



## INVESTIGATING THE REASONS FOR TRAGIC GENRE'S MISS FROM ORIENTAL LITERATURE

Masoud RASTEGARI\*, Maisam KHOEINY

MA graduate, Persian language and literature, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran.

**\*Corresponding Author**

**Email:** merajedanesh@gmail.com

### *ABSTRACT.*

*The main factor in mournfulness of a tragedy is the exhibition of an individual's weakness against destiny. It is exactly at the time the protagonist, as the representative of the mankind and megalomania, reckons s/he has the right to choose his or her destiny based on his or her individual efforts that s/he notices the bitter truth of being defeated by the destiny and once again the deepest human emotions stemming from confrontation with the determinism of destiny are portrayed in a tragedy. Thus, the joy resulting from a tragic issue is a sort of humans' collective archetype hence not limitable to a certain part of the world. The present study, drawing on the historical and literary evidence, firstly tries enumerating the conditions a society needs for the formation of a tragedy and secondly scrutinizes the reasons for the absence of tragedy in the east. Comparisons will be made within the current research paper between the tragedy reciting art in Greek and ancient Iran.*

**Keywords:** *Tragedy, Ancient Iran, Archetype, Determinism.*

### INTRODUCTION

Literature is the most authentic document for attaining the internal moods and the life quality of the past communities. Literature and its types have always been representing the wishes and ideals of a nation and showcasing the spiritual values, emotions and deep feelings of the people from an era; so, the expansion of a certain type of literature in a land with specific ethical and behavioral patterns is drastically dependent on its forefathers' destinies. Of course, it is clear that the expansion and stabilization of a literary genre needs certain cultural, social, political, religious, economic and other grounds. For example, the entry of Islam into Iran caused an overall change in the literary works as compared to before Islam. Moreover, the establishment of such great governments as Samanids and the first-half Qaznavids brought about the jocund literature of Rudaki and Onori era. Amongst the other examples of these peripheral changes in the formation and acceptance of a certain literature type, the vast invasion by the Mongols and the annihilation of the central government's themes can be pointed out that were followed by the destruction of the intellectual and literary systems and this set the ground for the emergence of introversive poetry. Due to the subtle and full-scale effects of extra-contextual and peripheral issues in the expansion process of various literature types within a territory, it is most superior to recognize the prerequisites needed by a literary genre to be formed. Therefore, before dealing with this issue that whether tragedy had found its way into the east and Iran or not and that whether tragedy is a genre specific to Greek literature or not, the present study explores and elaborates the characteristics that are required to be existent in a

civilization for tragedy to be able to form so that the reasons of tragedy's absence from the east could be figured out.

### ***Theatre:***

The existence of large and centralized cities made large populations of people, from every occupation, gather around in one place. From the past up to now, the creation of amusement centers for various social classes has been considered as one duty of the governing class. "After 1123, a large deal of the expenditures for preparing plays and scripts by Choir Gooses<sup>1</sup> were collected from the affluent individuals of the city" (Brocket, 2001-2002). Surely, the prerequisite to the existence of a powerful art-supporting central government is the existence of a large population of taxpayers to incur the extravagant expenses of constructing buildings specific to the holding of celebrations and theaters. "The capacity of a play house filled to its last vacancy has been estimated to be in a range from 14000 to 17000. Although everybody could enter the theatre, about one tenth of the total population in a city could not watch the shows" (ibid.: 100).

The several times repetition of the plays in advanced and equipped play houses caused a daily expanding increase in the numbers of the dramatic literature fans and laid the foundation of tragedy. The relationship between tragedy and the existence of theater is so strong that it can be claimed that tragedy was essentially created to be played on scene not to be studied. For the same reason, many of the tragedy concepts engage the audience when they are played.

The theatres were so widely scattered that an expression, named Dionysus village<sup>2</sup>, was formed in ancient Greece. It was a place for dramatic experiences. The scripts previously played in the city were reshowed there. The theatric plays were not limited to Aten. Thus, the historical evidence is reflective of the effect of investment in construction of places for playing the scripts created by the poets and writers on the acceptance and expansion of various dramatic literature types such as tragedy and comedy. It has to be also stated that comedy was even created subject to the effect of tragedy because comedy was developed seminally in the form of humiliating the events and the serious heroes of the tragedy. Surely, there has been a need for the existence of theatres with the same magnificence and scale of Greek theatres due to the existence of such celebrations as MithraKana<sup>3</sup>, Nowruz and so forth. Therefore, the civilization of ancient Iran has been in competition with that of Greeks and money was spent superfluously on the construction of such buildings.

### **The Role of Writing and Library Maintenance System in Preserving Tragic Heritage:**

Many of the nations' books and literary works have undergone distortions and occasionally forgotten due to their being narrated chest-to-chest and for not being written down. On the other hand, the nonexistence of central libraries for safe keeping of the books in governmental centers in ancient era caused the destruction of many of these works. It is evident that one motivation of the poets and writers in creating great literary works has been enrolment of them in the history's work paper. Thus, to encourage the writers of the plays and scripts in ancient Greek, one reward of the superior works has been the installation of their statues in the city. Therefore, the prerequisite for the creation of a complete epical period with tragedy being

<sup>1</sup>Choir Goose was a person responsible for selecting and hiring the chorus and s/he possibly had to pay them. It is something like the today's film producers.

<sup>2</sup>A large city in ancient Greece that is currently a province in today's Greece.

<sup>3</sup>Mehregan celebration has been the biggest ancient Iranian fiesta after Nowruz.



its product, as well, was the existence of sustainable and advanced civilizations and well-established social life. This had been accomplished by the Greek and ancient Iran's civilizations. In the book "the religious deeds", the third chapter, Paragraph 15, references have been made to the existence of the huge libraries in ancient Iran: "the lord of the lords ordered them to keep the writings of the instructions by Avesta and Zand the same way they had been accepted from Hormozd in two copies, one in king's treasury and the other in the castle of writings" (Azar Faranbagh, 2015: 63).

#### ***Wars and Inspiring Heroes:***

The basis and foundation of the tragic stories has been formed in the ground of bloody and long-term battles between large civilizations. The tragedy heroes have always been selected from amongst the victorious commanders of the two countries. The battles between two countries have been effective in the creation of tragedy to the extent that some of them incorporated the entire tragic subject like the "Persian Tragedy". The conflicts and struggles between the two civilizations of ancient Iran and Greek that instigated tens of marine and land-based wars in large scales and for long years, like Termopil war, Artemisium war, Salamis war, Plateh War, Orimidon battle, Cogmel war, Marathon war and so for, were per se considered as non-terminable sources for epic-reciting poets. The other point that caused the rulers support these poets was the governing system's need for preserving the chivalrous and cavalier spirit of these people and this encouraged the poets seek the achievement of this goal by creating mythical heroes who had gained fame from the heart of these battles. For example, "Sorena or Rostam Soren Pahlavi (52-82 BC) who was a brave Arsaces XIII contemporary Parthian commander was ranked first after the king in terms of wealth and fame and he was the most pioneering Iranian in his time in chivalry and competency. Sorena helped Orodes I enthrone and occupied the city of Silifke ... He defeated Crassus, the Greek commander" (Mo'ain, under the name Sorena, 2008).

According to his characteristics like bravery and chivalry, robustness and helping the enthronement of the king and his dwelling place, Sistan, he might have probably been the very Rostam character on which the primary themes of Ferdowsi's stories have been laid. On the other hand, Achilles or Akhilleus, the hero of the Greeks in Troy battle can be exemplified. "He was the strongest warrior of the Greeks in Troy war and he is also a protagonist in Homer's Iliad" (Ibid: under the term "Achilles"). The existence of heroes who were made and processed by the then poets and turned into myths has been the main pillar of the tragedies.

#### ***Nationalism Spirit:***

Since the main background of the majority of classic tragedies was comprised of the national heroes and warriors of a land, only the people who had a nationalist and patriotic spirit enjoyed this genre and loved to hear about the heroes' gallantries. This was per se needful of an integrated country and a central government. Thus, the lands lacking this principle and did not give value to the homeland with a certain geographical border could not sympathize with the tragedy heroes.

Tawfiq Al-Hakim, the greatest and most popular Arab world's scriptwriter, has the following words in this regard: "homeland of an Arab poet was a vast and extensive desert the residents of which were riding on camel humps in search of a sip of water and a heap of fodder for their livestock in the entire stretches of the desert. Poetry was also born in this same ground. Poems were grown and formed out of the slow and mild dipping of the camels' hoofs in the facies of



the desert sands. Thus, nothing was in proportion to plays in this mobile homeland because the first thing needed by drama is establishment and residence. In my opinion, the drama's need for residence and settlement is the main reason why Arabs have been left away from regular (tragic) dramas" (Tawfiq Al-Hakim, introduction, 2008, 224).

### ***Manifestation of Myth in Tragedy:***

The Persian term "Ostureh", equivalent in English to myth, is derived of Al-Ostureh and Al-Astireh in Arabic meaning baseless narration. But, this Arabic term is per se a borrowed word from a Greek origin "Historia" meaning inquisition, research, information and explication and history and so forth" (Bahar, 2003, 343). Since every noun is an expression and example of what it has been named after, the difference between Arabs' and Greeks' approaches to myth and its effect on the life and literature of the two can be found out in a comparison of the way they define myth.

Arabs consider myth as a baseless narration while Greeks take it identical to history. It is following this perspective that the myths and their characters find their way into the depth of ancient Greeks' culture and somehow bind everything from philosophy and city construction to literature and art thereto. Tragedy, as well, is no exclusion to this axiom. Although the researchers do not have much information about the quality of tragedy commencement in Greece, the rare documents available to the historians put it forth that tragedy stems from a mythical rite related to the praising of a God named Dionysus. Based on myths, Dionysus is the son of Zeus (the greatest Greek god) and the symbol of mortal god. It was believed that Dionysus has been brought up by the Satyrs<sup>4</sup> who was once killed and cut into pieces and revived again.

He was the god and deity of fertility, wine and revelry and his life events have always been considered attached to the spirit of year as faced in the other primitive religions, to wit the cycles of the seasons and pattern of returning to the source in the circle of birth, maturity, death and rebirth. "Through their practicing of certain rituals, the Dionysus worshippers were looking for a theosophical unification with the creative source. The Greeks always held one or several festivals every year to the memorial of the gods. In Atika, an important city in Aten, celebrations were held four times a year all for praising Dionysus. It was during one of these celebrations that Dionysus city was offered for the first time. Although Dionysus city was the last celebration that was opened, it was rapidly considered as the most important festival and 534BC is the year in which tragedy became popular" (Brocket, 2010, 6514-64).

Therefore, based on this theory, tragedy can be considered as the manifestation of myths in religious rites of the ancient people and its agreeability and acceptance is suspended over the better displaying of the myths thereby to claim that the more the civilizations are interlaced with religious rites the more the ground would be set for the growing of tragedy genre in them. Ancient Iranians, as well, have robust backgrounds in myth in their great civilizations. The proposition of such issues as Minoo, Ahriman, Hazarah Oshidar as well as such mythical kings as Jamshid and others are all suggestive of the existence of myth in the life and thoughts of the ancient Iranians and such books as Asurik tree, as the souvenirs of Zariran and ArdavirafNameh and so forth, provided patterns in line with the creation of mythical and tragic works.

---

<sup>4</sup>Satyrs are associated with Dionysus in art and drama.

### *Comparison of Ethical Concepts in Iran and Greece' Tragedy:*

Iran's civilization is very much similar to that of ancient Greece in terms of governmental, political, military and cultural structure. Literature has also never been away from such a resemblance because literature is the mirror of a society's moods and Ferdowsi, as well, has modeled the characters in his work after the mythical heroes of his land the same way that Achilles, Euripides, Sophocles have been selected.

Based on the investigation of the properties that are needed to be existent in a society so that tragedy genre can be formed, the missing of this literature type, tragedy, from ancient Iran and Ferdowsi's borrowing of it from Greeks are deemed very improbable. Not only Ferdowsi has not borrowed tragedy from Greeks but he has also portrayed the most excellent of literature types, i.e. a national tragedy, as evidenced in the few works remaining from the splendid era of the ancient Iranian kings. We are not going to discuss names herein because, as it is believed by some, there is no synonym for the term "tragedy" in the oriental world so this literature type has been borrowed from the west<sup>5</sup>. This reasoning is weak because the term "tragedy" in Greek, as well, does not reflect the literary plays; the main meaning of tragedy (its literal meaning) is "goat song". The expression is known to be related to the period during which a group of individuals danced for stealing a goat as a reward or around a goat that was going to be sacrificed. This literature type could have had another name in ancient Iran but we have been deprived of many of these expressions with the destruction of the valuable books of the then period of time. I believe that the tragedy of "Rostam and Esfandiyar", as well, like many of the other stories in Shah Nameh is amongst the remnants of the ancient, sometimes tragic, works of Iran that were destroyed in the foreigner's attacks. In explaining a part of these burning of books, Ibn Nadim writes that "Kai Zakhak constructed a city on Savad lands and made it the place of knowledge and scholars and made twelve castles each named after the skies and built storage places in them for scientific books and allowed scientists take positions in those palaces. Alexander, the Greek king, started off on a journey to invade Iran from a city known by Romans as Macedonia and murdered Dara, son of Shah Dara, and destroyed the cities and ruined the palaces made by the elders and rebellions. He leveled to the ground the palaces in the stones and boards of which there were images and inscriptions and made a list of whatever the things there were in the libraries and treasuries of Estakhr and translated them into Roman and Coptic languages and after finishing his needed transcriptions burnt whatever the things written in Gashtak style of writing therein"<sup>6</sup>. Two points are notable in this speech by Ibn Nadim: the first is that Iranians, based on their prior traditions and rites, used to write many of the historical and literary issues on the stones and walls of the cities' palaces and columns. Alexander caused the destruction of these works by his demolition of the palaces and burning of the cities and many of these stone works could have been related to dramatic arts<sup>7</sup>. On the other hand, Ibn Nadim reminds that Alexander was not like the Mongol Genghis Khan who did not care for the books and inconsiderately burnt all the books rather he firstly dispatched a group of scientists and experts to study the texts of the books so as to transcribe and translate the useful works. This necessitated precise and one-by-one study of all the books



<sup>5</sup> See also the introduction of the book "Al-Malak Al-Odib" by Tawfiq Al-Hakim

<sup>6</sup>Cited in the book "Nehmatan fi Ma'arefah Tale'e Al-Insan" by Abu Sahl Ibn Nowbakht Irani

<sup>7</sup>It was discussed in the section on Greece's theatres that one reward the scriptwriters were presented with was the construction and installation of their statue in the city.

existent in the library thus the epical and, of course, the literary works that were expressive of the victories and histories of Iranian civilization were destroyed all of a sudden because Alexander did not find them useful. So, it is not weird that we are not even inherited one thoroughly tragic work from ancient Iran's era. Of course, the same issue holds for ancient Greece, as well, because the thing transferred from all the thousand ancient Greece's tragedy to the later generations can be summarized in the works of only three Greek poets and all of the other works have been destroyed. Our knowledge of Greek tragedy is nearly completely based on the works of three dramatists from fifth century including Achilles, Sophocles and Euripides. Historians usually reckon that these existing dramas represent the then theater; it has to be recalled that these tragedies have remained from a thousand of dramas written between 400 and 500BC" (Brocket, 2002, 66).

The other reason for justifying the assumption that Iran's tragedy has been a native genre hence not borrowed from Greece's culture is the vivid difference between Iran and Greece in terms of their ethical premises. The following part exposit some of these ethical differences between Greece's tragedies and the only remaining Iranian tragic work, to wit Rostam and Esfandiyar.

Case One: it includes the distinction between the contents selected by the poets in Greece's tragic dramas in respect to the ones selected by Ferdowsi. The prevalent contents of the tragedies by these three Greek poets briefly include the followings:

Aeschylus: the Egyptian tragedy is about the women who killed their wives; Laeus, Oedipus and the seven heads tragedies are all three compiled in a collection known as "seven heads against Tebes" and their topics are respectively about a man who rapes another man who was his guest and the second one is about patricide and incest and the last one revolves about fratricide; the popular Aeschylus threefold tragedy known as "Oresteia" that includes three periodical tragedies named Agamemnon, Khoe Furies and Eumenides with the first one being related to cannibalism, mariticide and murdering of the second wife of one's husband, the second one related to matricide and the last one being related to the trial of a person who has committed matricide. As it can be seen, the theme and subject of the majority of Aeschylus tragedies pivot about matricide. One should accept that the exhibition of taboo scenes in theater caused elevation of emotions and feeling experiences that were far from the Greek's ordinary life and/or they were accompanied by heavy social costs and this added to the delectability of part of the dramas; but, in Shah Nameh's stories, although there is a large deal of potential and ground in the event's background for guiding towards these issues, Hakim Ferdowsi never sacrifices ethics for pleasantness of the story. As an example, in the story of "Sohrab", when Sohrab asks his mother to tell him his father's name, it can be witnessed that he threatens his mother that he would kill her if she does not do what he wants. Ferdowsi's astute mind simply could drag the story's course towards a direction that Sohrab kills his mother for hiding his father's name<sup>8</sup> in the dawn and add to the taboo load of the story. If Ferdowsi was an imitator of Greece's tragedy, he could have accentuated Tahmineh's love for her son to the extent that she would have never become willing to tell Sohrab his father's name for the fear of getting separated from Sohrab and this way the ground could have been set for the son's more suspicion and murdering of his mother the way it is in Greece's tragedies.

<sup>8</sup> Tahmineh speaks the following words as the reason for hiding the name "Rostam" from Sohrab: "I am afraid that Rostam would separate Sohrab from me and take him with himself to Iran upon becoming aware that he has a son".



Sophocles: amongst the most important of his tragic works, the followings can be pointed out: Oedipus Rex, Electra, Ajax and “raping Helen” the contents of which are respectively related to fatalism, incest and patricide. The second one is related to murder for incest and the next one is about the madness and suicide of a hero with the same name (Ajax) and the last one, to wit “raping Helen”, is well clear from its name.

Euripides nearly has twenty dramas and, in this regard, there are more works left from him in contrast to the two previous poets. The majority of the tragedies by him feature almost identical contents; for instance: “Hecuba” is about sacrificing a person for the soul of Achilles, killing of children, treason and blinding of Hecuba. Heracles is about insanity and murdering of relatives. There is also another drama with the same content under the name “two children of Heracles” which is about a man who sacrifices his daughters for victory in war. “Electra” is amongst the most famous of his tragic works which is about a girl who kills her mother in revenging her father by the assistance of her brother. “Phoenix” is about a son who, instigated by his mother, rapes his father’s beloved maid and is blinded and exiled by his father.

A vivid difference can be seen in a comparison of these contents with Shah Nameh’s stories. There is not even one case of incest in the entire Shah Nameh and the heroes’ bigotry towards their relatives is repeatedly exhibited in their behaviors. After hearing the news that his sister has been captivated, Esfandiyar tears apart the chains with which he has been tied in a prison and he does not even wait for the blacksmiths his father had sent for helping him. In another scene, although he knows that accepting his father’s request for bringing Rostam hand-tied to his presence would lead to his perishment, he prefers his own death to patricide. Phoenix is a story about a prince’s raping of his father’s beloved maid and it is not at all comparable to the chastity of Siavash against his stepmother’s temptations. The entire Shah Nameh is capable of being transformed to a murderous and unethical tragedy but Hakim Ferdowsi, considering the morality of his forerunners and ancient Iran’s people in the books remained from those eras such as “dos and don’ts”, “religious deeds”, “Ardaviraf Nameh”, “Zariran tree” and so forth<sup>9</sup>, has always used utmost art to present an excellent demonstration of a lofty tragedy in adherence to all ethical virtues and, of course, his representations have not left unimpressed by the Islamic teachings of his time. The issue of the difference between Iran’s and Greece’s tragedy is not only summarized in contents and themes and it can be also found in the other aspects, as well.

Case Two: it is the difference between the heroes in Iran’s and Greece’s tragedies. It is quite common in tragic genre that the protagonist is trapped in catastrophes due to his or her weak points; but, this is quite different from ignoring the entire ethical rules. A hero is adored by the viewers and audience when s/he is found characterized by even the least of morality and heroic characteristics. The best example in showcasing ethical superiority of Ferdowsi’s heroes versus Greek heroes is the comparison between Gudarz and Achilles. A dreadful fight occurs out of hatred and old enmity of Iran and Turan in a confrontation between Gudarz and Piran Viseh. Gudarz strikes Piran Viseh and cuts his hand and he escapes to the mountain. Gudarz advises him to return and promises that he would take him alive to the king because his hand is cut and he cannot continue fighting. So, he proposes the cessation of the battle out of

<sup>9</sup>Some accusations like marriage with close relatives that are said about the cultured ancient Iranian people have been well analyzed and answered in scientific and well-documented researches by Dr. Ali Reza Shapour Shahbazi. To study the issue, please refer to the mythical book “marriage with close relatives” in ancient Iran.



magnanimity but it is considered as stigma by Piran Viseh and prefers not to surrender. Gudarz turns around the mountain while riding on his horse and, finding no way into the mountain, he prefers to go towards him on foot. Piran Viseh throws a dagger towards Gudarz and severely injures his arm and this makes Gudarz become twice as much angry. Gudarz becomes incumbently forced to kill Piran Viseh by a spear and he becomes sad and starts mourning upon reaching over his head and bearing witness to his blood-soaked body. As it was commonly exercised by the victorious warriors, he had to cut the enemy's head and send it to the king but he withdraws from doing so out of manliness and humanity. Ferdowsi's wonderful work with the story peaks at the time that, knowing that drinking the blood of the defeated enemy means continuation of his soul's life and power in the body of the victor<sup>10</sup>, he makes Gudarz do it out of sympathy and respect to the enemy's warrior and refrain cutting his head and treat his body respectfully. Surely, Gudarz's hatred and enmity to the enemies has not been less than Achilles's hatred of Trojan people but it is a fixed attribute of the heroes in Shah Nameh to give more value to manliness over every other thing. Comparing such an action by Gudarz with Achilles's behavior after defeating Hector, the ethical superiority of Shah Nameh's heroes over the heroes in Greece's tragedies becomes more outstanding. It was in Troy war that Hector kills the commander of Trojan army, Patroclus, who happened to be Achilles's cousin and he thought he had fought and killed Achilles for the large similarity of him to Achilles. This same issue incites Achilles to revenge and he kills Hector and defeats Trojan army. Achilles disrespects the corpse and fastens it to his chariot and drags the rival's body on the ground for three days out of an animal-like anger.

Of course, the comparison of the ethics and the other moral considerations of the heroes in Shah Nameh with those of the heroes in Greek tragedies does not mean that all the heroes in Ferdowsi were well-mannered and with favorable behaviors because some inferiorities like preservation of power and behavioral shakiness can also be observed in the behaviors of the heroes in Shah Nameh, as well; but, the important issue here is the observance of a moderate limit between doing good and evil-doing and if this concept is placed on the scale of Ferdowsi's Shah Nameh, filthiness and immoral behavior never preempts the excellent heroic manners. So, the expression of some issues in Shah Nameh like filicide as in Sam's efforts for killing Zaal in his childhood, Goshtasb's sending of his son, Esfandiyar to the mouth of death and Darab's being thrown into the water by his father, Hoday, for the avarice and greed of ruling and other events of the like, as well, have been incumbently presented by Ferdowsi for keeping the tragic spice of the stories as well as observation of the trustworthiness and originality of the story hence they are not at all comparable to the matricide and such behaviors as incest in Greek tragedies. Aristotle, as well, has the following words in the second chapter of Nicomachean ethics about ethics in art: "each art fulfills its unique duty if it finds the middle way and sets it as its scale. Due to the same reason, it can be stated about every artwork that

---

<sup>10</sup>Of course, it is quite possible that it might have meant the return of the souls of Gudarz's children to him because many of Gudarz's relatives had been murdered by Turanian enemies. Drinking the blood and/or eating the liver of the enemy who had killed a relative of the victorious warrior was a symbol of avenge and return of their souls into the body and soul of the revenger, especially because, after this verse, immediately come verses reviving the memory of Gudarz's children that corroborates this assumption:

"He pushed down his clasp and brought out blood/he, filled with excitement, drank the blood and stained his face"

"He grievously roared for the blood of Siavash and started entreaty to the God"

"He pleaded to the just God for the revenge of the blood of his seventy dear sons" (Ferdowsi, 1997, 131)



nothing can be reduced from or added to it and it means that every deficiency or extremism would harm the work and it is the middle way that can preserve it and a good artist always does his or her best to keep it to the moderation” (Aristotle, 2007, 64). Now, considering the abovementioned materials regarding ethics in art, Iranian tragedy’s following the lead of Greek tragedy is envisaged improbable for the latter’s being weakly committed to ethical values and choosing contents that inescapably stimulate the audience’s moral sensitivities. This is a defection compensated by Ferdowsi in his *Shah Nameh* via giving priority to the human values over material pleasures. Ferdowsi is a poet who succeeded in elevating tragedy to its most excellent levels by observing the limits of ethical moderation so he can be considered as Aristotle’s ideal artist.

Case Three: there is another difference posited in the bottom layers of tragedy regarding the quality of the relationship between the human beings and the God in the east and its difference from that established by the people in ancient Greek as reflected in the process of a tragedy.

The sum of Dr. Nasr’s statements about the issue is that the humans can be divided into two sets of man promethean and man pontifical. He exemplifies the pontifical men in the oriental people whose ideology is composed of the relationship between the God and the human beings based on an ascending wayfaring from the earth and the inferior world to the heavens and the unseen world; this relationship is never cut; he exemplifies the promethean man in the human beings who revolt against the God and tend to take the authority of future in their hands.

In a book named “in search of a celestial matter”, Dr. Nasr expresses that the thought’s root stems from the mythical Prometheus who steals fire from the gods and starts fighting with them in its real sense. He concludes that since tragedy features the nature of revolt and uprising of the human beings against the gods, it has not found its way into the eastern part of the earth and this is why there is no synonym made in Arabic and Persian for tragedy because the term is conceptualized in Greek as the human’s fight against the gods<sup>11</sup>. As for the absence of a synonym in Persian for tragedy, the issue was discussed in the previous pages and also discussions were put forth about the fact that the term “tragedy” has nothing to do with the existence of this genre in Iran and even Greece.

However, it has to be pointed out about the myth of Prometheus that the promethean incident in Greece’s myths is not at all related to the fight between the human being and the Olympian gods and, essentially, Prometheus is per se one of the titans and, of course, the God of the fire. He was beloved by Athena, daughter of Zeus, and Prometheus was appointed during the era of humans’ creation by Zeus to resolve the human beings’ problems. It was him who provided the human beings with fire and was angered for doing so. Zeus put him on top of a mountain and his liver was eaten everyday by an eagle and it grew again over the night so that he might be chastised for his disobedience<sup>12</sup>.

So, first of all, the myth of Prometheus is not a story of human’s rise against the gods rather it is the story of the sympathy of the god of fire for the human beings. Moreover, tragedy originates from Greeks’ common religious rituals and dates back to before the emergence of Zeusian gods one of whom is Prometheus. Tragic representations, as a sort of religious rites, date back to the period of the Greek’s shared religious beliefs. “Five primary aspects are found in a search for the common aspects of the civilization in Greek cities: common language, common spiritual

<sup>11</sup>See also the book “the search for a celestial issue”, pp.211-212

<sup>12</sup>See also the book “the history of civilization”, chap.7, “Greece’ gods”, by Will Durant



life, zeal for playing sports, love for beauty within the format of common arts and common religious beliefs and rituals ... [in the course of time], the religious beliefs caused segregation of the Greeks to the same extent they had caused their unification because there were more coherent powers and sects disobeying Zeus under the flag of the preliminary Olympian gods who were respected and praised by everyone ... [in fact] it was political and tribal separations that resulted in polytheism and rendered monotheism impossible” (Durant, 2000, 801).

The genesis of tragedy in Greece dates back to the pre-Olympian gods and to the period long before Prometheus and Zeus; thus, it cannot be considered as an imitation of the fight between the gods and vice versa. To create tragic genre in Greece and Iran, the belief in the separation of and fight between the man and the god was not required because, despite someone’s belief in the fight between the human being and the heaven as the subject of tragedy, tragedy can be realized as a subtle relationship between the human beings and religious beliefs and, ultimately, the God.

Based on the evidence, Greek tragedy has been seminally a completely ethical art laid on the foundation of religious rites and it was in the course of time that it was afflicted with such improper and immoral patterns with the entry of such gods as Zeus characterized by such inferior traits as marriage to his daughter, unfair punishment of the other gods and so on. “The initial Greek gods were more respected and more important in contrast to the Olympian gods but they were in second rank in terms of fame. Due to the same reason, some of them can be found in Homer’s poems and, instead, the Olympian gods have been repeatedly mentioned” (Ibid, 805). Since idolatry has never been prevalent in ancient Iran and the ancestors’ rites have been the utmost practicing of ethics and humanity, the literary subjects have been accordingly given the tints of ethics the prominent manifestation of which is Shah Nameh.

## CONCLUSION

The present article investigated the reasons for the lack of extensive and accentuated presence of tragic genre in the east as compared to Greek’s literature; at first, the conditions needed by a society for tragic genre to be formed and welcomed by the people therein were enumerated and it was proved, relying on the historical and literary documents, that ancient Iran’s civilization had had all of these properties. Next, three aspects of tragedy, namely the differences in the contents, heroes’ characteristics and the quality of the relationship between the oriental man with the God in contrast to that between the Greek and the God, were compared and it was proved that tragic genre has been originally existent in ancient Iran as exemplified in Ferdowsi’s epic. It was also found out that Iranian tragedy, in comparison to Greek tragedy, features a specific style of storytelling making the audience encounter two completely different ideologies. It has to be eventually stated that tragedy, as the most excellent literary type, reflects the mankind’s collective wants and wishes and this has been repeated over and over in the scenes of the drams seemingly different in appearance but similar in their nature and internalities. This is why tragedy is liked by all the communities and cultures.

## References

Aristotle, (1965), “poetical techniques”, tr. Zarrinkoub, Abd Al-Hussein, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Tehran, book translation and publication foundation.



- Aristotle, (2007), "Nicomachean ethics", tr. Muhammad Hassan Lotfi, Tehran, Tarh-e-Now.
- Azar Faranbagh, (2015), "Azarbad, son of Omidan: religious deeds", trs. Maryam Reza'ei and Sa'eid Oriyan, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., Tehran, scientific publication.
- Bahar, Morad, (2003), "research on Iranian myths", 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Tehran, Agah.
- Brocket, Oscar Garrus, (2002), "the history of the world's theater", tr. Houshang Azadivar, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., v.1, Tehran, Morwarid.
- Durant, Will, (2000), "history of civilization", 6<sup>th</sup> ed., trs. Ahmad Batha'ei and Ahmad Aram, Tehran, Tehran University Press.
- Ferdowsi, Abu Al-Qasem, (1997), "revised by Jalal Khaleghi Motlagh, v.5, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., California, Farda Publication Institute in cooperation with Iran's heritage foundation.
- Mo'ein, Muhammad, (2008), "Mo'ein Dictionary", 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Tehran, Aden.
- Nasr, Sayyed Hassan, (2007), "in search for celestial matter", tr. Sayyed Mustafa Shahr A'eini, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Tehran, Nay.
- Tawfiq Al-Hakim, (2008), "Al-Malak Al-Odip", translation and introduction by Reza Nazemiyan, pp.220-23.

