whom putting up a battle is toilsome.

Hič šah râ dar ĵahân ân zahre nist = No king in the world can dare
Ku soxan rânad ze Iran bar zabân = Even talk against Iran

Marqzar-e mâ be šir ârâstast = Our meadow is adorned with lions

Bad tavân kušid bš šire ĵyân = It is really toilsome to fight an angry lion

CONCLUSION

National identity is a set of joint attributes and ideals of an independent nation who are aware of and through which they feel a sense of belonging to each other. National identity is composed of various components such as culture, language, land, history, religion, symbols, myths, customs and beliefs. It can be inferred from Ferdowsi that, the richer one nation is in terms of its constituent elements of identity, the stronger and more stable that country will be. On the other hand, the preservation of these elements and passing them down to future generations is essential in order to strengthen, reproduce and perpetuate national identity. One of the imperative ways of transferring the cultural-civilizational heritage of identity-building to the posterity is, written materials and among the magnificent Iranian works, Ferdowsi's The Shahname is an exception in terms of having historical-cultural components of Persian identity. Therefore, after Ferdowsi, Iranian identity continued not in the context of a politically and religiously integrated governments, but in a cultural, literary and artistic context too. Having known that, Iranians

have preserved The Shahname as their national identity. Understanding the conditions and demands of the time, Ferdowsi composed The Shahname from historical sources so as to protect the Persian lands and territories, preserve freedom and establish the national identity of all his compatriots, the ancient greatness, the glorious deeds and constructive as well as praiseworthy efforts of the ancestors of this ancient country. Additionally, he organized the narrations of the priests and peasants and presented them to the society as the best means and factor for forming a strong and powerful nation. The magnificent quality of The Shahname is that it has guaranteed the continuity and unity of Persian civilization and history. Today, it is believed that Ferdowsi has connected the Iranians with their past and made their ancestors present in the past. If Ferdowsi had not appeared in one of the most critical and decisive periods in the history of Iran and at the dawn of Persian literature, and had not composed The Shahname, the Iranians could not have cherished their historical and cultural existence and in later times, as an Iranian, would not have been able to build on their precious culture and glorious history. On this basis, our judgment and insight will not be in vain and exaggerated if we deem that The Shahname has laid the foundation of what we call the Iranian unconscious.

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