

**A REVIEW OF THE STUDIES CONDUCTED ON  
FERDOWSI'S SHAHNAMEH WITH A FOCUS ON FEMINIST CRITICISM**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Because of its historical significance and also due to the fact that it represents a part of the ancient Iranian national identity, it is important to study Ferdowsi's Shahnameh. When Shahnameh is the subject of discussion, Iranian culture and history come to attention and since Shahnameh narrates ancient Iran events in an Islamic era, given the cultural indications in the book, it is expected to provide the reader with an image of Iranian woman in ancient times. By reviewing some of the studies which have investigated women in Shahnameh, the present paper seeks to find out whether this expectation has been fulfilled or not. It gives a brief summary of these studies and appraises them according to the theories of feminist criticism and shows the differences and similarities between these studies and theories. It was found out that most of the studies have made common conclusions and considered women's image generally and biasedly. These studies pay little attention to the theories of feminist criticism.*

**KEYWORDS:** Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, Feminism, Women, Literary Studies.

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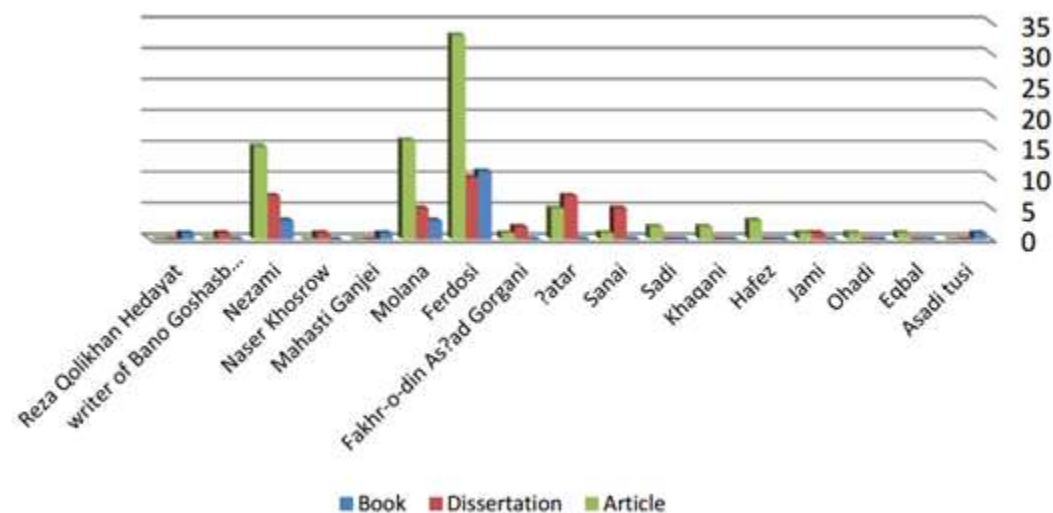
## **INTRODUCTION**

As one of the greatest poems of Persian literature, Shahnameh has traditionally been one of the most popular literary works among the Iranians due to its historical and cultural significance, its narrative style and the Iranian's long-standing interest in ancient stories. This fact encourages researchers to examine the poem from different viewpoints. Since Shahnameh's stories are not limited to battlefields and women play a role in them, many researchers have studied them from a feminist view point. Moreover, with the emergence of feminist theories and their entrance into different fields including literature, it is necessary to evaluate the studies which have been conducted based on these theories. Accordingly, the present paper examines some of these studies. This paper builds on an earlier work that examined Persian female-oriented literary studies: A Glimpse to the Female-oriented Criticism in Persian Literary Researches, Bagheri & Mirzaeyan: 2013.

For the purpose of the said research, all of the feminist studies, including books, dissertations and papers, conducted on Persian literary works from 1934 (the oldest paper found had been published in this year) to 2013 were collected using the keywords "woman" and "feminism". The research – which was published in the Global Journal of Art, Humanities and Social Sciences – indicated that in the field of classic literature, the subfield poem, Shahnameh accounted for the largest number

of these studies. The following chart shows the number of studies carried out on the works of different poets.

**Chart 1. The number of studies done on the works of classic poets**



In the present paper some of these studies whose research aspect was more distinctive than the others were selected as the sample and the extent to which they borrow from the theories of feminist criticism and also the importance of local and cultural issues in them were examined.

### **The Rights and Status of Women in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh**

Author: Gholam-Reza Ensafpour Publication date: 1976 This book deals with the issue of women in Shahnameh and is divided into 4 chapters: 1- Shahnameh, a Mirror of Women's Rights in Ancient Iran, 2- Women during the Pishdadian Era, 3- Woman during the Kianian Era, and 4- Women during the Sasanian Era. The book's titles as well as that of the first chapter reveal the author's posture and approach and consequently the conclusions he will make in the end can be predicted. It seems that describing Shahnameh's women through such expressions as "Shahnameh's women, the incarnations of perfection and beauty and estimable creatures" (p. 14) aims to suggest that women have high status in Shahnameh. Local and cultural issues, including women's giving dowry to their wives and hijab, have also been taken into consideration in the book. Due to the use of the term "women's right" in the title of the book and of chapter 1, the importance of this issue in feminist studies and the diversity of theories and viewpoints in this regard, the reader expects the book to examine the issue accurately. However, it only describes the status of women in different eras and states the story of these women and the couplets related to them and it does not provide an accurate analysis of women's rights in Shahnameh.

As to the stories related in the book, it is worth noting that in order not to damage the ideal image Shahnameh paints of women, the book narrates the story of Sudabeh only until before she falls in love with Siavash, her stepson, and speaks of her virtues up to then and skips the rest of the story (in what follows, Sudabeh's flaws from the viewpoint of other researchers will be stated).

### **Women in Shahnameh (Women's role in Seizing and Losing Power from Ferdowsi's Viewpoint)**

Author: Abolhassan Banisadr Publication date:1984

This monograph discusses women's "marital responsibilities" in 4 fields: 1- women's responsibilities in intragroup marriages and also in maintaining the central power, 2- women's responsibilities in intergroup marriages and their role in unstable power relations, 3- women's responsibilities in unstable power relations through affairs and as sexual political commodities, and 4- women's social status as a sexual commodity (p. 5). As to intragroup marriages, the author speaks of the marriages that led to the maintenance of power, integration of territories and unification of the rulers of Iran and Rome. Quoting some verses from Shahnameh, he tells the story of these marriages and explains the role of women and marriage in the preservation of the central power. Concerning intergroup marriages, the book discusses the role of marriage and women in the expansion the political power network and keeping the balance between the central and regional powers and also the effect of sexual relations on political links.

As regards the third field, sexual promiscuity and its role in power relations are analyzed. The sections regarding the role of sexual relations in power transition, inclusions and exclusions and exploitation of women as "sexual commodities", discuss the other role of women in Shahnameh (women as power tools). Regarding the last field, under the two sections "Women as a Commodity" and "Women as Social Homeland", the author examines the two aspects of women in Shahnameh: One which regards women as a means of preserving the community and increasing its population through reproduction and the other which considers women equal to the homeland and thus deserving of protection. The book takes account of political and power relations. It discusses the topic in question based on the author's ideas and his reading of it. "Women as a sexual commodity" is an important issue that has received a lot of attention in feminist criticism and the author examines it from a new angle. The author's ideas are to some extent similar to those of Marxist and socialist feminists but he does not state their ideas.

### **Ferdowsi, Women and Tragedy**

Editor: Naser Hariri Publication date: 1987. The book contains a collection of papers on Shahnameh which were published until 1986. These papers are: "Shahnameh's Women and Men" by Mahin Tajaddod, "Shahnameh and Iliad" by Abdolhossein Zarrinkoub, "Romeo and Juliet's Night and Zaal and Rudabeh's Night" by Mohammad-Ali Eslami Nodoushan, "Ferdowsi's Shahnameh and Homer's Illiad" by Nasrollah Falsafi, "Women's Image in Shahnameh" by Dabir Siaghi, some comments from Reza Baraheni, "Women in Shahnameh" from Theodor Noldeke's viewpoint. In what follows, only those papers which deal with women's image in Shahnameh will be analyzed.

### **Shahnameh's Women and Men**

The paper is adapted from the introduction to the book "The Life and Death of Heroes" by Mohammad-Ali Eslami Nodoushan. The first part of the paper gives some details about Shahnameh and heroic stories. The second part, entitled "Women in Shahnameh", opens with "Shahnameh is not an anti-woman book" (p.12). This opening sentence shows the author's posture and the general

description he gives of Shahnameh's women in the following pages supports it. Referring to the compliments Shahnameh pays to women, the author states that "most of Shahnameh's women are an epitome of a perfect woman. While enjoying the female characteristics, they are sagacious, magnanimous and even valorous."

The reason why the author emphasizes the sagacity of Shahnameh's women is that in the patriarchal culture, women's being emotional was regarded as a fault and weakness. This attitude has been prevalent among such liberal feminists as Mary Wollstonecraft and has leveled criticisms against them. Critics believe the fact that Wollstonecraft has usually spoken in favor of reason and against emotion and that it has never occurred to her to question male rationalism is a fault on her part.

The third part of the paper deals with women's beauty in Shahnameh. Feminist theories criticize concentration on the beauty and figure of women. For instance, Carolyn Korsmeyer regards the concept of beauty a controversial issue in feminist theories since it emphasizes the outer beauty of women (Korsmeyer, 2008: 94). The author believes that although the love stories of Shahnameh (except the case of Sudabeh) are characterized by nudity, they are pure and decent. In the last part of the paper, the author speaks of the troubles of Shahnameh's women such as Tahmineh and Farangis and concludes that "Shahnameh's women have their own peculiar female virtues. They seek their felicity in the happiness of their spouse. While chaste and modest, they, along with their husbands and children, step in to the road that leads to the victory of good over evil" (p. 19). The sentence "Shahnameh's women have their own peculiar female virtues" raises the question of what is meant by peculiar female virtues. The sentences that follow contain the author's definition of female virtue: to seek your felicity in the happiness of your spouse, to be chaste and modest, to along with your husband and children step into the road that leads to the victory of good over evil. The concepts of women these sentences imply are comparable to the concept of "women's otherness" introduced by Simone de Beauvoir. In the book "The Second Sex", she points out that women are defined solely based on their relationship with men (Robbins, 2010: 19).

### **Women's Image in Shahnameh**

The paper first gives some details about Shahnameh and then examines women's image in it. The title of the paper is broad and implies a descriptive discussion. As to the issue of women in Shahnameh, after explaining the high status of women in Shahnameh, the paper argues that the image Shahnameh paints of women is superior to that given in all the other lyrical poems and states the qualities used in Shahnameh for characterizing women. Then it deals with the well-known women in Shahnameh and categorizes them into princesses, noblewomen, handmaids, nannies and sorceresses. The study is exclusively descriptive and does not employ any theoretical framework. It only focuses on the text and does not draw on theories of feminist criticism.

### **Women in Shahnameh from the Viewpoint of Noldeke**

This one-page paper presents Noldeke's viewpoint on Shahnameh's women. The importance of the paper lies in the fact that its author looks at the Iranian community from the outside and the prejudices prevalent among the Iranians does not influence his ideas. However, the opening sentence of the paper, "Women do not have high status in Shahnameh" (p. 163), indicates the

author's view which seems not to be shared by many Iranian researchers (In the introduction to the book "The Words Shahnameh's Women Deserve", Kia refers to this issue directly (Kia, 1992)). To support his claim, Noldeke only refers to few women. He states that Gordiye, although a warrior, is a conspirator and that Manijeh is spoken of in Shahnameh only as long as she is necessary for the mythical aspects of the story. Yet, he makes no mention of Katayun or the girl who helped Ardeshir while he was escaping. Referring to these few cases, focusing on minor female characters and ignoring other major characters in Shahnameh, he concludes that in Iranian epics one cannot find such women as Penelope, Andromache and Nausicaa who in their female world are equal to men (p.163). Noldeke's view is in opposition to that of the authors who have studied the women's status in Shahnameh and shows how custom and society influences the research on women.

### **The Words Shahnameh's Women Deserve**

Author: Khojasteh Kia Publication date: 1992

In the introduction to the book, Kia notes that "we do not share this view of Noldeke that women do not have high status in Shahnameh". Stating this in the introduction shows the author's posture and to some extent reveals the conclusion she is going to make. The author introduces the most important women in Shahnameh in a descriptive way in 3 sections stating their stories as well as the parts of Shahnameh related to them. In the third section of the book, the author considers Shahnameh's character Sudabeh to be similar to Sumer's Innana and Babylon's Ishtar and also points out that Georges Dumézil compares the role of Sudabeh in Shahnameh with that of the daughter of Kavi in the Indian epic Mahabharata. This comparison is so interesting and challenging and raises some questions: Does the author make this comparison in order to improve Sudabeh's status? Is Sudebeh, regarded by religious Iranian critics as a bad character, decent and estimable? In addition to the 3 sections, the book contains 3 indexes on the instances of women's beauty in Shahnameh, hero's married life and women in Greek culture. In the first index, after stating some instances of women's beauty in Shahnameh, the author discusses where this beauty comes from and in what eras and among what tribes this beauty has been popular.

This index, like the paper "Shahnameh's Women and Men" written by Mahin Tajaddod, deals with the beauty of women. As mentioned previously, according to some feminist theories, beauty should not be overemphasized. Examining the origins of this aesthetics and the comparisons made can help to understand cultural traditions but entering into these issues is in opposition to feminist theories. From the existentialist viewpoint, attention to women's figure and women's trying to achieve the beauty acceptable to men undermine women's independence (Jaggar, 1983: 95).

The second index introduces 8 types of marriage in Indian religious practice and identifies some of these types in Shahnameh. The points made in this index based on Indian-Iranian texts, addressing cultural relations in ancient Iran, introducing the different types of marriage common then and giving a reason for the type of Tahmineh and Rostam's marriage are among the strengths of this book. The latter is a challenging subject which has been examined from different viewpoints.

The third index addresses the women's status in ancient Greece. The author asserts that in the Greek myths women are regarded as worthless and points out that this anti-woman attitude can be

observed in Homeric epics too. Given the author's stance against Noldeke, it can be said that this part of the book is a response to Noldeke's view and the question arises as to whether Kia has misjudged the issue without taking account of all the cultural relations in ancient Greece.

### **The Stories of Shahnameh's Women**

Author: Zahra Mohazab      Publication date: 1995  
Based on Iranian historical books, the author starts her discussion by a title as "A Review of Iran's History and an Investigation of Women's Social Status in Iranian Society" and examines their social standing from the beginning of human life until the Sasanian era, dealing with women's status in each era briefly. The next chapters address Shahnameh's women and their stories. The conclusions the author makes on women's personality based on the stories of Shahnameh include: The number of good women is more than that of bad women in Shahnameh. Shahnameh emphasizes the personality traits of women rather than their race. Women are described as beautiful blessings but are not praised on the grounds of their beauty. They are acceptable in Iranian culture and are not fussy when selecting their spouse and are predominantly supported by men. Women's giving dowry to their spouse, their age of marriage, matchmaking ceremony, women's clothing, women as scapegoats, the recognition of women's property rights, polygamy and women's right to fight and to govern are also discussed.

In some of the studies conducted on Shahnameh, some issues in relation to women have been ignored due to the author's bias. The fact that Mohazab addresses some of these issues, including women used as scapegoats, the prevalence of polygamy and women's being supported by men, and discusses women's clothing, dowry, the age of marriage and marriage ceremony shows her interest in ethnic and cultural issues. In most of the female-oriented studies, the epic atmosphere of Shahnameh and its heroic tales have led the researchers to pay more attention to the heroic aspect of women (however, in most cases the researchers have been descriptive and the analytical aspect is less dealt with in regard with the heroism (pahlavani) of Shahnameh's women). This may be due to the fact that women's being emotional is considered as a weakness and men's being a hero (pahlavan) is regarded as an advantage from the viewpoint of the researchers and the heroic aspect has been dealt with more to prevent women's being seen inferior to men. This issue can be examined based on female-oriented theories. Some conservative feminists argue that "in equal conditions, men display masculine psychological traits (such as courage, aggression, rationality or the ability to think logically, abstractly and analytically, and the ability to control emotions) while women show feminine traits (like flexibility, gentleness, modesty, helpfulness, sympathy, compassion, kindness, intuition, sensitivity, selflessness) and the society should maintain this social discipline in order to ensure men would remain "manly" and women, "womanly" (Tang, 2008: 18). In this study, the researcher focuses on the emotional aspect of women along with their logical power.

The results of this study show that Shahnameh does not focus on race. It contradicts the points made in the book, "Ferdowsi and Women's Status in Islam and Shahnameh". The said book refers to race as a justification for discrimination against women).

### **Appropriate and Inappropriate for Women in Shahnameh**

Author: Manouchehr Akbari      Publication date: 2001 .In this article, the author examines some personality traits of the famous women in Shahnameh by referring to their stories and talks about their foresight and wisdom based on the verses of Shahnameh. The study notes women's complete rule over the city Herom. According to the opinions of some feminist movements like the radicals' belief in the separation of women from men, examining the features of this city and its women's attitude toward men based on the historical texts concerning the city's history can provide new findings about common cultures in ancient Iran.

Some points in regard with women noted in this article are as follows: There is a balance between heroes and heroines and princes and princesses (in terms of personal and social traits). In terms of freedom of speech, women are equal to men. The culture dominant in Iran and the region in ancient times allowed women to show their talents and competences. In a large family, if a woman gave an order after her spouse's death, it would be followed exactly. In Shahnameh, all loves are terrestrial. No one has a heavenly and mystical personality. In Shahnameh, expressing love for a man by a girl has not been criticized and even has been allowed and common. As to women, modesty, piety and hijab before marriage were emphasized. The women are loyal to their husbands. Secrecy is a part of married life. The continuity of generations and races has been one of the main motivations for getting married. Investigating this attitude according to the feminist opinions such as Fayerston's belief in that it is important for men to have a child in order to immortalize their name, property, class and identity (Tang, 2008: 143), can present a new approach to studying Shahnameh based on female-oriented theories. The paper mentions the cases in which women were blamed, considered as a disgrace and deserved to be killed but like other studies, does not analyze this kind of thinking and the extent to which it was common in ancient Iran.

It concludes that "women have a special social status in Shahnameh" (p. 80). The author is expected to specify women's status and avoid such generalizations.

### **Motherly Emotions in Shahnameh**

Author: Tahereh Rezaeifar      Unpublished MA defended in 2005

In the first part of this thesis, the researcher investigates the family and the status of woman in the pre- and post-Islamic periods. Such division had not been made in the previous studies, distinguishing this thesis from them. Another distinctive feature of this study is that it deals with the status of women in Shahnameh in general and quoting some verses from Ferdowsi, discusses the manifestations of women in Shahnameh, including their married life, heroism, courage and their role in the governance of the country. The thesis concludes by discussing other manifestations of women which have rarely been addressed. These aspects include: marriage, deprivation from family privileges, setting conditions for marriage, women's familiarity with the customs and traditions, especially marriage, Rudabeh and caesarean, pregnancy with twins and miscarriage, naming the baby, abandoning the baby due to selfishness and lack of attention to motherly emotions, the girl's running away from home and her mother's concerns, witnessing the child's success, female jealousy, loyalty to husband, instances of bad women in Shahnameh, mariticide, divorce, punishment of women for doing something bad, appreciating women, women's mediation and problem solving, marrying widowers, women's disguising themselves as men, worshipers of women (p. 32-59).

Cases like miscarriage, naming a baby, abandoning a baby, lack of attention to motherly emotions, divorce and etc. have been dealt with for the first time. Examining these manifestations from the feminist viewpoint may bear interesting results. Some radical feminists believe that any relationship in which one takes care of another human being could be called motherly. In contrast, other radical feminists disagree with this idea and insist that no woman should deprive herself from getting pregnant and the joy of raising children in an attempt to resist patriarchy (Tang, 2008: 140). The existing differences and similarities in feminist ideas about motherhood and its different manifestations in Shahnameh can provide new insights into ancient Iranian customs and beliefs. In the third part, Shahnameh's mothers are introduced; motherly emotions are dealt with, and the reasons for the superiority of some mothers over others are mentioned. The comparison of the mothers shows that motherly emotions are not specific to a specific time and religion. Many children are more inclined toward their mother rather than their father and maternal lineage affects their future.

At the end of this part, the author addresses the relationship between the fame of mothers and that of their children. It is formulated that the more famous the woman's child and her husband are, the more glorious she will be. This idea can be compared with that of □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□. It can also be investigated whether this idea applies to ancient Iranian society. "D□□□□□□□□□□ believed that women are oppressed due to 'being the Other'. A woman is the Other because she is not a man. Man is the Self, a free being who gives meaning to his existence, and woman is the Other or someone who is given meaning by others" (Tang, 2008: 23). The previous studies investigate women generally and based on such concepts as "women's status" and "women's rights", but this research presents a more detailed analysis of women's personality in Shahnameh. The periods studied are also notable. This study can provoke an important debate which can be explored from new viewpoints and more analytical aspects.

### **A Reading of Woman in Shahnameh**

Author: Mahbubeh Paknia Publication date: 2006 The researcher in this paper aims to answer the following question: Do the women in Shahnameh enjoy higher status than other women of their time? Considering women's personality regardless of their role as a wife, a mother and/or a girl at the beginning of the paper along with using the word "reading" in the title of the paper and "women's studies" in the keywords suggest that the author is going to investigate women's status in Shahnameh from a new angle. The researcher has expressed her position in the section "Expectations from Shahnameh" stating that the status of the woman in Shahnameh should not be compared with that of the women of our age and that the advantage of female-oriented researches is that they lead to understanding different strata of the traditional society, which is a good point of this research.

In the second part of the paper, the author discusses a few comments made on women's status in Shahnameh. She asserts that Iran was an important empire in ancient times and as an important civilization, provided fertile ground for women's growth. But it does not imply that ancient Iranian culture, historically and geographically, has exceptionally paved the way for women to show their



talents. Therefore, it is not realistic to refer to such works as Shahnameh as evidence and claim the superiority of Iran and Iranians" (p.116).

Given the epic identity of Shahnameh and its women, the following parts of the paper deal with the manly behavior of some of these women and how impressive these characters are. But the author asserts that it must be noted that the story mixes reality and imagination in this regard. Attention to the aristocratic context and the epic nature of Shahnameh has helped the researcher to carry out a more acceptable analysis of women's status in Shahnameh than the other researches. Friedrich Engels, a Marxist feminism theorist, argues changes in peoples' material life conditions influence the structure of family relationships. The points made on the aristocratic atmosphere of Shahnameh in this paper can be examined based on this theory.

The author refers to the fact that the supporters of women's rights movement have criticized characterizing women as only "beautiful". She talks about "loyalty" and the fact that this is a reciprocal feature, but in practice women are more expected to be loyal than men. Later, based on the public perception of decency, she discusses some examples of matriarchy and women's proposing marriage to men in Shahnameh and states that these examples do not conform to the public perception of "decency". With respect to the wisdom of women in Shahnameh, two contrasting views are discussed.

One of the good points of this research is that each and every one of the questions posed in the different parts of the study has been restated in the conclusion, and the results have been stated as answers to these questions. Moreover the author has offered the results of the story taking account of the aristocratic atmosphere of Shahnameh, the popular beliefs in the community's culture and the requirement for the stories to be fascinating and fictional.

### **Women's Image in Iran's Epic Literature**

Author: Zohreh Aalinasab Publication date: 2008

The first chapter of the book deals with women's status in and Shahnameh. The author believes that "women have always had high status among Iranians (p.13)". Using the adverb "always" shows the author's posture. Then, based on Iranian books and historical and cultural documents she develops the discussion. The fact that the author discusses Zoroaster's viewpoint, i.e. the religious and cultural attitude of ancient Iran toward woman, and Pahlavi texts reveals her attention to cultural and ethnic relations. The next chapters address Shahnameh's first women, famous mothers, and the love story of Bijan and Manijeh and that of Khosrow and Shirin, quoting some verses about them from Shahanmeh. Here again, women have mostly been described rather than analyzed. Chapter 5 introduces Sudabeh as "The Princess of Impulses", and narrates her story in Shahnameh, referring to the mythic origin of Sudabeh and Siavash. This title for Sudabeh to some extent prevents readers from shaping a negative perception of her. Most researchers investigating Shahnameh through a local and cultural approach have painted a negative image of Sudabeh. If we consider Sudabeh's request from Siavash to make love with her an attempt to challenge the common perception of women and analyze her character based on radical feminists' assertion that women should dispel the common perception of feminine identity made by patriarchy in order to obtain their complete personality and feel their real and natural being (Tang, 2008: 176) and that

they only achieve complete political, economic and social equality with men when sexual relationship between women and men becomes completely equal (Tang, 2008: 180), then we might come up with an totally different impression of her.

In the sixth chapter, female powerful warriors in the history of Iran and world are introduced based on Shahnameh, Bahmānameh and Darabnameh. The author explains their origins, appearance, weapons and combativeness. However, with respect to the heroic aspects of women in Shahnameh and other epic stories, the question is that were there historical presidents for such female warriors and if yes, what was the society's perception of them? Such a classification of female and male traits and the tendency to assign heroism to men can also be examined from the viewpoint of liberal feminists. Liberal feminists dream of women's freedom from sex discriminations. They believe patriarchal society thinks that women are only suitable for jobs like teaching, secretary ship and nursing and are mostly unable to carry out such tasks as ruling, preaching and investing. Liberal feminists believe that such gender stereotypes are highly unfair (Tang, 2008: 54). In the seventh chapter, a part of Rostam's tale in Shahnameh is narrated and the positive traits of Rostam along with the verses referring to these traits have been stated. Given the title of this book and the six previous chapters, there is no proper relationship between this chapter and the previous ones.

### **Ferdowsi and Women's Status in Islam and Shahnameh**

Author: Faezeh Faryabi Publication date: 2008. The first chapter of this book addresses Shahnameh, its importance and the national standing of Ferdowsi in terms of ambitions and objectives. The second chapter, which consists of 4 parts, states Islam's view on women quoting some Quran verses. The discussions in this chapter along with the title of the book reveal the religious approach of the research and the conclusions are made based on this approach. Chapter three investigates women's image in Shahnameh. From the author's viewpoint, Ferdowsi characterizes women as obedient, chaste and good spouses (p. 42). Wherever Ferdowsi's lines are in contradiction with this, the author clarifies that "analysis of these opinions show that the contemptuous words against women are in fact uttered by people who are not of Aryan decent or are distant descendants of Aryans" (p.42). Then, the author classifies Shahnameh's women.

With respect to the traits Ferdowsi attributes to good women (i.e. obedient, chaste and good spouses), it should be noted that if we investigate Shahnameh based on a feminist approach, characterizing good women with such traits will be criticized. From the feminist viewpoint, these are the traits a patriarchal society assigns to good women. "Wollstonecraft believes that it is wicked to characterize women as gentle, obedient, passive and pretty" (Robbins, 2010: 81). Moreover, describing good women as "good spouses" attracts this criticism from the feminists that the value of women as independent beings and not in connection with men has been overlooked. In d□□□□□□□□□□ viewpoint, men define women based on their relationship with men and not as independent beings. Women are not regarded as independent beings (Robbins, 2010: 83). The author has adopted a religious approach to examine these traits and her ideas are different from feminists'. This shows how the approach selected for the purpose of a study changes the results of the study.

The second part of this chapter deals with the traits of Shahnameh's women including: 1- Helpfulness in hard times, 2- decency, 3- politics and ruling, 4- wisdom and prudence, 5- love for children, 6- courage, 7- raising good children, 8- marriage and married life, 9- love and loyalty. In addition, the chapter discusses "some cases in which Ferdowsi is unkind toward women" (p. 80). They include not using women's power of thinking for consultation, emphasizing the inability of some women to learn knowledge, regarding women as a tool for reproducing boys and other cases in which Ferdowsi talks about women in a reproachful tone. A distinctive feature of this book is that it discusses the cases in which, from the author's viewpoint, Ferdowsi is unkind toward women. Discussing these cases is important since the previous studies dealing with women's status in Shahnameh ignore them. The fourth chapter introduces oppressed women in Shahnameh and compares the fate of some women in Shahnameh and Iliad and Odyssey. The researcher does not clarify her aim of comparing the women in Iranian and Greek epics but it seems that given the global reputation of the women of the Greek epic, she, like some other researchers (Abbasi and Ghobadi, 2010), has aimed to bring to the fore the women of the Iranian epic and also respond to such figures as Noldeke. The author's attention to the traits regarded as virtues among the Iranians but criticized and even considered as a kind of cruelty to women by feminists indicates the difference between the theories of new western criticism and Iranian cultural and ethnic issues. This difference shows that the western version of feminist theories cannot be applied to Iranian women in most cases.

### **The Hidden Goddesses: Women's Image in Shahnameh**

Author: Leila Daalvand Publication date: 2010. The first three chapters of the book deal with kings, the meaning of their names, their reign, and their characteristics. In regard to women, the author gives a summary of their stories in Shahnameh quoting some verses from Ferdowsi.. Some events related to women in Shahnameh have been explained in the light of other studies. As to Faranak, the author states "Faranak is the most prominent and estimable woman in Shahnameh. She is not the kind of woman who sits in the harem wearing sumptuous costumes and a golden crown. She is the kind of woman who contributes to the social transformations of her time." The author does not clarify Faranak's contribution to social transformations.

In the second chapter, the author introduces women of Pahlavani period, and states that "the freest and most powerful women have been portrayed in Rostam's myths and when introducing the family of Zal and Rostam (p. 44)". The use of such adjectives as "prominent", "estimable", "free" and the like shows the attitude of the author and her descriptive approach. The above sentence about the women in Rostam's tale brings up some questions, including what kind of freedom is the freedom the women in Rostam's myths enjoy? What are the criteria of freedom in the author's view and/or the ancient Iranian society? What are the characteristics of powerful women? Does women's being powerful mean they have manly traits like combativeness? Do womanly traits such as being sensitive and emotional and the ability to give birth were regarded as instances of women's power?

The love story of Zal and Rudabeh, and the story of Rudabeh's pregnancy have also been mentioned. The latter can be investigated from different viewpoints since pregnancy is one of the most controversial issues in feminist theories. For instance, some feminists consider pregnancy as

a cruelty toward women and some others including Fayerston and O'Brian have expressed contradictory opinions about women's pregnancy. After narrating the story of Tahmineh and her going to Rostam's chamber, the author states a few positive and negative comments about this act of Rudابه. Referring to the book "The Words Shahnameh's Women Deserve" by Kia, she maintains that no immoral action occurs in this scene, and that is why after describing her beauty, Ferdowsi praise Tahmineh's wisdom and chastity. The points stated about Tahmineh show that she has been analyzed based on cultural issues. This behavior on the part of Tahmineh brings out the question that is there any precedent for this act of bravery? In ancient Iranian society, what were the consequences of such a behavior? Dose the fact that Ferdowsi describes the beauty and wisdom of Tahmineh immediately after telling the story of her going to Rostam's chamber indicate that due to the cultural differences between the ancient Iran and the Iran at the time of Ferdowsi, this action on the part of Tahmineh received heavy criticism? Can investigating marriage types in the ancient times provide an answer to such questions? ( Refer to the points made in section 4 of the present paper about the index of the book "The Words Shahnameh's Women Deserve").

The author has also discussed the views of some researchers on Gordafarid and her heroism, which bring up some questions including were there precedents for the heroism of women in ancient society? Was heroism, i.e. women's being manly, considered as a positive trait? Did women try to remove their differences with men in order to achieve equality with men, and did men's privileges encourage them to try to be manly? Feminists believe that femininity, per se, is not a problem; the problem is the denigration of such feminine traits as kindness and gentleness by patriarchy. They believe that if we equalize feminine value with masculine value, the discriminations against women will be eradicated (Tang, 2008: 20). Answering these questions and comparing them with the feminists' ideas can provide us with a more transparent image of Iranian women in ancient times.

The author introduces Siavash's mother by referring to historical and mythical sources, and later she introduces Sudابه as the only woman whom Ferdowsi considers blameworthy. As mentioned previously, analyzing the personality of Sudابه from different viewpoints can provide a new perception of Sudابه.. After a brief description of the historical context of Shahnameh, the fourth chapter of the book deals with the following in order to understand women's status in ancient Iranian society based on Shhnameh's stories: Women's reign, woman and consultation, woman and fighting, women's strategies to demoralize enemies before war, women in the ceremonies, woman and ownership, women and motherhood, the traits of a good woman, marriage, the relations between girls and boys, and dowry in Shahnameh.

Moreover, three common types of marriage in Shahnameh (intragroup, intergroup and incestuous) are also explained. The reasons why incestuous marriage, i.e. marriage of brothers and sisters and other closely related family members, were considered appropriate from the Iranians' viewpoint and relations between girls and boys have also been dealt with. The author has only quoted those verses of Shahnameh related to women's social status but analyzing and comparing them using literary theories would have provided better understanding of women's status in the ancient Iranian society. The issue of marriage, especially incestuous marriage, brings about the question that has this kind of marriage been common among all the social classes or we can find instances of

marriage and free relationships in the ancient Iranian culture which are in conformity with feminist movements? As mentioned earlier, the book investigates women's status in Shahnameh based on local and cultural relations and through a broad and descriptive approach rather than an analytic one.

### **The Comparison of Women's Status in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh and Homer's Iliad and Odyssey**

Author: Hojjat Abbasi, Hossein-Ali Ghobadi Publication date: 2010. In the abstract of the paper, the authors state given that some criticize Shahnameh as misogynist, they aim to examine women's status in Shahnameh. However, given that the authors themselves point out the dissimilar context of Shahnameh and Iliad and Odyssey, they make no mention of their aim of comparing the Iranian and Greek ancient cultures. The first part of the paper analyzes some mythological beliefs regarding the feminine nature of the universe and then discusses women's status in the ancient Greek society asserting that women had a very low status then. Afterwards, women's role in the two epics of Iliad and Odyssey are analyzed and the following points are made: Greek epics mostly deal with divine goddesses rather than terrestrial women. They address the beauty of women rather than their human virtues. In Greek epics, women are presented in such a way that they, consciously or unconsciously, instigate disturbance. They are controlled by men and mostly their lust. They have no independence. Odyssey paints a better image of woman. The presence of such an important character as Penelope improves women's status; however, there are still many cases in which women are regarded as inferior and unreliable.

The fact that the researchers analyze women's status in Greece looking at the Greek society from outside brings about some questions: To what extent have the authors considered the cultural backgrounds of ancient Greece and used them in their discussions? Do the Greek researchers agree with the authors' ideas or there is evidence in the Greek culture that refutes these ideas? The second part of the article examines women's status in ancient Iran according to the orient lists and ancient books such as Avesta and highlights some instances of favorable attitude toward women in those periods. In analyzing the role and status of women in Shahnameh, the authors address the following: The variety of female characters in Shahnameh, women's independence and autonomy, their sagacity, their central and decisive role, the dignity and honor of women, and their good-naturedness.

The authors conclude that given Zoroastrianism's support for women, they enjoy high status in Shahnameh, both in terms of literary characterization and value. They play an important role in Shahnameh and are not used as a tool to satisfy men's lust. It seems that the authors have ignored some facts about Shahnameh in order to reach their desired results. For example, Rudابه's persistent love for Zal is introduced as a symbol of women's independence and autonomy but in fact Sindokht tries hard to obtain the consent of Rudابه's father, which does not correspond to the meaning of autonomy. Moreover the paper makes no mention of the cases in which women are regarded as a reproach and blameworthy. The paper is based on ancient Iranian's viewpoints and traditions. Its results contradict those of the paper "A Reading of Women in Shahnameh".

## CONCLUSION

The most prominent point about the studies carried out on Shahnameh is the prejudiced approach of some of the researchers. It seems that given Iranians' intense interest in Shahnameh due to the fact that it displays the historical identity of ancient Iranians, they've tried not to damage the reader's positive image of Shhnamehe. Therefore, they have overlooked some facts. Moreover, there are generalizations and repetitions in these studies, and in many cases the researchers have examined the women's image in Shahnameh generally rather than in detail. One of the important things in conducting a research is to adopt a clear methodology. The researcher should take a specific approach in order to prevent the interference of personal preferences in the research. If Iranian society does not accept many of the theories of feminist criticism, it should replace them with its own theories. In one of his books, d□□□□□□□□□□ addresses the writing of five authors on women to show that how they have presented their ideal image of women in accordance with their own attitudes. What they have in common is that all of them encourage their ideal woman to forget and deny herself. These ideal images can be observed in the studies reviewed in this paper too.

The investigation of some of these studies showed that very often the researchers have adopted a descriptive approach to examine women's status in Shahnameh. However, it is necessary to analyze Shahnameh with new approaches. While studying Shahnameh from a female-oriented viewpoint, it is very important to take a clear approach and methodology and to address contradictory ideas. Some similarities and contradictions found in the studies examined in this paper are presented below.

### Similarities

The majority of the studies concluded that women enjoy high status in Shahnameh and thus in ancient Iran. Sudabeh has been presented as a negative character since she killed Siavash. The studies conducted by Iranian researchers indicated that women had higher status in ancient Iran than in ancient Greece.

### Contradictions

There were some contradictions in respect to the issue of race and its relationship with women's status. The book "The stories of Shahnameh's Women" asserts that Shahnameh places emphasis on women's personality traits rather than their race while the book "Ferdowsi and Women's Status in Islam and Shahnameh" refers to race as a justification for discrimination against women. In her thesis, Rezaeifar talks about such feminine characteristics as selfishness, feminine jealousy, and lack of attention to motherly emotions which have not been discussed in other studies because they are negative traits.

The paper "Shahnameh's Women and Men" deals with women's beauty in Shahnameh, but the book "The Stories of Shahnameh's Women" asserts that in Shahnameh women are regarded as beautiful blessings but are not praised on the grounds of their beauty. The paper "A Reading of Woman" discusses women's beauty and the fact that most of the descriptions of women in Shahnameh are related to the beauty of their figures.

The book "Words Shahnameh's Women Deserve" describes different types of marriage common in ancient Iran and assigns Tahmineh and Rostam's marriage to one of these types. However, other studies are silent about Tahmineh's going to Rostam's Chamber or they simply whitewash it by referring to the compliments Ferdowsi pays to her for her wisdom and chastity. The paper "A Reading of Shahnameh" considers such cases as women's proposing marriage to men, the special status of women, the combativeness of girls and the like as the requirements of the aristocratic atmosphere of Shahnameh but other studies, including "The Stories of Shahnameh's Women" and "Women's Rights and Status in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh" have referred to these cases to conclude that women in ancient Iranian society enjoyed high status.

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