

Historical outline of Regional multiplicity, evolution of Literature and its significance in Persian Manuscript Illustrations

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Abstract

This study observes the role of Persian literature that developed and formed into a land of diversities and subsequent impact of literature on Persian manuscript illustrations. Persia, invaded and occupied by Greeks, Arabs, Turks, Mongols, and Scythians gave way to literature to flourish under numerous dynasties. Zoroastrian beliefs and traditions have always been present in Persian art and literature. Literature included old scriptures of Avesta, Bundahishn and Denkard and later developments in form of 'Shanameh' by Firdawsi, and 'Mukhzanu 'I Asrar', 'Khusraw u Shirin', 'Haft paykar' 'Masnawis', and 'Khumsa' by Nizami, all are much valued contributions in Persian literature. Manntiq- al Tayr by Farid-al Din 'Attar, an allegorical masnawi describes impressive imagery, the adventure of the birds and Sa'di's Bustan, Gulistan and Jami's Baharistan are remarkable works that gave life to the creation of images for Persian manuscript illustrations. . Artistic productions of mythological themes and symbols are significantly works of artists and poets working under the patronage of different rulers from thirteenth till fifteenth century. Persian artists gave visual imagery to literature and poetry, to generate interest of the reader in literature; and to make them known with Persia's historical past and diversity of the region. Melodious amalgamation of artistic and poetic language with a spiritual narrative expression caused the development of miniatures. Thus, these miniatures hold of a rich accordance with Persian history, religion and literature.

Keywords: Diversity, Persian Literature, Manuscript Illustrations, Myths, Beliefs and Traditions.

Introduction

The roots of Persian painting are found in ancient Persian literature, culture, and myths. Artistic productions of mythological themes and symbols are significantly works of artists and poets working under the patronage of different rulers from thirteenth till fifteenth century. This research paper observes the roots of Persian painting in ancient Persian literature, culture, and myths and to investigate this one needs to know the historical and religious factors that lay behind the production of such magnificent art. Therefore, first and foremost important step towards such research is to understand the historical and religious factors of ancient Persia. This paper is extracted from my unpublished Mphil thesis titled "Persian Allegory of *Chinoiserie* Motifs" which is submitted to Higher Education Commission, Pakistan. A careful chronological order to document history is opted to benefit other researchers.

Persia, a land with regional diversities, mysteries of myths, poetry, literature and rich tradition had been invaded and occupied by Greeks, Arabs, Turks, Mongols,

and Scythians. The ruins found at Persepolis and the gigantic traditional palace complex which was built in the Achaemenian era, and the remains of the Sasanian constructions are indications of a prosperous background of Persia in art and structural design. Zoroastrian beliefs and traditions are always present in visual and verbal artistic expressions of Persians. In Persian literature, many mythological themes and symbols have been used to bring forth the concept of good against evil. Persian artists effectively evoked audience's deep sense of cultural and religious identity through art and literature and by inducing ancient Iranian elements to convey such messages. One can analyze a relation between Persian literature and Persian illustrated manuscripts, as these paintings describe numerous myths from the history and religion of ancient Persia.

The Iranian faith is identified from the inscriptions of the Achaemenian kings (558-330) and from Avesta, reference to the Iranian gods and heroes is found especially in the Bundahishn, or 'Book of Creation'. The religious texts of the Zoroastrians that include the Avesta and later sources such as the Bundahishn and Denkard provide much in sequence about the earliest Iranians and their gods as well as the creation of their world. The

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Bundahishn or 'Creation' consists of Pahlavi (Middle Persian language) translations of parts of Avesta that no longer survive and their commentaries (Zand) as well. The Denkard gives the summary of the Avesta in Pahlavi. 'Yasht' is a section within the Avesta, in which, the gods, heroes and marvellous creatures mostly appear. In the sixth and seventh centuries AD, the late Sasanian period, the legendary past and early history of Iran had been recorded in the official Khvadaynamak (*Khudaynameh*), which was written in Pahlavi (Middle Persian language) and no longer exists. In the eighth century Khvadaynamak and other Pahlavi books were translated into Arabic and translation into Persian were soon followed. Further advancements in literature lead us to '*Shahnamah*' (Book of the Kings) which has equally saved a great body of traditions and legends.

Sources to transfer tradition and history to generations were both written and spoken, due to the ancient oral tradition splendid past of Persia passed on from generation to generation. Persian literature contains its extraction in accessible works in Pahlavi and Old Persian. The mass of the existing Persian literature nonetheless comes from the period of Islamic subjugation of Persia c. 650 CE. The early Iranian dynasties such as Tahirids and Samanids were founded in Khorasan and played important role in the development of literature. Firdawsi, Sa'di, Rumi, Hafiz and Omar Khayyam all made valuable contribution to keep the historical and traditional past of ancient Persia alive through their poetry which became the basis to produce great art of books.

Firdawsi's '*Shanameh*', and Nizami's '*Mukhzanu 'I Asrar*', '*Khusraw u Shirin*', '*Haft paykar*' '*Masnawis*', and '*Khumsa*' all are much valued contributions in Persian literature. *Manntiq- al Tayr* by Farid- al Din 'Attar allegorical *masnawi* describes impressive imagery, the adventure of the birds and Sa'di's *Bustan* (Orchard) and the *Gulistan* (Rose Garden) are remarkable works that gave life to the creation of images for Persian manuscript illustrations. Jami's *Baharistan*, the *Haft Aurang* or Seven Thrones, '*Yusuf u Zulaykha* and *Laila o Majnoun*' are other remarkable works of Persian literature. Persian poetry is in general measured to have fallen into decline after the death of Jami, who died shortly before the rise of the Safavids.

Persian art represent a sense of ambiguity due to the subjects addressed. Despite the diversity of the region, its style, design and iconography lasted till today. Persian myths are drawn from legendary past of Iran described in literature and are conventional tales and narratives of ancient origin. Several of them are about extraordinary or supernatural beings. These myths reveal the approach of the culture, to which they belonged. In Persian culture myths are of important function and our understanding regarding these myths is amplified when we believe them within the framework of Iranian history. These Persian myths are well preserved as a visual language in the historical Persian manuscripts illustrations. Persian artists gave visual imagery to all literature and poetry, to

generate interest of the reader in literature; and to make them known with Persia's historical past and diversity of the region through splendid visuals of manuscripts.

Historical outline of Regional multiplicity, evolution of Literature and its significance in Persian Manuscript Illustrations

Glory and splendour are the most common adjectives when describing Persians. Persia and Iran are same country and the image fabricated by Persia is one of wine, romance: roses and nightingales in lush gardens, hasty horses, enticing women, mysteries of myths, and coloured carpet shimmering like ornaments, poetry and mellow music. ^[1] Iran was the name adopted in the early 20th century, due to the Aryan re-awakening. Persia means the ancient identity and Iran denotes the modern one. In this research both terms, Persia and Iran have been used, to describe historical background of the country.

Since ancient times Iran was a thoughtful and complex civilization, Invaded and occupied by Greeks, Arabs, Turks, Mongols, and Scythians. After Arab conquest Persians were forced to submit to Islam, the Persians accepted the new religion imposed upon them and immediately set about changing Islamic law and Islamic custom to suit their own character. ^[2] Among the territories of Iraq, Afghanistan, Russia and Persian Gulf, the Iranians converse an Indo-European language in the centre of the Arabic-speaking Middle East. ^[3] Iranians are not Semitic, nor do they belong to Turkic people, though they are of Aryan origin. Historically Iranians are known to us as one division of peoples who belong to the Indo-European family, which came from Russian grasslands to settle in Iran, Europe, northern India and Central Asia. This settlement happened in a sequence of migration and assaults, in the concluding part of the 2nd millennium BCE. ^[4] And this elucidates the association of Persian language with other Indo-European languages. The migrated Iranians were not one single clan into the land of Iran. Some of them were identified as Medes and Persians; nonetheless some of them were also recognized as Parthians and Sogdians. The titles Mede and Persian were themselves shifting coalition and unions of disparate tribes. ^[5] Historical records of these alliances are carved in the reliefs of Persepolis.

Iranian history is full of hostility and drama: assault, conquerors, fights and revolutions. Religion, influences, intellectual movements and ideas changed things within and outside Iran and around the world. It is a place of brilliance, where the gods reside and the ancient heroes still walk in the land, where the secluded past and immediate present lives side by side. ^[6] In art, literature and philosophy influences of religion are dominant. Religious myths have been an expression to convey the knowledge of the mysteries since pre historic and culture and rituals transport them to next generations. Therefore, customs and rituals of ancient Persia are of great

significance to analyze Persian illustrated manuscripts, as these paintings describe numerous myths from the history and religion of ancient Persia.

All the Great Persian Kings, Cyrus, Darius, worshipped the Lord of Wisdom, Ahuramazda. Who owed his position among men due to the claims made for him by Zarathustra, the furthestmost of the prophets Persia has given to the world. Amongst the books which compose the Avesta, known as the Bible of Zoroastrianism, only a portion, the 'Gathas', or 'psalm' is generally considered, a work of probably by Zarathustra himself who was the founder of the faith.^[7]

Zoroastrian religious conception was an expression of Iranian practice. It publically utters the sanctity of fire, water, air and earth that could not be tarnished by something impure. Earth and the universe are in a fight of *Hormuzd* (good) against *Ahriman* (evil), as in the case of truth against the lie, and the illumination against obscurity. This ideology generates a hope that good deeds would constantly win, but this conquest was not only inevitable ending, and it is not possible without active participation of the committed individual.^[8] Persian miniatures convey a sagacity that virtuous forces have failed and the world is submitting to the critical and degenerative activities of the demonic and vice versa. In Persian literature, many mythological themes and symbols have been used to bring forth the concept of good against evil. Persian artists effectively evoked audience's deep sense of cultural and religious identity through art and literature and by inducing ancient Iranian elements to convey such messages.

Achaemenes became king of the Persians (705-675 BC). Later systematically, Alexander occupied the Achaemenian Empire and moved from Asia Minor to Syria, and later Palestine and Egypt, and sequentially to Mesopotamia, Iran proper, to Afghanistan and Transoxiana. Lastly, to Achaemenian India investing one territory after the other, in conflict to constant confrontation. While moving in these territories Alexander attempted to leave no remains that could restore Achaemenian supremacy.^[9] The short-lived Alexandrian Empire and splitting up of the Achaemenian caused weak and defensive situation of central Iran. Descendants of Alexander failed to grip not more than a few years. From Transoxiana a northern Iranian clan known as Parthians, invaded Iran and under the family of Arsaces they progressively forced their rule by 220 B.C. They controlled all areas of central Iran and Mesopotamia and removed the Greek Empire in Bactria, India and from the Seleucid Empires from Syria, Asia Minor and Egypt.^[10] In Iranian culture, roots of Zoroastrianism can be found from the time of founder of faith but in Sasanian politics Zoroastrianism as a religion played a much more vital role. City of Istakhr, outside Persepolis, was the place where Zoroastrianism was practiced. One of the Zoroastrian high priests, Sassan, (A.D 180) lived in Istakhr and he was succeeded by Papak who recognized himself ruler of Fars. And this happened during the time of inner

rebellion between the Parthians and constant fights on western borders with Romans. Ardshire who was the son of Papak, proclaimed his sovereignty by succeeding the Artabanus V. Who during one of the additional victorious wars of Parthians with Rome built a place of imperial pretensions at Firuzabad.^[11] The House of Sassan declared undeviating descent from Achaemenes. Sassan's son Shapur, consolidated the power of dynasty by succeeding and captivated Roman Emperor Valerian (A.D 260).^[12] At the time of such social turmoil, Zoroastrians considered riches and possession as something superior.

Landholdings reinforced into the hands of a small number of people and the ideas tending towards socialism in religions like Christianity, Manichaeism and, Islam discouraged the basics of culture. A priest named Mazdak, persuaded the ruling Sasanian King Kavad in fifth century, that immorality appear from wealth and the equivalent sharing of possessions was the only way of persistence of kingdom. King Kavad approved his idea and attempted to put into practice the Mazdakian amendments but failed to rise above the disagreement of the priests and upper classes. As a result Mazdak was put to death and Kavad deposed. Sasanian kings sustained to preside over in the customary manner till the arrival of Islamic confrontation. With the arrival of Christianity the religious climate of the Middle East changed considerably, and left its collision in the Roman Kingdom. Mani produced and circulated the Manichean faith in Mesopotamia which was swiftly accepted by people and gathered several supporters.^[13] The Manicheans undoubtedly had a great contact on the history of Persian paintings. For their dualism and denial of the world contradictory with chief system of belief of new religion they were heretics per distinction. Due to the discrimination against them, many were slain and other left the lands. But Mani, the painter lived on and his believers made much use of his art. In the year A.D. 651, the Arabian invasion of Persia brought to an end the empire of the Sasanian and defeated Yazdigird, who was the last member of the dynasty.^[14] With the rise of Islam Sasanian dynasty eventually collapsed and Islam was substituted Zoroastrianism which was the certified religion of Iran during the Sasanian era. The Arabian conquest of Iran exhausted both, army and treasury, by several battles and the people lost tolerance to the high taxes that were forced on them.^[15]

In 7th century Persia was assaulted by Muslim Arabs. Sasanian dynasty in Iran came to end with Muslim conquest. For about one and half century following Islamic Conquest, the Persians were administrated by representative of the Muhamadan Caliphs, sent from Medina and Baghdad. These officials were firm to demolish every residue of Zoroastrianism as well as the Sasanian state. Wherever they were able, they smashed and ruined the monuments of the Persian kings.^[16]

A frequent question regarding history of Iran is the problem of connection from pre-Islamic Iran to the Islamic period, and to modern times. The great

institutions of Persia, the monarchy and Zoroastrian religion, reached its climax during Sassanid rule which were swept away by Islamic conquest and within three centuries there were little apparent remains of them.^[17] The ancient religion of Persia Zoroastrianism was bound to give way to the irresistible force of Arab doctrines and these diversities also changed the social, political and literary structure of the Iran.

From the mid-8th century onwards, Persian manipulation on mythical taste became apparent in Arabic literature. For the correct reading of the Qur'an, knowledge of Arabic tongue became compulsory for the converts, to perform religious worship and the Pahlavi script was enforced to give way to the Arabic.^[18] Calligraphy that was created by Islam due to veneration of the Holy Quran developed in harmony with literature. Calligraphy that was applied for book productions was also applied on other art forms during ninth to thirteenth century. Despite of drastic change in culture, Persian language survived and did not go under to be replaced by Arabic, like many other languages in the lands that Arabs conquered. Persian changed from the Pahlavi of the Parthian and Sassanid periods, by taking a large number of loan-words from Arabic and re-emerged after two ambiguous centuries as the elegant Persian tongue spoken by Iranians today.^[19] Due to such religious and political diversity in Iranian culture, different customs and rituals developed as rebuilding ancient ideas into modern expressions and transformed image of gods and goddesses into heroes and remained in the mythological history of Iranian culture. Islam brought many changes in the Iranian culture but Persians' individuality remained and Iranian religion, Zoroastrianism, became foundation of Iranian arts and culture.

In the formation of Persian manuscript painting, besides importance of religious factors, literature is also an essential element that played vital role in the conception and formation of visuals vocabulary. Zoroastrian beliefs and traditions are always present in visual and verbal artistic expressions of Persians. Illustrated manuscript paintings followed those religious and cultural subjects, which were described through Persian arts and literature and are practiced till today.

Art is the aesthetic aspect of the people of every culture or region and is influenced from the cultures and traditions of other societies. Therefore, it includes all spiritual, intellectual, emotional and personal aspects of existence, according to religion, faith, literature, history, philosophy, traditions and customs. In short art expresses the soul of the people. Persian arts reached their climax during the Achaemenian dynasty (549-325 BC), however, recaptured vigour throughout the Sasanian dynasty (224-642 AD). Some of the Achaemenian art works are tombs of kings at Pasargad and Naqsh e Rustom. The ruins found at Persepolis and the gigantic traditional palace complex which was built in the Achaemenian era, and the remains of the Sasanian constructions are indications of a prosperous background in art and structural design. Art

and literature of Persians such as, Zoroaster's hymns in the Gathas and other Zoroastrian substances, year back to the second millennium BC and are entirely paradigms of their mythical expression that continued in later centuries. Persian art represent a sense of ambiguity due to the subjects addressed. Despite the diversity of the region, its style, design and iconography lasted till today. Persian artists depicted the world around them in relief, ceramics, parchments and paper. Metal goblets, and metal engravings glassware, ceramic vessels, and sculptures in stone and metal, show complexity in visual arts in ancient Persia. Manuscript illustrations that flourished around thirteenth century during Mongol era, represent a style which shows essence of the art works of previous centuries.

During the primordial Persian art, the Persians continuously investigated metaphysical forces in their art. They were in quest of making association with these forces with whatever existing expression was possible for them. Art was somehow a common expression among them, and they also had a great admiration for beauty. Persian art is based on ornaments and these ornaments point toward their habits, religion, and beliefs, in accumulation, it can manipulate the people in a scholarly way.^[20]

Long before writing and scholarly expression started, myths have been fundamental part of all societies. Myths and folklore were passed down from generation to generation through oral traditions. Stories were told in homes and large crowds and some were passed on by travellers. These myths and legends helped people to explain their origins, their relation with history and their existing relation with the world they lived in. Persian myths are drawn from legendary past of Iran and are conventional tales and narratives of ancient origin. Several of them are about extraordinary or supernatural beings. These myths reveal the approach of the culture, to which they belonged. They also describe their attitudes toward the conflicts of superior and wicked as well as the action of gods, characteristics of heroes and wonderful living things. In Persian culture myths are of important function and our understanding regarding these myths is amplified when we believe them within the framework of Iranian history.^[21] These Persian myths are well preserved as a visual language in the historical Persian manuscripts illustrations.

The ancient ruins of Persepolis represent divine art with a mystic diversity through engraved images of king's companions and soldiers in ceremonial scenes, as well as early people such as Parthians, Sogdians. Other engraved decorative motifs of mystic value, battle scenes and hunting scenes, all record the history of the region. Alexander moved his troops to Persia in 331 BC and defeated Achaemenids monarchy. After his death, Seleucious, became king of Persia and was highly influenced by Greek culture. Greeks' philosophy and the art works of space management in architecture, with new discipline and strong sense of movement, balance and

proportions brought change in arts and increasingly destroyed the pure Persian style of Achaemenids. After Seleucids, only a few Persian artistic elements were left and Greek art re-established eastern art.^[22] From 250 BC, Arsacids became more powerful and pushed Seleucids back to Mesopotamia and succeeded to start the Arsacids Empire in 160 BC after invading all parts of Persia. Arsacids art was the foundation for later arts and found its way to Sassanid and Byzantine art.^[23] Role of the Sassanid, who ruled over Iran from 226 A.D. to the middle of the seventh century, is of far greater artistic importance. Adapting and intensifying preceding approaches and methods, they reconstructed the Parthian capital at Ctesiphon. A vast palace with a massive barrel vault was raised with wreckages and bricks. Sassanid architecture was ornamented with carved stone, stucco reliefs and multi-coloured stone mosaics were made a part of surface decoration. Bowls, and ewers, fine-looking gold and silver dishes, frequently ornamented with hunting scenes or animals in high relief, and fabrics with balanced design still exist. By using the same locations that the Achaemenids had decorated with reliefs and inscriptions, the Sassanid also documented their victories on massive out-door rock reliefs spread all the way through Iran. Painting and art of Sassanid era influenced Asia and had a strong connotation on the arts of China, Byzantine and France. In their attempt to renovate Achaemenids' art, Sassanid did not limit themselves to replicate other styles. Their art shows creativity and involves such elements, which developed later after the invasion of Arabs. When Alexander took over Persia, Greek art found its way to Asia and changed the art of region in several ways.^[24] One of the most significant distinctiveness of Sassanid art is the indistinguishable patterns and decorative designs which no doubt influenced Islamic art. Well-organized patterns of animals, birds, and plants were arranged face to face or side by side. Motifs of the tree of life; all have a long history in the Near East. Figures of ordinary and imaginary animals, such as peacock, dragons, and the use of matching geometrical shapes, were all widespread decorative elements applied in the arts of this era.^[25]

Islam altered the complete community formation of Iran in such a way that it is persevered to present day. However, the Caliphate and Arabs could not uphold subjugation for an extended era. Regardless of Arab, Turkish and Mongol invasions Iran preserved and regularly restated its uniqueness.^[26] During the first century and half of Arab rule less is known of the inner condition of Persia. Politically Persia was held in helplessness as a tributary province, which was strictly supervised by an acumen system developed by the first Umayyad caliph.^[27] Muhammad (p.b.u.h) and his associates ignored unnecessary decoration but architectural works produced during Umayyad were luxurious and glowing. Specifically in the construction of mosques in this period, not only local available materials and various utensils from additional places were used,

such as byzantine columns and capitals.^[28] Primarily Muslim illustrative art is restricted to paintings, and later, to books. All that has come down to us from primordial times in the way of painted pictures is some few remains of papyrus and paper in Egypt.^[29] Exchange of ethnicity and merger of arts among nations existing in a huge area, including Middle East, partly Europe, and the North Africa, produced a type of art which was known as Islamic Art. Nonetheless, there are familiar essentials in the arts but each area and nation preserved its own uniqueness in the presentation and performance. In the beginning pictures were included in text only for decoration. Some of the pictures were embodied as purely decorative ornamentations. Abstract decoration growing out of naturalistic was frequently applied especially on the first and last pages with ornamentation in many manuscripts. Same way abstract ornamentation was applied as independent decoration in Quranic manuscripts.

Persians were one of the most influential among Islamic nations, because of their rich and diverse background in art and architecture. Persians' efforts of intermingling, refurbishing and developing visual expressions, in the form of images, patterns and motifs, taken from the previous dynastic arts are evidently put into practice and can be analyzed in the later illustrated manuscripts in Persia. It was not only art and architecture of ancient Persia that was a source of inspiration in Persian manuscript painting but the importance of literature cannot be ignored due to its fundamental role. The Iranian faith is identified from the inscriptions of the Achaemenian kings (558-330) and from 'Avesta', the latter being an extensive collection of hymns, discourses, precepts for the religious life, and its oldest portion dates back to a very early period, earlier to the domination of the great king.^[30] Texts mentioned the survival of illustrated manuscript in Sasanian times. Secondly, a tradition of illustrated manuscripts had existed in the Arab world long before 1300.^[31] Only in Pahlavi, we find a large number of traditions preserved with reference to the Iranian gods and heroes especially in the Bundahishn, or 'Book of Creation'. Furthermore, the huge epic written by the great poet Firdausi in Modern Persian, and known under the name of '*Shahnamah*', or 'Book of the Kings,' has equally saved a great body of traditions and legends which would otherwise have forgotten. Though, in the epic, in a more historical appearance, these myths are in reality nothing but humanized narrations.^[32] The religious texts of the Zoroastrians that include the Avesta and later sources such as the Bundahishn and Denkart provide much in sequence about the earliest Iranians and their gods as well as the creation of their world. The Bundahishn or 'Creation' consists of Pahlavi (Middle Persian language) translations of parts of Avesta that no longer survive and their commentaries (Zand) as well. The Denkart gives the summery of the Avesta in Pahlavi. 'Yasht' is a section within the Avesta, in which, the gods, heroes and marvellous creatures mostly appear.^[33]

In the sixth and seventh centuries AD, the late Sasanian period, the legendary past and early history of Iran had been recorded in the official Khvadaynamak (*Khudaynameh*), which was written in Pahlavi (Middle Persian language) and no longer exists. In the eighth century Khvadaynamak and other Pahlavi books were translated into Arabic and translation into Persian were soon followed.^[34] In Sasanian period many books appeared about the history of past, later in 8th century during Abbasid period most of them were translated from Pahlavi to Arabic but in both cases original Pahlavi texts and Arabic translations have been lost. The myths that emerged in the part of Avesta which is known as 'Yasht Avesta' include some accounts of primordial pre Zoroastrian origin; most likely they belong to the Pagan Indo-Iranian period. They express the heroic deeds carried out by kings, gods, and warriors in opposition to ghostly and human enemies. Numerous myths re-emerged in the *Shahnameh*, which is a classic in verse form by Firdowsi, and it was concluded in AD 1010.^[35] It is not surprising to find, in many of the written works, reference to the sources used for ancient stories. These sources were both written and spoken, due to the ancient oral tradition passed on from generation to generation. The Zoroastrian Priests had to learn religious hymns and prayers by heart to spread them further. The sacred word of the prophet Zoroaster, the Gatha, and other parts of the Avesta, were preserved by oral tradition until as late as the fourteenth and fifteenth century AD. The preservation of the sacred book of the Zoroastrians in such a manner proves the importance and long history of oral tradition. There were also minstrels (*ramishgar, khuniyagar*) who performed for the ruler and his court, in addition to the Zoroastrian priests who kept their religion alive by memorizing and repeating the hymns and prayers. The origin of the ancient stories is usually ascribed to the Sasanian period, which began in the third century AD and ended with the advent of Islam. Many of them actually date from an even previous time, but 'Sasanian' seems to be a universal term for everything pre-Islam.^[36]

Persian literature contains its extraction in accessible works in Pahlavi and Old Persian. The mass of the existing Persian literature nonetheless comes from the period of Islamic subjugation of Persia c. 650 CE. Persians gained positions of scribes and bureaucrats in the Islamic empire and when Abbasids came to power (750 CE) steadily its writers and poets as well became active part of Islamic empire. Early Persian poetic expressions are distinguished by strong court patronage, expressing undue panegyrics. The custom of imperial benefaction began under the Sassanid era and continued through the Abbasid as well as Samanid courts and later into every foremost Persian dynasty. New Persian literature came up and flourished in Transoxiana and Khorasan due to existing political environment. The early Iranian dynasties such as Tahirids and Samanids were founded in Khorasan. Factual developments only commenced in the days of the

Samanids, (A.D. 874-999). Abu Shukur of Balkh (950 AD) was said to be the first who introduced *Ruba'i* or quatrain form of poetry. Later Rudaki, began with a kind of court poetry of Iran.

Another poet who flourished in the encouraging ambiance of Samanid court was Daqiqi, a Zoroastrian by some scholars, who support their declaration on one of Daqiqi's lyrics which provides poet's point of view about the world's four choicest blessings that are ruby lips, the music of harp, Zoroaster's teaching, and red wine.^[37] In ninth century Mahmud of Ghazna gathered a number of poets who collected *diwans* filled with pastoral panegyrics. Firdowsi was the most outstanding in that group of poets whose work marked the beginning of a new hasty stage of development. His remarkable contribution of epic '*Shahnameh*' in Persian literature consists of a history of mythical rulers of ancient Iran. These elements were known to Arabic world from the translations of original Pahlavi texts. Later many other Persian poets such as Sa'di, Rumi, Hafiz and Omar Khayyam also made a valuable contribution to keep the historical and traditional past of ancient Persia alive through their poetry which became the basis to produce great art of books.

The Persian myths reflect the survival of an ancient institution in the culture as well as the language of a large geographical area expanded beyond the political boundaries of the modern Iran. The diversity of the region and political upheavals could not succeed wipe out the ancient chronicles, and these legends have served for millennia.^[38] These legends are visually narrated through the works of literature, more specifically *Shahnameh*. The art of storytelling in ancient Iran was well thought-out expression to transfer history from generation to generation.

The works of some great poets as Daqiqi and Firdowsi provided people opportunity to read or listen to these stories in their own language and not only through Arabic translations. There is a range of such books (*namehs*) in Persian literature, but Firdowsi's *Shahnameh* is unique because of the loveliness and lucidity of its language. Every Iranian is known to the heroes of the *Shahnameh*, Rostam, Sohrab and Isfandiyar, and they are part of the life of every Iranian and to this day it is widespread practice to read and recite these stories.^[39]

In compiling together, Persian translations of the *Khudaynameh* and other Pahlavi sources, significantly, Firdowsi's other written record was the prose *Shahnameh* of Abu Mansur, known as *Shahnameh yi Abu Mansuri*, of the mid tenth century AD which regrettably no longer exists. His efforts were to revitalize and secure the Persian language as well as history and Iran's mythological past, that was fabricate on a long written practice.^[40] Writers, who were familiar with the earlier literature, such as Firdowsi, ensured survival of written tradition. Consequently written sources and continuous oral practice kept the myths and stories of Persia active to the current date. The *Shahnameh*, specifically, plays an

essential role in Persian life and culture due to its literary merit and its significance in safeguarding the myths as well as the history of ancient past in the Persian language. [41] Written in some 50,000 couplets or double-verses, the '*Shahnameh*' is a classic that include the myths, legends and describe the history of Iran's pre-Islamic past. Firdowsi, was born in Tus (Khurasan), completed his *Shahnameh*, some three and half centuries after the Arab conquest of Iran around AD 1010. The *Shahnameh*, which was dedicated to Ghaznavid ruler, Sultan Mahmud, is counted not only a work of immense literary importance, but also a precious resource of information about the traditions and customs and most importantly folklore of pre-Islamic Iran. [42] Material which poet used is immense and it begins with the ancient heroes of Iranian antiquity, Guyumart, Hushang and Tahmurath, who brought knowledge on earth, and ends with a short description of the Sasanain dynasty and a narrative of the death of Yazdigird III, the last of his line. [43]

From the coasts of the Caspian, Arabia or out of central Asia, invaders had come down to Persia, and all were spell bound to the Persian verbal communication, accepted Persian conducts, and refined Persian skills in arts. Countless wars were fought, numerous towns fell and their inhabitants suffered mass destruction, still Persia sustained to exist and was strengthened by an enormous spiritual energy. Forced to acknowledge distant principles, the Persians spontaneously and suitably translated and transmuted the foreign elements, until it came in appearance as something they had themselves invented. [44] Effects of the obliteration of the Caliphate were countless. Islam, that was for a time without recognized head, and Persia no longer approved an Arab ruler even supposedly. In such situation, Arabic finished being the official language and circumstances gave way to Persian language. [45]

Literature of Persia is rich with a current of mysticism. The minds of the Persians were rarely satisfied with the unyielding dogmas of Islam and they rebelled against the austerity of Zarathustra. They felt delighted in physical things, and were also thirsting for God and it was unavoidable that they should find their pleasure in combining their awareness of God with a daily delight in the world around them. Thus, Sufism, a system of theosophical mysticism began to amplify converts soon after the Islamic capture in Persia. Man was looking for some means of piercing the veil of the indefinite, in order to find the standards for recognizing the ease of their souls. Mysticism comforted their souls and it was surely not the constrained property of Persia, however, widespread to most lands in the Middle Ages. Sufism in Persian literature comes from the fact that it instills virtually the whole of Persian poetry with its spirit. [46] The Sufi beliefs extended out of the disaster of the times, but in a sense they had always been present in the Persian spirit. The delicacy, the delight of love and admiration, the sense of individuality with the visible world, was no

more than a symbol of God's majesty and all these things were already present in Persians.

Sufism in Persian literature gives a spirit to poetry. Except Firdowsi, all Persian poets gave expression to its mysticism and ideals. The first notable poet in the Sufi movement was Abu Sa'id ibn 'I Khayr, who popularized the quatrain as a verse form and established it with mystical thoughts. Nasiri Khusraw, Sana'i, Umer Khayyam, Al Ghazali, Anwari made valuable contributions in Persian mystic poetry.

Relatively war like adventures of the ancient heroes in Firdowsi's *Shanameh*, whereas Nizami (1411 A.D) introduced romantic poetry, based upon the stories of lovers from different legends. He produced his first work *Mukhzanu 'I Asrar*, in *masnawi* form at the age of forty and composed first romance, '*Khusraw u Shirin*' year after *Mukhzanu 'I Asrar*. His *Haft paykar* or seven effigies is in the style of Arabian Nights. The last of Nizami's *masnawis*, the *Iskandarnama* (Book of Alexander), is treated in epic style. A variation of expression is found in Nizami's *Khumsa* that include five romances which incorporate tales-within-tales and is regarded as encircling historical, political, ethical, erotic and mystical subjects on the whole.

An allegorist, Faridu 'I Din 'Attar brought Sufi folklore in poetry and his contribution was amplified from three to seven stages, on the Sufi 'Path' which are elucidated in the *Manntiq- al Tayr* (Speech of the Birds). Which is an allegorical *masnawi* describing with impressive imagery, the adventure of the birds (i.e. the Sufis), who travel through seven wonderful valleys (the seven stages) in search of their king, the *Simurgh* or Phoenix (i.e. the truth). [47] Attar produced many spiritual and moralistic works. Fundamentally, he was a mystic poet, and put into great influence on Jalal- al Din Rumi, who escaped or remained unaffected by the catastrophic events of the time, along with another Sufi writer, and Moralistic Sa'di, whose work achieved reputation in Persia and outside. However, Sa'di was a creative writer in all forms of verse and his popular works are the *Bustan* (Orchard) and the *Gulistan* (Rose Garden). *Gulistan* is written in prose, but with long sections in verse. It is a lighter, more humorous work than the *Bostan*, and it contains immeasurable stories selected from history or from the author's own collected experience. Some of his lyrics have even been considered equally good as those of Hafiz. [48]

The last great wave was capped by Jami, but the movements detectable in Persian literature of to-day are not of course entirely due to Jami's influence. It was also due to the contribution of a regular initiation for literature by many other writers. [49] He produced a number of forty-five works and the best known works are the *Baharistan*, another known as the *Divan*, and the *Haft Aurang* or Seven Thrones. A series of moralizing romances *Yusuf u Zulaykha* and *Laila o Majnoun* are other remarkable works produced by him. Persian poetry is in general measured to have fallen into decline after the death of Jami, who died shortly before the rise of the Safavids.

Persian manuscript illustrations portray Persian art and spirituality altogether. Persian artists gave visual imagery to literature and poetry, to generate interest of the reader in literature; and to make them known with Persia's historical past and diversity of the region. Melodious amalgamation of artistic and poetic language with a spiritual narrative expression caused the development of miniatures. These miniatures hold of a rich accordance with Persian history, religion and literature. Patterns and motifs are related to spiritual and intellectual principles of Persians, though, many foreigner motifs have also been observed in the art of books. Symbolic and metamorphic meanings of these motifs can be comprehended and admired only with the understanding of literature and the period in which this art was created and flourished. The spiritual significance of this art gives it such meanings that are in authenticity, beyond its visual description.

Conclusion

The Old Persian language of Achaemenian Empire was an Indo-European tongue and resembled with Sanskrit and Avestan, which was the language of Zoroastrian's texts. Old Persian developed in Pahlavi language and its remaining texts formed the basis for Firdowsi's *Shahnameh*. Arab conquest of Persia brought language of new monarchs but Pahlavi language continued to be spoken. A modified form of Pahlavi is known to us as modern Persian language and first Persian poet; Rudaki's poems were comprehensible for modern readers. We find exceptional prominence of poetry in Persian literature which produced the major outlet of artistic expression in the form of manuscript illustrations. Persian poetry either in form of *Qasida*, *Ghazals*, *masnavi* or *Ruba'i*, express use of Sufi imagery and creates an unusual difficulty in its interpretation and yet this fact makes it a language full of spirit and mysticism. However extract of Persian literature is in Old Persian and Pahlavi and new Persian literature flourished in Transoxiana and Khurasan under Tahirids and Samanids (899-999). Existing works of Persian literature are believed to date from eighth century with the decline of Caliphate and literature properly begins from ninth to tenth century. Under Samanid's contribution of Rudaki and Daqiqi in Persian literature is of remarkable value. Daqiqi's contribution as a composer of epic, thousand couplets, work on the ancient kings of Persia that was later integrated in Firdowsi's '*Shahnameh*' where *Rustum*, *Sohrab* and *Isfandyar* being originally gods later conceived as heroes or dragon killers are integral part of the mythical themes. Persian art represent a sense of ambiguity due to the subjects addressed. Persian myths are drawn from legendary past of Iran described in literature and are conventional tales and narratives of ancient origin. Several of them are about extraordinary or supernatural beings. These myths reveal the approach of the culture, to which they belonged. In Persian culture myths are of

important function and our understanding regarding these myths is amplified when we believe them within the framework of Iranian history. These Persian myths are well preserved as a visual language in the historical Persian manuscripts illustrations. Persian artists gave visual imagery to all literature and poetry, to generate interest of the reader in literature; and to make them known with Persia's historical past and diversity of the region through splendid visuals of manuscripts.

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