

A View of the Intertextual Link Between Ferdowsi's Epic Drama and the Discourses of Rumi and Saadi

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ABSTRACT

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Poets and their thoughts are usually related. In the field of literary criticism, these relationships are usually discussed under the title of intertextual relationships. When it comes to the peaks of Persian poetry and the range of high ideas they have raised and their artistic structures, examining intertextual relationships is a difficult and extensive task. In this essay, we will briefly examine one of the elements that brings together and connects the three great Persian poets (Firdausi, Rumi, and Saadi), which is the main characters and role-players in their works. The research method is research-research and based on the evidence available in the works of these greats. Through the presence of role-players such as the king, Rostam, the dragon, and especially the demon and their equivalents in mystical poetry, the deep and prominent connection between epic and mysticism is one of the most obvious results that can be obtained in the path of this goal; namely, finding the threads of connection between these three genres of epic, mystical, lyrical, and popular poetry. The important point here is that the issue of man and his life is the common aspect of the works of these three poets, which is also a guiding and reinforcing element of the subject, and all the common factors in the works and thoughts of these great people together remove from the minds the idea of the slightest difference and separation between the Islamic religion and the Iranian culture and traditions. It is worth mentioning that in addition to the connecting role-players element, ideas, themes, and language are also other guidelines in this area that can be the subject of another research in this field.

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Introduction

Persian classical literature is characterized by an intrinsic thematic and philosophical coherence across diverse literary genres. Traditional genre classifications often separate epic (*Hamaseh*) from mystical (*Erfan*) and didactic poetry; however, deep intertextual connections demonstrate that these genres share an underlying worldview rooted in Iranian cultural identity and humanistic values. Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* (conceptualized as the master "dramatic text" of Hakim Tous) introduces three foundational archetypal character types: **Kings (*Shahan*)**, **Heroes/Champions (*Pahlavanan*)**, and **Mythological Beings (*Div* and *Simurgh*)**. This research investigates how these three archetypes are recontextualized, transformed, and internalized within the mystical and didactic discourses of Jalal al-Din Rumi and Saadi Shirazi, demonstrating the unbroken continuum of Persian literary-cultural thought.

Method

The study employs a descriptive-analytical methodology grounded in library research and **intertextual criticism** (*naqd-e beynamatni*). By conducting a comparative textual analysis of the *Shahnameh*, Rumi's *Masnavi-ye Ma'navi* and *Divan-e Shams*, and Saadi's *Golestan* and *Bustan*, the researchers trace the semantic shifts and symbolic adaptations of the three primary archetypes across epic, didactic, and mystical domains.

Results

The findings illustrate that the archetypal figures of the *Shahnameh* serve as a vital intertextual matrix for both Saadi and Rumi, functioning on distinct symbolic registers:

- **Kings (*Shahan*):**
- Saadi utilizes legendary and historical kings (e.g., Anushirvan, Alexander, Jamshid, Keykhosrow) as moral archetypes for social ethics, justice, transience of power, and pedagogical advice to rulers of his time.

- Rumi transforms the monarch into an ontological and spiritual archetype—representing God, the spiritual guide (*Pir*), the Saint (*Vali*), or the elevated soul (e.g., Keykhosrow as the illuminated mystic; the King in the opening tale of the *Masnavi*).
- **Heroes/Champions (*Pahlavanan*):**
- *Rostam* stands as the central bridging figure. In Rumi’s discourse, Rostam is elevated to the champion of the “battleground of the heart” (*meydan-e del*), the Perfect Man (*al-Insan al-Kamil*), and a spiritual counterpart to Imam Ali in waging the “Greater Jihad” (*Jihad-e Akbar*—the battle against the ego).
- In Saadi’s discourse, Rostam represents both martial prowess and the ultimate symbol of Iranian ethical-social endurance, frequently deployed to derive pragmatic wisdom.
- **Mythological Beings and the Battle with the Demon (*Div*):**
- The epic battle against the *Div* (manifested in Rostam’s *Haft Khan*) is internalized in mystical discourse: the *Div* represents the lower self/ego (*Nafs-e Ammarah*) and worldly illusions, while the *Simurgh* represents divine assistance, the transcendent guide, or Shams-e Tabrizi.
- **Epic–Mystical Convergence:** The *Shahnameh* functions as an “external, heroic epic” (*hamaseh-ye biruni*), whereas the *Masnavi* represents an “internal, spiritual epic” (*hamaseh-ye daruni*). Both masterworks share identical teleological trajectories: the triumph of light, virtue, and intellect over darkness and beastly instincts.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Ferdowsi, Saadi, and Rumi share a unified intellectual and civilizational foundation centered on human dignity, ethical wisdom, peace, and spiritual realization. While Ferdowsi focuses on national identity and the defense of the homeland (*Iran-zamin*), Rumi expands this into a universal, spiritual homeland (*vatan-e jahan-shomul*), and Saadi applies it to social and moral reform. The intertextual presence of *Shahnameh* archetypes in the poetry of Rumi and Saadi proves that Persian epic and mystical traditions are not disjointed genres, but complementary dimensions of a single cultural and philosophical heritage.