

## CHAPTER I: EPIC AS A GENRE

Epic is a broadly defined genre of poetry, and one of the major forms of narrative literature consistently described as “the master-genre of the ancient world” (Foley 1). Epics played a significant role in the primeval societies, and functions that ranged from the historical and political to cultural and didactic. Epic as a genre has been discussed ever since Aristotle’s *Poetics*. It was ranked by Aristotle as second only to tragedy, but many Renaissance critics rank it the highest of all genres (Abrams 77). European literature was described by Samuel Johnson as a series of footnotes to Homer. In his poem “On first looking into Chapman’s Homer” Keats expresses delight in Homer’s creative transcreation (Fowler 68). Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism* asserts that Homer established for his successors the "demonstration that the fall of an enemy, no less than of a friend or leader, is tragic and not comic," and that with this "objective and disinterested element," the epic acquired an authority based "on the vision of nature as an impersonal order" (319). Dryden and Pope chose to translate rather than to emulate Virgil and Homer; Arnold discussed the epic in his essays, and his *Sohrab and Rostum* (based on Persian epic, *Shah Nameh*) is so saturated with Homer that his essays On “the Modern Element in Literature” and “On Translating Homer” almost seem to be continuing by other means a debate which the poem initiates (Jenkyns 301).

Epic as a word derived from the Greek adjective ἑπικός (*epikos'pi*), from ἔπος (*epos*) meaning ‘word, story, poem’. Epic as one of the oldest and widely popular poetic genres is a traditional form of narrative poetry that portrays heroic and marvelous deeds of great heroes and the intervention of gods in human life. An epic is a very long poem that uses elevated or majestic language to create a sense of sublimity. Aristotle in his definition of differences between epic and tragedy says:

Epic poetry resembles tragedy in so far as it is an imitation in verse of what is morally worthy: they differ in that the epic has only one meter and is narrative in form. They also differ in length, for tragedy tries to confine itself, as much as possible, within one revolution of the sun or a little more, whereas the time of an epic is unlimited (11).

The culture and history of a nation or race is often reflected in an epic. For instance, Homer’s great epics *Iliad* and *Odyssey* draw upon Greek mythology and reflects Greek culture. The same

thing goes for Indian epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* through which Indian culture is portrayed as well as the Persian epic *Shah Nameh* which opens a wide window for its readers to Iranian culture and myths.

Epic retells in a continuous narrative the life and works of a heroic or mythological person, communities or groups of people. It comprises a description of pre-history and early life and societies. So ‘epic’ or ‘heroic poem’ in the descriptive generic term is applied to a work that meets at least the following criteria: “it is a long verse narrative on a serious subject, told in a formal and elevated style, and centered on a heroic or quasi-divine figure on whose actions depends the fate of a tribe, a nation, or (in the instance of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*) the human race” (Abrams 76). Epic speaks of time when people try to mould civilization. It reconstructs the time when tribes got unified into a nation. So, the epic of each nation narrates the ideals and desires of that nation and relates the story of efforts of that nation to consolidate for further. Epic is the poem of nations in the time of nations’ childhood, when history and mythology, reality and imaginary were mixed to each other and the epic poet became the historian of the nation (Shamisa 115).

An epic raises primary questions like: How fire was discovered? How scripts were born? How were subjects like life, death, love, hate and devotion faced?

Although in its original sense, the term refers to long narrative poems which speaks in a rich and superior style, about serious matters of ancient people, In modern times, epic has come to denote a work in prose, verse, theater, or film that exhibits action on a large scale and treats a significant historical event. Such works are usually referred to as belonging to the epic tradition (Quinn 140).

## **Persian Epic**

In different cultures and literatures there are some generic terms for epic which are different from court epic and own some distinctive features. In Persian for instance, the word for epic is *hamaseh* which is originally an Arabic word means a great deed, chivalry and gallantry, but interestingly in modern Arabic language the word *hamaseh* is not common to refer to epic and instead they use the word *malhamah* means a great war. However in Persian we call, for example, the great work of Ferdowsi *hamaseh-ye Ferdowsi* and the work of Daghighi, *hamaseh-ye Daghighi*. Heroic works in Persian literature are mainly in *nameh*-style. *Nameh* means ‘book’

in general and includes both heroic and non-heroic works. Of non-heroic works, *Ghabus Nameh* for example is a collection of advices written by a father for his son, *Siyast Nameh* is an historical work about Mogul empire in Iran and *Marzban Nameh* is a collection of fables. Therefore non heroic *nameh* works have lots of verities in theme and style and it is difficult to define *nameh* as a genre in these kinds of works. But heroic *nameh* works in another hand are more specific and *nameh* in this respect has primary elements which form a generic framework and that can be traced as a gene. The ancient form of the word is *namak* in *Pahlavi* language and once can be seen in *Khotay namak*, which is a vast work on the history of Iran from mythical times to the death of Khosrow II in 628. This work is considered as one of the first attempts to collect verbal heroic tales of ancient Persia, was written under the order of Khosrow Anushirvan. When Pirouz, Khosrow's grandfather loses the war from the barbaric tribes of the north of Persia, and they occupied the country, the national pride of Iranians was hurt. In another hand a new prophet called Mazdak appeared and presented his religion to the people. This political and religious disorder led Khosrow Anushirvan of deciding to revival of national identity. He needed Iranians to be unified against invading of enemies, specially the emperor of Rom and the barbaric tribes of the north. Aiming of this, he summoned all intellectuals and *mubad* (Zoroastrian priests) to compile a work containing heroic tales of Persia. This collective effort resulted *Khotay namak* or in its later pronunciation *Khoday Nameh*. *Khotay* or *khoday* means king and therefore *khoday nameh* is a synonym for the word *shah nameh* both meaning the 'the book of kings'. The text includes a collection of mythical legends of Persian kings and heroes, written in Pahlavi language later formed the basis for the Persian poet Ferdowsi's *Shah Nameh* (Book of the Kings). This work was enriched during the time and had different versions but none of them is available now.

The second attempt to write of heroic tales was in Samanid era when Iranians lost to Arabs and Iran was occupied by the latter. Thus again the national pride of Iranians which had been hurt by Arabs was the motivation of this effort. Historians know the state of Khorasan and specially the city of Tus as the center of this movement. Writing of the *nameh*-style heroic tales was a common work in this era. These stories were about national heroes and past kings of Persia, written in prose, called *Shah Nameh* (The Book of Kings). The unknown writers of these heroic works generally belonged to the cast of *Dihghans* who were landowners and desired to preserve Iranian traditions. Among all, *Shah Nameh Abu Mansuri* was the most comprehensive

work, written on order of Abu Mansur Mohammad- ibn Abdol Razzagh, the governor of Tus. This work was compiled by some writers in tenth century. According to the expert Dr. Jalal Khaleghi Mutlaq, the main reference of these writers was one version of *Khoday Nameh* of Pahlavi language and at least four of them knew *Pavlati* and translated into Persian. For this reason when they finished their work, they named it *Shah Nameh* which is synonym of *khoday Nameh*. The *Shah Nameh Abu Mansuri* was one of the main references for Daghighi's *Shah Nameh* and Ferdowsi's *Shah Nameh*. Daghighi was probably the first who started versification of *Shah Nameh* but composing only thousand verses, he was killed by his slave. Ferdowsi was the second after Daghighi who composed his *Shah Nameh*. After Ferdowsi's *Shah Nameh*, a number of other works similar in nature surfaced over the centuries within the cultural sphere of the Persian language. Many of them were heavily influenced by Ferdowsi and used his genre and stories to develop their own Persian epics, stories and poems (Nurian website). Bringing some examples, we can mention *Sam Nameh*, *Burzu Nameh*, *Luhrasb Nameh*, *Faramarz Nameh*, *Kush Nameh* and *Bahman Nameh*. This is interesting to note that the Indian epic, *Mahabharata* was translated into Persian as '*Razm Nameh*' meaning 'the book of war'.

The *nameh*-style heroic poems in Persian have a common meter called *motaqāreb*. This meter (in Persian: *bahr*) is based on regularly recurring patterns of short (◡) and long (—) syllables. Stress does not play an important or clearly understood role. This meter is a line of eight feet in two hemistiches. The hemistiches of each line have end-rhyme which differ from line to line and do not rhyme with each other. Between hemistiches there is a regular caesura but no regular one within each hemistich. Almost, there is no enjambment.

Definition of the meter of *motaqāreb*:

fa-‘ū-lon / fa-‘ū-lon / fa-‘ū-lon / fa-‘al

◡ — — / ◡ — — / ◡ — — / ◡ —

Here is a sample from Ferdowsi's *Shah Nameh*:

be-nā-mē / kho-dā-van / de-jā-nō / khe-rad

kaz-’īn-bar / ta-ran-dī / she-bar-nag / za-rad

Almost all post-*Shah Nameh* epics are regarding to the Sistan cycle (Rustam, his ancestors and his posterities), and each of these epics is devoted to adventures of one central hero and the epic is named after him. The lineage of the Sistan heroes was: Garshasb, Nariman, Sam, Zal,

Rustam, Sohrab and Barzu. Also Faramarz son of Rustam as well as Banu Gushasb his daughter have their heroic *nameh* called *Faramarz Nameh* and *Banu Gushasb Nameh*. Among these *nameh* works, *Garshasb Nameh* (The Book (or Epic) of Garshasb) by Asadi Tusi (died: 1072) is considered as the second most important Iranian national epic, after Ferdowsi's *Shah Nameh*. Asadi Tusi who also happens to come from the same town of Tus, composed his work in 9000 couplets about half a century after the *Shah Nameh*. The poet took the story from a written work which was possibly *Garshasb Nameh* of Moayyed Balkhi and he noted that it is a complement to the stories of the *Shah Nameh*. The poem is thus based on written source although it was part of the folklore of the common people. Garshasb, the central hero of the tale was in the reign of Zakhak who ruled for 1000 years. Traveling to Zābolestān, he saw Garshāsb and encourages him to slay a dragon that had emerged from the sea. Showing great deeds of prowess, Garshāsb succeeds in killing the monster. Zakhāk then orders Garshāsb to go to India, where the king who was a vassal of Zakhāk's has been replaced by a rebel prince. Garshāsb defeats him and then meeting of a Brahman, stays in India for a while to observe its philosophical discourse. India has always been a place of marvel for Muslim authors. Later he returned to Iran and becomes king of Zābolestān. The poem ends with another battle and dragon-slaying, followed by Garshāsb's death.

Almost one century after Ferdowsi's *Shah Nameh*, another heroic tale called *Faramarz Nameh* was written by an unknown author. Faramarz is the son of Rustam and the tale deals with his voyage to India in order to help the Indian king Nowshaad. According to this story, the Iranian King Kay Kavus received a message from the Indian king Nowšād Shah who asked help against his five enemies; first, Konnās Dīv (a carrion-eating demon who had abducted three daughters of the Indian king); second, Gorg-e Gūyā (a talking wolf who speaks like human being and thus was known as Gūyā means talking); third, Aždahā (a dragon); fourth, thirty thousand rhinoceros and the last was Kid Shah who gets a huge tax from him. Faramarz was volunteer to go to India and then Bijan, son of Giv and some other Iranian heroes accompanied him in his voyage to India. Faramarz slays the dragons and also has seven labors such as seven labors of Rustam in *Shah Nameh*. The author of *Faramarz Nameh* as other Persian writers of epic poetry who came after Ferdowsi, was heavily influenced by the style of the *Shah Nameh*.

The other *nameh* texts are *Bahman Namhe* and *Kush Nameh* ascribed to Iran Shah Ibn Abul Kheir, composed probably in twelfth century. *Bahman Nameh* includes a preface and four

chapters. The poet in the preface praises sultan Mohammad and asking for premium, sends the poem to him by Mir Movdud who was one of the commanders of army. In the first part of the book Bahman the son of Esfandiyar crowned as the king of Iran. He married Katayun, the daughter of the king of Kashmir. Katayun loved a slave called Lolo and took him to the court of Bahman. By advice of Katayun, Bahman entrusts the tasks to Lolo and goes for hunting. Lolo riots and Bahman goes to Mesr (Egypt). He married Homa, the daughter of the king of Egypt and by his help conquered Iran. At the end of this part when he hears of Rustam's death he howls. In the second part, taking revenge of his father who was killed by Rustam, he attacks Sistan. For three times he loses from Faramarz, Rustam's son but in the fourth battle he defeats and hangs him up. Rustam's daughters, Banu Goshasb and Zar Banu escape to India and goes before the king of Kashmir. In the third part, Bahman followed them and captured Rustam's daughters. In the fourth chapter Bahman crowned Homa. Ending of the story, on a day Bahman goes hunting and faces a dragon. He battles with dragon but finally is swallowed by him.

Another heroic tale *Kush Nameh* is also one of the most important *nameh* texts composed by Hakim Irānshāh Abu'l-Khayr between the years 1108-11. Probably he is the same poet of *Bahman Nameh*, but however the writer's name does not appear in the work. The story deals with the heroic tale of Kush the Tusked (or Persian: *Pil-gush*, "The Elephant-eared"), the son of Kush who is the brother of the king Zahhak. The tale starts with the king Zahhak who killed Jamshid and predicts that a person from Jamshid's family avenge his death. Therefore Zahhak sends his brother Kush to Chin (China). Kush marries a woman who gives birth to an elephant-eared and tusked son. He gets angry and kills his wife for giving birth to such a demonic creature. He then leaves his son in the forest. Later, Abtin finds Kush and takes him to his house and he is raised in Abtin's family. In a war between Abtin and Kush, when Kush and his son recognize each other, they join forces against Abtin. Abtin escapes to Māchin (inner China in Persian literature) and Kush puts his son as the king of China. After years Abtin's son, Faridun attacks and jails Zahhak and Kush the Tusked in Damavand mountain. After forty years Faridun put Kush free to help them in a war against Nubi army. Kush marches to Ondolos but then he breaks his pledge to Faridun, returns and battles against Iran's army. He helped Salm and Tur, the two sons of Faridun to kill their brother Iraj and also after years battled with Manuchehr who wanted to take revenge of Iraj. Kush almost appears in all the stories mentioned in *Shah Nameh* of Ferdowsi.

Another example of such *nameh* texts is Hamdallah Mustawfi's *Zafar Nāmeḥ* or the Book of Victory. This 14th century epic history, compiled in 75,000 couplets, relates Iranian history from the Arab conquest to the Mongols. Mustawfi spent fifteen years of his life to complete this long historical epic. The work has three chapters: the first chapter is regarding to the history of Arabs and includes the life of the prophet Mohammad, the life of four Muslim leaders after the prophet called *khōlafaye rashedin* and also the history of Bani Omayyeh and Bani Abbas clans. The second chapter is the history of Iran and the third and last chapter is devoted to the history of Mongols. *Zafar Nāmeḥ* is considered as the second historical epic after *Shah Nameh* of Ferdowsi using the same language and meter.

### **Indian Epic**

In Indian literature as well critics speak of some generic terms bearing some distinct features of the court epic. Among them is *mahākāvya* (meaning great poetry), a genre of Indian epic poetry in classical Sanskrit literature. *Mahākāvya* is a short epic similar to the epyllion comprising 15-30 cantos, a total of about 1500-3000 verses. Compared with the *Ramayana* (500 cantos, 24000 verses) and the *Mahabharata* (about 100000 verses), *mahākāvya*s are much shorter. In its classical form, a *mahakavya* consists of a varying number of short poems or cantos that tells the story of a classical epic. It is characterized by ornate and elaborate figures of speech and skilled descriptions of scenery, love, hate, revenge, battles, festivals, weddings, embassies, councils, triumphs and so on. This particular form of the Sanskrit literary style is considered the most prestigious form in Sanskrit literature ("mahākāvya." website).

Belvalkar's translation of Dandin's *Kāvyaḍarśa* (1.15-19) notes the traditional characteristics of a *mahākāvya* are as following:

It springs from a historical incident or is otherwise based on some fact; it turns upon the fruition of the fourfold ends and its hero is clever and noble; by descriptions of cities, oceans, mountains, seasons and risings of the moon or the sun; through sportings in garden or water, and festivities of drinking and love; through sentiments-of-love-in-separation and through marriages, by descriptions of the birth-and-rise of princes, and likewise through state-counsel, embassy, advance, battle, and the hero's triumph; Embellished; not too condensed, and pervaded all through with poetic sentiments and emotions; with cantos none too lengthy and having agreeable metres and well-formed joints, And in each case furnished with an

ending in a different metre—such a poem possessing good figures-of-speech wins the people’s heart and endures longer than even a kalpa.

About the aforesaid traditional characteristics of a *mahākāvya*, Ingalls (33–35) states that these features are not random suggestions but specific requirements. He says “Every complete *mahākāvya* that has come down to us from the time of Kalidasa contains the whole list, which, if one considers it carefully, will be seen to contain the basic repertory of Sanskrit poetry. Contained in it are the essential elements of nature, love, society, and war which a poet should be able to describe”. Whether right or not, Ingalls compares *mahākāvya* with Persian *diwan* and observes that the great *kāvya* tested a poet by his power of rendering content, which is a better test at least than the Persian *diwan*, which tested a poet by his skill at rhyme.

Critics identify five works as model *mahākāvya*: The first work is *Raghuvamśa* by the celebrated Sanskrit poet Kalidasa. Comprising 19 *sargas* (cantos), the story deals with Raghu dynasty, the family of Dilipa and his descendants up to Agnivarna, who embrace Raghu, Dasharatha and Rama. While the earliest surviving commentary work written on the *Raghuvamśa* is that of the 10th-century Kashmirian scholar Vallabhadeva but however the most popular and extant commentary is of Mallinatha (ca.1350-1450) entitled *Sanjivani*. The meters used in the epic are 21 Sanskrit meters, namely *Mattamayūra*, *Mandākrāntā*, *Mālinī*, *Anustup*, *Indravajrā*, *Upajāti*, *Upendravajrā*, *Aupacchandasika*, *Totaka*, *Drutavilambita*, *Rathoddhatā*, *Vamśastha*, *Vasantatilakā*, *Puspitāgrā*, *Praharsinī*, *Mañjubhāsinī*, *Vaitāliya*, *Śārdūlavikrīdita*, *Śālinī*, *Svāgatā*, *Harinī* (Acharya Kavyatirtha Appendix 2). In this story the hero Raghu goes on a military expedition to Transoxiana. He defeats the Hephthalites, or White Huns, whom the Indians called Hunas and *Mlecchas* (barbarians). Then Raghu and his army cross the Oxus River and encounter the Kambojas, an ancient Indo-Scythian people. Kambojas submitted to Raghu and presented him treasures. This group of people probably dwelt in the vicinity of the Pamirs.

The second work is *Kumārasambhava* (meaning "Birth of Kumara") written by Kālidāsa. While the extant version of the epic comprises seventeen cantos (*sargas*), the first eight are accepted as his authorship but the last nine seem to be later additions. *Kumarsambhava* is widely considered as one of Kalidasa's finest works, a great example of *Kāvya* poetry. The epic deals more with Shringara Rasa, the rasa of love, romance, and eroticism, than Vira rasa (the rasa of heroism). In the story, Tarakasur a rakshasha (or demon) was blessed that he could be killed only by Lord Shiva's son. Shiva had subsumed Kama-deva (the god of love). Parvati performed great



tapasya to attract the love of Shiva. Of their being together, a son called Kartikeya is born who kills Tarakasur to restore the glory of Indra, the king of gods.

The third paradigmatic example of Kāvya poetry is *Kirātārjunīya* by Bharavi written in the 6th century or earlier. This epic poem consists of eighteen cantos describing the battle between Arjuna and lord Shiva in the garb of a *kirāta* or mountain-dwelling hunter. Critics praise the work both for its gravity or depth of meaning, and for its impressive and sometimes playful expression. Cantos 4 to 9 are not related to the plot but instead they are just an excuse for beautiful descriptive poetry, which influenced on all later Sanskrit epics poetry. More than 42 commentaries written on *Kirātārjunīya* point the popularity of the work among critics. Also many anthologies and works on poetics entail verses from this work. Among the verses, the 37th from the eighth canto, which illustrates nymphs bathing in a river is the most popular verse and is noted for its beauty. Another verse from the fifth canto (*utphulla sthalanalini...*) describes the pollen of the lotus flowers being blown by the wind into a golden umbrella (*Chhatra*) in the sky is noted for its imagery, and has given Bharavi the sobriquet of "Chhatra Bharavi". The *Kirātārjunīya* is important of being the only known work of Bharavi. Singh (297) regards it to be "the most powerful poem in the Sanskrit language" and Warder (225) considers it the "most perfect epic available to us", with more concentration and polish in every detail. Despite using extremely difficult language, Warder notes that his alliteration, "crisp texture of sound", and choice of meter closely correspond to the narrative.

The fourth paradigmatic example of Kāvya-style poem is *Śiśupāla-vadha* (literary means "the slaying of Shishupala") composed by Māgha in the 7th or 8th century. Including 20 *sargas* (cantos) *Śiśupāla-vadha* is an epic poem of about 1800 highly ornate stanzas. Critics praise the work mainly for its exquisite descriptions and lyrical quality than for any dramatic development of plot. This is almost a common feature that can be seen in other Sanskrit *kavya* poems as well. Their plots are also drawn from one of the epics, in this case the *Mahabharata*. In the story, Shishupala, king of the Chedis in central India, has clashed with Krishna many times and insulted him several times in an assembly. Finally Krishna angered beyond measure and cut off his head. The 10th-century Sanskrit theorist Kuntaka observes that Magha arranges the story such that "the sole purpose of Vishnu's Avatarhood as Krishna appears to be the slaying of the evil Shishupala." Magha also creates a conflict in Krishna's mind between his duty to destroy Shishupala and to go Yudhisthira's ceremony to which he has been invited. This conflict is

resolved by attending the ceremony also attended by Shishupala who is killed (Singh and Barauh 763). It seems in composing the *Śiśupāla-vadha*, the poet Magha has been influenced by the *Kirātārjunīya* of Bharavi, and intended to emulate and even surpass it. Similar to the *Kirātārjunīya*, the poem presents rhetorical and metrical skill more than the growth of the plot and is significant for its intricate wordplay, textual complexity and verbal ingenuity. The vocabulary is rich and it is even claimed that it contains every word from the Sanskrit language. The narrative also moves a way from the main action which has little to do with the main story. As an example, the author describes the march of an army in cantos 9 to 11 leave the main theme to describe nature, sunrise and sunset, the seasons, courtesans preparing to receive men, the bathing of nymphs and so on. These descriptions make Śiśupālavadha to be an important source on the history of Indian ornaments and costumes, giving different terms for dress as *paridhāna*, *aṃśuka*, *vasana*, *vastra* and *ambara*; upper garments as *uttarīya*; female lower garments as *nīvī*, *vasana*, *aṃśuka*, *kaśeya*, *adhivāsa* and *nitambaravastra*; and *kabandha*, a waist-band (Datta 1204) and so on.

The fifth example of Kāvya poetry is *Naiśadha-carita* by Sri-Harsa. It is an epic poem in twenty two cantos describing the life of King Nala and Queen Damayanti. Nala is the king of Nishadha Kingdom known for his skill with horses and culinary expertise. His main weakness is gambling. He is possessed by god Shani. Nala was chosen by Damayanti as her husband in the *swayamvara*, a function in which the bride selects her husband from among the invitees, and preferred him to even the gods who came to marry her.

To this list, sometimes a sixth one is also added: *Bhattikavya* by Bhatti from the 7th century. It is a Sanskrit poem written in the formal genre of mahakavya deriving from on two Sanskrit traditions of the *Ramayana* and Panini's grammar. It also combines other traditions in a mixture of science and art and retelling the adventures of Rama which is the main purpose of Bhatti's poem. *Ravanavadha* (the death of Ravana) is an alternative title of *Bhattikavya*. It is impossible that this title was the original one as the death of Ravana is only a short part of the whole poem. *Bhattikavya* may have got this title to separate it from other works relating the death of Rama. *Bhattikavya* is the earliest example of "instructional poem" or *śāstra-kāvya*. The subject of *Bhattikavya* deals with the life of one hero which is the member of both warrior cast and a god. In this poem, each canto has a uniform meter. The end of each canto introduces the topic for the

next part. The form and subject of this poem is conducive to development of the four aims of life: righteousness, wealth and power, pleasure and spiritual liberation. *Bhattikavya* includes descriptions of cities, mountains, the rising and setting of the sun and the moon, the ocean and the sports, love and sex. The poem gives a full exemplification of Sanskrit grammar. It also gives a good introduction to the poetics or rhetoric science (Narang).

In the relatively secluded world of modern Sanskrit literature, *mahakavyas* continued to be produced. In the introduction to *Sodaśī: An Anthology of Contemporary Sanskrit Poets*, Radhavallabh Tripathi writes:

The number of authors who appear to be very enthusiastic about writing in Sanskrit during these days is not negligible. [...] In a thesis dealing with Sanskrit *mahākāvyas* written in a single decade, 1961–1970, the researcher [Dr. Ramji Upadhyaya] has noted 52 Sanskrit *mahākāvyas* (epic poems) produced in that very decade.

Some modern *mahākāvyas* do not aim to follow all the traditional principles, and take historical matter as their subject. Such examples are Rewa Prasad Dwivedi's *Svatantrya Sambhavam* on the Indian independence movement, or *Keralodayah* by K.N. Ezhuthachan on the history of Kerala), or biographies of historical characters such as *Shrishivarajyodayam* by S.B. Varnekar's on Shivaji, M. S. Aney's *Sritilakayasornavah* on Bal Gangadhar Tilak, or P. C. Devassia's *Kristubhagavatam* on Jesus Christ. Some others like the *Śrībhārgavarāghaviyam* (2002) composed by Jagadguru Rāmabhadhrācārya followed the subject of the traditional epics. The *mahakavya* has been used by modern poets to commemorate such noteworthy individuals as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru (“mahakavya.” website).

In the *History of Indian Literature*, Weber (122-124) points to some other generic terms which are used to denote narrative legend like *akhyāna*, *vyākhyāna*, *anuvyākhyāna* and *upākhyāna*. These terms along with *itihāsa* seem to be prose while the other term *gātha* is more like a song. Anandavardhan, the author of *Dhvanyāloka* (8-14), distinguishes *itihāsa* from the court epic in the deployment of material. He says *itihāsa* relates what happened while the court epic is defined by formal sophistication and embellishment. Weber describes another generic term *gātha* as “strophes of historical purport” and references Ashwamedha sacrifice and a list of kings who perform it. Presenting some evidence, he shows that they are parts of longer hymns

and are not isolated verses. It seems that *gātha* is distinguishable from *itihāsa*, *purāna* and the narrative. *Gātha* refers to actual events in recent memory and has the hyperbolic character. Discussing the characteristics for *gātha*, Chanda says: “it is part of a larger song and necessarily in verse; its matter is borrowed from actual events but its style is not realistic- rather, it eulogises the hero of actual event with hyperbole” (15).

One of the first rigorous attempts at classification of narrative types in Indian literature did by Bhamaha who made a distinction between *kathā* and *ākhyāyikā*. According to him, in *ākhyāyikā* the hero tells his own story and the material of this story comprises of *kanyāharana*, *yuddha*, *vipralambha*, *srngāra* and the *abhyudaya* of the hero. The meters that can be used to tell the story are particular and considered as a distinct feature. *Kathā* on the other hand is bereft of *chhanda* and the story is told by a third person and not the hero himself. Visvanatha expresses that the *ākhyāyikā* should contain a description of the poet’s family-tree, and mentions that the *ākhyāyikā* can also be in verse. He says that the *Kathā* is necessarily prose and must be created which is a creation of *saras vastu*. Amarsinha adds that the *ākhyāyikā* is *pralabdhartha*, or received material, its subject matter is known, while the *Kathā*, after Bhamaha, is imagined, *kālpanik*. Chanda (17) note that in the *Dhvani* school, at least one writer, Anandavardhana in discussing *aucitya*, refers to narrative types, also on the basis of source material. Anandavardhana’s contribution is that the *vidhi Kathā* deals with inherited or traditional material, as the *itivṛtta*, whose theme is adopted from traditional sources as well. Dandin, disagree of the theory of distinctive genres that Bhamaha sets up, says that the hero cannot always tell the whole of his own story and others should speak too, while Bhamaha stated that the *ākhyāyikā* should be a first person narrative, divided into *ucchvasas*.

Another generic term to be discussed here is *charit*, defined by Devipada Bhattacharya as biography, written on the plan of Thucydides or Plutarch, and its relation to history is direct. In *Tracing the Epic as a Genre*, Chanda identifies the elements that make up different texts bearing the name *charit* and considers its generic evolution. According to her, *charit* in its earliest form was a genre rooted in ‘history’ as recorded in the *purānetihāsa*, in the *Brahmanas* and in the extant *Purānas*. But it was also *kāvya*, using all literary devices to hold the readers’ attention. The *charit* texts in this period are written in Sanskrit, the language generally accepted as literary. *Harshacharit* written by Bana around the middle of the 7th century is a *charit* text that bears the name of one of India’s most famous kings. Bana was a Sanskrit writer and the 'Asthana Kavi'

meaning 'Court Poet' of King Harsha. It is generally accepted that writing historical poetic works begin with *Harshacharit* in Sanskrit language and the text ranks as the first historical biography in the language (Keay 161-2). *Harshacharit* written in ornate poetic prose narrates the biography of the king Harsha who appears also in Hieun Tsang's account. Bana relates the greatness of the king when he is asked about him in Bana's home at Pritikuta. The work is in eight *ucchvāsas* (chapters) wherein the first two *ucchvāsas*, Bana gives an account of his ancestry and his early life. He begins his *charit* by listing his favorite works and debts to the *riti* of different regional schools. Then he relates the remembered deeds of king Harsha. The main concern of the *charit* is the story of Harsha's sister Rajyasri. He narrates her marriage, her capture by enemies and her brother's fights to rescue her, his final vow of vengeance and then conversing to Buddhism (Basham 433).

Concerning the elements that Bhamaha has counted for his theory of distinctive genres, *Harshacharit* can be called an *ākhyāyikā*. Other writers such as Rajasekhara have also used this text as an example to define the genre. But Keith calls the text a historical romance. Chanda eowments that although Bana is too close emotionally and temporally to his subject, his choice of material - the beautiful bride, her sad fate, abduction by the villain, rescue and revenge - is typical of the sequence of the *mahākāvya* or the *ākhyāyikā* according to Bhamaha. She cites *Harshacharit* as an example for the genre of *charit* to show it as a "the twilight zone between fact and fancy, history and literature, the real and the imaginary" (29).

A mixture of romance-material and fact can also be seen in other texts. A similar text is Bilhana's *Vikramankadevacarit*, dating back to 1088 AD. *Vikramankadevacharita* is an application of the normal formula for an epic on a historical theme. The work is composed in eighteen cantos. It begins with the usual application to create a hero in order to maintain safety of the world. The hero Calukyas has a supranational origin of the family. God agreed to creat from Brahma's *culuka* or water pot and Calukyas was born. The imaginary origin for the family of the hero is followed. Bilhana narrates the story of Tailapa, his victory over the Rashtrakutas, telling of the following kings and thereafter the poet concentrates on Ahavamalia, father of his hero. As the king is childless, he and his wife pray to Shiva for children, and as the reward of his penance, three sons Somesvara, Vikramaditya and Jayasimha are born. The narration of family history merges with all elements of epic story, war and revenge, love and marriage. It concentrates on a hero who may have existed in history but his deeds are more fictional than real and he appears a

superhuman, owning extraordinary qualities. As Chanda noted, “For the 11th or 12th century reader the requirement of such histories seems to be the portrayal of a real person on an epic or heroic scale” (31). Therefore it is again the notion of history and of literature. Using of literature by history where the heroes want to preserve their names and establish their fame is a sense that is expressed fine by Bilhana. He says about the power of literary word:

Where is the fame of kings who did not keep the lords of literature at their sides? There have been many kings on earth whose names, even, no one knows. The fame of the king of Lanka shrank, whilst Rama became famous, all because of the power of the First poet (31).

The charit, as a literary genre states this power and appears during the ages to be the vehicle of histories. The creators of such these works chose literature to narrate history, and their works are artistic presentation of historical events. The authors of charit texts take care and value to literary aspects of their works and recording history is not the only aim. However these writers are literary artists, rather than historians.

Medieval charit has some shifts. Medieval India is marked by the rise of many small and often rival kings and kingdoms. The heroic/epic charit of Brahmanical Sanskrit tradition provided a model for the medieval ones. The earlier charit was popular among Jains and the Buddhists and provided a model for the Medieval Bhakti charit. However within this shift, charit moved from the Sanskrit milieu into the vernacular. Some generic names like the *ras* and *kaha* that evolve from the vernacular tradition show this movement. The Jaina tradition has some texts names *ras* or *sandhi* which is similar to charit format. It means the charit travels and moves across India under its own name or taking other names. In both types of the medieval charit means the heroic charit and the Bhakti charit, the tradition of praise - poems or eulogy and hyperbolic genealogies have been the forerunners.

There are a number of heroic charit related to many clans in different parts of India. The history of Calukya, described by Bilhana in the charit of Vikrama, was continued by Jaysimha II in the charit titled *Kumarapalabhupalacharita*. This fourteenth century charit dealt with the king and his teacher Kshemcandra. The text used earlier sources, decorating them and praising the hero. Another charit related to the Cahamana dynasty is titled *Surajanacharita*. This was written by Candrasekhara in the sixteenth century, eulogizing the hero for his religious toleration. The charit concentrates on the hero's human qualities rather

on his chivalry. Some examples of charit texts from the southern part of India that preserve the heroic/epic tradition are *Mayuravarmancharita*, a *champu* text in eight chapters, narrating the story of the Kadamba, the ruler of Mayuravarman. There is also a charit that is not about chivalry but deals with intellectuality: the biography of Vyasatirtha or Vyasaraaya of Madhavan Dvaita Vedanta School. *Vyasayogicharita* written by Somanatha narrates the birth of the central hero which is connected to divine revelation, his marriage with Lakshmi and his consecration as the guardian deity of the empire by Krasnadevaraya. The writer claims with some evidence that he had met the aged Vyasa and wrote his biography. The *Mādala Panji* in the tradition of Orissa and the Rajacāritra as a chapter of the *Panji* in Oriya are two more examples. A Sanskrit kāvya work is also Vasudevaratha's *Gangavamsanucharita*, written in *champu*.

Of Tripathy, Chanda says that the *veergāthā* in the Indian literature can not be exactly the same as epic in the western literature because there are various types of *veerta* and chivalry is only one of them. Chanda states, "The *mahākāvya* too may not coincide with epic as understood in the west, for the definition of the former has little to do with bravery. It should be divided into *sarga*, its hero ought to be a god or a *kshatriya* born of a high lineage, the main rasa would be either *sringara* or *santa*, not *veera* and its story should be known" (41).

The Bhakti charit forms a part of the didactic tradition wherein not physical chivalry or political power but 'abstract qualities' are presented. In this kind of charit men are praised as gods and the attempt is to redraw and establish new religious values. Producing these models result in socio-religious movements. *Rasool charit* written by Syed Sultan in Bangla is an example of this kind of moral charit. The story deals with the hero who is Mohammad, the prophet of Islam. *Rasool* in the name of the charit means prophet in Arabic. The story begins with the birth and emergence of the prophet and telling of the greatness of Islam as a religion. The second part describes *shab-e-meraj* as the Night of Ascent, the blessed night when the Holy Prophet of Islam was spiritually transported to heaven and he reached a high stage of nearness to God Almighty which is beyond ordinary human comprehension. The story also deals with Prophet's deeds including the battle with the Hindu king Jaykum and focuses on the establishment of Islam.

The period 1050 to 1400 AD has been called the *Veergāthakāāl* in Hindi literature where the *rāso*, the *vijay* or the *kahā* are prominent genres. The *rāso* moves between literature and history

dealing with materials that seem to be innate to the *charit*. The *rāso* is considered as *veergatha* because of its content that is bravery and chivalry of heroes. The *rāso* or *kahā* use other features of *charit* genre: The first person narrative by using a dialogue form and references to actual events specially wars that can be traced in history. The generic name *rāso* is may be from *Rajsuya*, the *Yajna* performed by kings, or from *rasāyan*. In the *raso* a historical event is presented in literary terms and the text goes for aesthetic merit.

The first extant *rāso* is *Khumman Rāso* by Dalpativijay written in the local vernacular language of Rajasthan. The date of the *rāso* is Vikram Samvat 869-893 and narrates the victories of Rana Khumman of Chittor and of the royal families from Bappa to Rajasinh. The text has grown and altered over the centenaries. No earlier redaction than the 17th century one is available but the original is generally considered to be an older work than *Prithviraj Rāso* (Mukherjee 181). Considering the *Khumman Rāso* as the first, *Prithviraj Rāso* is of course the most famous of all. The *Prithviraj Raso* or *Prithvirajaraso* is a text traditionally ascribed to Prithviraj's court poet Chand Bardai on the life of Prithviraj III Chauhan, a Rajput king who ruled Ajmer and Delhi between 1165 and 1192. This text has been recorded as a historical work, used by several western historians such as Todd, Taso and Garcon (Chanda 51). Debates on the literality of the text besides its historicity make it an ideal heroic *charit*. Over time, the *Prithviraj Raso* was embellished with the interpolations and additions of many other authors. Only a small portion of the existing text is likely to have been part of the original version. Several versions of the *Prithviraj Raso* are available but scholars agree that a small 1300-stanza manuscript in Bikaner is closest to the original text (Gopal 8).

Some critics have made a distinction in the classification of these vernacular genres. According to Tiwary (33-5) poetry texts are called *geet* and the prose texts are called *khyāt*. A *rāso* in prose will be *khyāt* as is *Prithviraj Raso*. The *Sujancharita* of Sujan is in verse and the *Visaldey Raso* mixes both poetry and prose.

Tracing the *charit* through the centuries give us the idea of the process of genre-formation. In the last years of the nineteenth century there is a significant shift in Indian literature. For the first time the writing, reading and theorizing of literature in various Indian languages faced new epistemology and experienced different conceptual apparatus. As we have seen before, the occurrence of Muslim occupation was reflected in the *charit* texts. Religious or political struggles also influenced literature. The literature of the nineteenth century, as Ipshta Chanda (55) states is



an arena where different views of thoughts in world literature “meld with, confront and impact upon one another”. The charit in this century encounters the European novel. *Chinibashcharit* and *Bangalicharit* written by Jogendrachandra Basu and *Muchram Gurer Jibancharit* written by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay in 1887 are the earliest charit texts in Bangla. These works are realist projects but as Bankim Chandra remarks about his character Muchiram in the preface to the book, “this does not profile any real person, it is a picture of society, Bengali society in particular.” *Damarucharit* written by Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay in 1923 is another example for the genre of charit in the 20th century, describing the picaresque adventures of a single hero Damarudhar who is far from heroic. The story is narrated in the first person where Damaru relates his adventures to an audience. First person narrative is what Bhamaha had advocated for historic authenticity. The charit as a literary genre moves between two lines of history and literature. Therefore it is not surprising that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the charit is used for literary representation of history. As Bankim Chandra says in his article "Banglar Itihas":

There are reasons for the fact that Indians have no history. They believe that everything that happens, happens because of divine mercy ...they think of the divine as the doer in all cases. Hence, they are prone to singing the praises of the gods; in the *Puranetihāsa*, they narrate the great deeds of the gods... the human being is nothing, hence there is no need to sing praises to the guna of human characters. This timid mentality and *devabhakti* is the reason for the lack of history (60).

### **Kinds of Epic**

Within the original sense of the term critics tend to distinguish between primary and secondary epics, while some scholars speak of tertiary epic as well.

1- Traditional Epics are also known as Primary or Folk Epics. Primary epics are direct expressions of the culture they depict, composed orally for performance before an audience. This kind of epics are written in ancient times and belong to oral traditions (Cuddon 266). Some of the most famous examples of this pattern are: *Gilgamesh* a Sumerian epic; *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in Greek ; *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the two Indian epics; *Shah Nameh*, *Bahman Nameh*, *Borzu Nameh*, *Garshasb Nameh* and *Ayatkar-e-Zariran* in Persian.

2- Secondary or Literary Epics are inspired by traditional epics and are in skillfully style. The poet creates a subject or uses ancient subjects, structures and motifs, like *Aeneid* of Virgil which is based on *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; or *Paradise Lost* of Milton is a Biblical epic. Abrams believes that, “The literary epic is certainly the most ambitious of poetic enterprises, making immense demands on a poet's knowledge, invention, and skill to sustain the scope, grandeur, and authority of a poem that tends to encompass the world of its day and a large portion of its learning” (77).

3-Tertiary Epics are those composed recently deriving from secondary epics. In *Companion to Ancient Epic*, Foley writes, “if the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* represent primary epic and the *Aeneid* secondary epic, the next stage might be called tertiary epic”. He observes “once the possibilities of heroic verse seem to have been exhausted, the time comes, or so the ambitious and original poet may feel, for anti heroic epic or parody of epic” (571). Foley brings the example of Byron’s *Don Juan* which has been called a secondary epic in English after *Paradise Lost*. The poet himself calls it an “Epic Satire” after the style of Virgil and of Homer, so that my name of epic is no misnomer. Borris in *Allegory and Epic in English Renaissance Literature* speaks of a “post-tertiary” category where tertiary elaboration constitutes extensive textual reflection. He says, “tertiary epic reinterprets the secondary phase which subsumes the first, so this further phase respond to the third by redeveloping tertiary procedures and conventions so that they become critically self reflexive” (73).

Besides the above categories, epic can be classified according to its subject:

1- Mythological Epic is the most ancient and purest kind of epic based on mythologies of a nation, like the Sumerian epic *Gilgamesh* and the first part of *Shah Nameh* (until Faridun’s story), parts of *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, parts of the *Bible*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

2- Heroic Epic describes the life of heroes. It can be mythological like that recreating the life of Rostam in *Shah Nameh* or can be historical like as *Zafar Nameh* by Hamdollah Mostovfi (which is about the war between Iranians and Arabs ) and *Shahanshah Nameh* written by Saba (which is about the war between Iranians and Russians ) in which the heroes are historical protagonists. Usually in these epics, the hero is a commoner for whom death is better than shame and opprobrium.

3- Religious Epic presents the hero as a religious man and the plot is based on the tenets of one religion. *Divine Comedy* of Dante, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, *Khavaran Nameh* by Ebn Hesam and *Khodavand Nameh* by Malek-ol-Shoara Saba-ye-Kashani are such examples.

4- Mystical Epic is common in Persian literature in which, the hero mortifies his passions and achieves eternal glory by unifying with God. His enemy is passion and rut that he calls bogey of passion or goblin of rut as well as other similes and metaphors like dog, pig, cove of passion (the last a reminder of Mehr the god-sun who victimized the first cove).

The hero of such an epic undertakes a dangerous trip and passes seven stages of love or austerity and abstinence. This trip representing the features of Man to God has many difficulties, resistance, privation and so on. The wayfarer or the hero of a mystical epic purges himself with the help of a spiritual guide who is the defender god and enemy of evil, the demon of passion

The Persian epic of Hallaj in *Tazkera-tol-Ovliya* by Attar is a mystical epic. *Mantegh-ot-Teir* another work of Attar is also a mystical epic but has composed in a figurative style. *Bhagavad Gita*, an Indian religious text is sometimes called a mystical epic.

However it is possible to find other kinds of epics in world literature. In European literature is the form called Mock Epic that imitates the elaborate form and the ceremonious style of the epic genre, but applies it to narrate a commonplace or trivial subject matter. A masterpiece of this type is *The Rape of the Lock* (1714) by Alexander Pope. The grandiose epic perspective presents a quarrel among socialites of his day over the theft of a lady's curl. The term mock epic is often applied to poetic forms which are purposely mismatched to a lowly subject as for example Thomas Gray's "Ode on the Death of a Favorite Cat" (Abrams 27).

### **Elements of Epic Style**

It is generally accepted that the epic has a grand style and sublimity in the use of words and meanings. In this style the imagery enhance the grandeur and magnitude of the theme. Epic heroes are compared to strong and mythic animals like dragon, whale, lion and tiger and so on. One of the specifications of the epic style is the use of hyperbole; but here hyperbole constitutes not the imagery but the essence and nature of the epic. The epic hero is supernatural and so his behavior and appearance are extraordinary.

In Homeric epic there is a kind of simile known as epic simile or Homeric simile which is of such length and ramification that it appears almost independent and separate rather than having a narrative function and “in some cases running to fifteen or twenty lines in which the comparisons made are elaborated in considerable details”(Cuddon 276). In other words, the secondary subject introduced by epic simile far exceeds the parallelism it seeks to establish with the primary subject.” As Abrams says, this figure was imitated from Homer by Virgil, Milton, and other writers of literary epics, who employed it to enhance the ceremonial quality and wide-ranging reference of the narrative style” (Abrams 79). Here is an example from *Paradise Lost* by Milton in which the fallen angels busy building the Pandemonium are compared with swarming bees:

In spring time, when the sun with Taurus rides,  
 Pour forth their populous youth about the Hive.  
 In clusters; they among fresh dews and flowers  
 Fly to and fro, or on the smoothed Plank,  
 The suburb of their straw-built Citadel,  
 New rubb'd with balm, expatiate and confer  
 Their state affairs, so thick the aery crowd  
 Swarm'd and were strait'd...

Epics also pose the Epic Question. Narrator asks the Muse to inspire him to compose the story and aid his great work. In Greek mythology, the nine Muses presided over the arts and other fields of learning.

In Persian literature instead of Muse, possibly a *Mubad* (Zoroastrian priest) or *Dehghān* (a cast of people who desired to preserve ancient traditions of Iran and be proud of their nationality) narrates the story or even a nightingale can tell that. Ferdowsi in the beginning of the story of Rostam and Sohrab pictures a spring with its wind, rain, nightingale and flower. Then he narrates the love story of a cloud and nightingale for a flower and in this prelude, asks if the readers can hear the shriek of the cloud and the croon of the nightingale.

Homeric Epithet is also one of the features of epic style. These are adjectival terms-usually a compound of two words- as used by Homer as recurrent formula as: "fleet-footed Achilles," "bolt-hurling Zeus," "the wine-dark sea", Rosy Fingere'd dawn, God like Paris (Abrams 89).

## Features of the Epic

The epic is recognized by some features such as the following:

1) Epic works include war, bravery and adventure and so on. In an Epic, a hero is often involved in a war or adventure or journey and encountered with various obstacles. It can be said that the basis of an epic (in its different types) is war and adventure. For instance in Persian epic *Shah Nameh*, heroes like Rustam or Esfandiyār face wars and adventures as do Achilles, Hector, Paris and Odysseus in *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In the *Ramayana*, Rama and Laxmana are involved in many battles and wars.

2) Animals are important in an epic and often have main roles as supernatural creatures. Achilles' horse Xanthos has the ability to speak and predict and even predicts the death of Achilles. Raxsh the loyal horse of Rustam, is not an ordinary horse. It wars with lions and in some other wars Raxsh decides what it must do. Simorgh (fabulous bird variously identified in *Shah Nameh*) brings up Zāl (father of Rustam) and also helps in the birthing of Rustam as midwife. It teaches Rustam how he can win in the war with Esfandiyār.

In *Bahrām Yasht* (ancient Iranian book) there is Vareghneh the king of birds. Ahuramazda advised Zoroaster that the touch of the feather of this bird would protect him. If he has its feather or its bone, no one can injure him. Simorgh gave a feather to Zal to burn when he is in trouble. In *Mantegh-ot-Teir* (Persian Gnostic epic), Simorgh is a symbol of God.

In the epic of Adam and Eve, a snake cheats Eve and a peacock causes Adam's ouster from paradise. In the epic of Mehr, Mehr wrestles with a cow. In *Ramayana*, animals have important roles. In the main war between Rāma and Laxmana with Rāvana of Lankā, a group of monkeys and bears help them. King Sugriva and his aide-de-camp Hanuman (two exiled monkeys) promise to recover Sita if Rāma helped Sugriva regain his kingdom. In epics there are fantastical animals like winged horse, seven headed dragon, bliss bird (Homā) and so on.

3) The epic hero kills monsters, gnomes and dragons. For instance, Rustam and Esfandiyār kill the monster and white demon in their seven stages (*Haft khān*). Gilgamesh kills Hombaba the monstrous guard of cedar jungle. The most common killing in ancient epics is the killing of monsters, as Faridun kills monster Zakhāk and Ardashir kills the worm of Haftvād. Beowulf too

kills monsters. In the gnostic epic, the hero wars with his passion's dragon, as Rumi has composed:

Passion is dragon and not death  
No care to it has made it torpid

4) Epics have with magical effect. In *Gilgamesh*, a plant gives eternal life to one who eats it. Pomegranate is a holy fruit that Esfandiyār eats which makes him brazen-bodied. From Siyavush's blood, the plant of *khon-e- Siyavushan* grew that is used as medicine. In the epic of Adam and Eve there is a forbidden tree and who those eat its fruit, can distinguish between good and bad. Also in the story of Rustam and Esfandiyar "people worship tamarisk" shows tamarisk as a holy tree. In *Ramayana*, Hanuman brings a mountain where curative herbs grow to save Laxmana and Rama's life.

5) The hero of an epic is a supernatural creature with god-like powers and divine features as in the epic of Mehr or sun as a god. Two thirds of *Gilgamesh* is divine and only one part human. In *Aeneid* of Virgil, Aeneas is the son of Aphrodite. Achilles's mother Thetis is also goddess. In the Christian epic, Jesus is the son of God. In *Ramayana*, Rāma is god. In Iranian epics, the hero is not clearly mentioned as a child of god but a sign of "man-god" is the long life of epic hero. Rustam is five hundred years old when he battles with Esfandiar. His birth is supernatural and his father brought up by Simorgh in the god's mountain (Alborz). Esfandiar who is a supernatural creature abuses Rustam by saying that his father is son of devil. Eskandar doesn't have eternal life but searches for āb-e hayāt for having eternal life. In Gnostic epics, a hero attains eternal life after passing through seven dangerous stages.

6) Supernatural powers play a role in epics. Heroes have relationship with gods and speak with them. In *Shah Nameh* before wrestling with Sohrab, Rustam asks god to return his power. In the story of Rustam and Esfandiar, Zāl speaks with Simurgh (a symbol of god). Controversy of Ayyob, the prophet with God is the most beautiful part of the *Bible* as the dialogue of Mosa with God in the *Bible* and *Koran*. In *Ramayana* Rāma speaks with gods and asks help and advice from them.

7) Some times, gods support one hero against the others. In fact, the war of two heroes is the war of gods with each other. Dues of in Neo-Classical metaphysics, supernatural powers depicted in epics were called “machinery”. Mock-epics used such “machinery” in their imitation of the epic form.

8) A woman falls in love with the hero of an epic but hero doesn't care for her. For instance, Ishtar falls in love with Gilgamesh who ignores her and so she gets angry and sends a cow to destroy the earth. Tahmineh (Samangan's daughter) falls in love with Rustam who ignores her. Another example from *Shah Nameh* is that of Sudābeh's love for Siyavush. The prototype of love of Sudābeh and Tahmineh is the love of a goddess or an epic hero. Some mythologists analyze the hero of epic as one killed in the period of matriarchy by the woman leader of a tribe. The hero of an epic is usually a man but some epics have woman heroes like Gord Afraid (*Shah Nameh*) and Kannagi of the Tamil epic *Silappati Karam*.

9) Hero of an epic is a national or race hero. For instance Adam in *Paradise Lost* of Milton is represents humankind and Achilles in *Iliad* and Rustam in *Shah Nameh* are national and cultural heroes. Nezāmi the Iranian poet in his two epic compositions *Eghbal Nameh* and *Sharaf Nameh* tried to introduce Eskandar (who was not Iranian) as a religious hero but he didn't succeed.

10) The epic hero is powerful in all horizons.

11) The acts of heroes are supernatural and defy logic. For example Rustam as hero eats a wild zebra for a meal and he is so heavy that his feet sank in the ground. Aristotle says, “tragedy should make men marvel, but the epic, in which the audience dose not witness the action, has greater scope for the inexplicable, at which men marvel most...to marvel is pleasant, as can be seen from the fact that everybody adds something in telling a story, thinking to please” (53). Since the epic hero is supernatural, his acts are also unusual.

12) The hero of epic faces an antagonist in each part of his life. Rustam faces Afrasiab, Ahoramazda (god) Ahriman(evil) and Christ, Dajjal. But when two heroes face each other, one of them wins leading to tragic subtraction. Like the war between Rustam and Sohrab and Rustam and Esfandiar in *Shah Nameh*; the war between Achilles and Hector in *Iliad*; Rama and Ravana in *Ramayana*.

13) The hero of an epic undertakes journeys and travels which are dangerous. Rustam and Esfandiar in their seven stages obstacles (*Haft khān*) face a lot of problems and troubles. Also Odysseus had a lot of problems. In mystical epics, hero should also pass difficult stages and obstacles.

14) The acts of a hero have national and spiritual importance. For instance the war between Rustam and Afrasiyab has national importance and the war between Esfandiar and Arjasp has religious value. Mystical epic in which Man wages wars against passion contains matters of spirituality. In *Gilgamesh*, the oldest philosophical thoughts about secret of life and death are discussed.

15) An exciting epic scene would be the duel between the hero and the antagonist as Rustam and Ashkbos Koshani, which is one of the best parts of *Shah Nameh*. Piran Vise was killed in the war by Gudarz and Key Khosro killed Afrasiyab in the same situation. In the battle field, when two heroes face each other, there is epic boast which contains mockery of the rival and adversary. When heroes come to the battle field as their first start to a career, they praise themselves, boast and then enquire who their rival is. In religious and philosophical epics, every one tries to condemn some one else with complicated questions. One can say that the basis of the debate is of epic value.

16) In epic wars, especially in a duel, heroes use different kinds of weapons.

17) One of the instruments of war is cheating. Rustam cheats Sohrab to save himself from death. Faridun is a magician; Yahweh the god of Bible is artful; in Koran god called himself artful; also in *Iliad*, the Greeks opened the gate of Troy with cheat and trick. And also Esfandiar conquered Rooin Dej (brazen castle) with trick.

18) The hero of an epic is man-god so his death remains enigmatic.

19) In an epic there is prediction and augury. Sām dreamed that Zal (his son) is alive in Alborz mountain; Jāmāsb predicted that Esfandiar is killed by Rustam; killing of Achilles in Trojan war was also predicted and for this reason his mother made him brazen.

20) Epics contain devils, ghouls, gnomes and hexes.

21) Epics have power, greatness as well as simplicity.



Some literary terms which are closely related with the epic should be noted here.

### **Myth and Epic**

Myth as a word derived from Greek word *mūthos* and it is the word that Homer used to mean narrative and conversation, but not fiction. Odysseus tells false stories about himself and uses the term *mūthologenevein* to mean “telling a story”. At a later period, Greek *mūthos* also meant fiction. Plato refers to *mūthos* to signify something not completely untruth but for the most part fictitious. Nowadays myth tends to donate a fiction which conveys a psychological (or even historical) truth. However in its modern significance, myth refers to stories belonging to a specific culture recounting supernatural or paradoxical events designed to reflect that culture’s view of the world. The word “myth” can be taken to refer generally, in relation to epic, to the background of traditional oral storytelling, available to the poet in written versions in some cases, from which the epic derives. Scholars of myth often separate traditional oral stories into categories based on narrative content – myth, legend, and folktale (Edmund 31).

Myths are about the exploits and demeanor of gods, legends about heroes, and folktales about ordinary people. Myth would be of a fabulous or superhuman nature, and which may have instituted a change in the workings of the universe or in the conditions of social life. Most myths have social rituals as series of actions carried out in sacred ceremonies. But even now a main question for anthropologists is whether rituals generated myths or myths created rituals.

Myth has occupied a central role in the psychologies of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung and among philosophers such as Ernst Cassirer and Suzanne Langer, who argue that mythic thinking is a fundamental aspect of human consciousness. The relation of myth to literature has been one of the chief concerns of literary study in the 20th century. Frazer’s book *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915) believes that ‘primitive’ societies have faith in the efficacy of magic, or adopt totems because they regard themselves as blood relations of the totemic animal, or are ignorant of the connection between sexual relations and birth (Frazer 29-32). The most celebrated myth critic is Northrop Frye whose *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) is an impressive attempt to encompass literature within mythic frame. Northrop Frye sees literature as rooted in the myths of the seasons: comedy, spring; romance, summer; tragedy, autumn; irony, winter. As a result, these four genres are indelibly marked by their mythic origins. He mentions some cyclical symbols

and writes: “these cyclical symbols are usually divided into four main phases, the four seasons of the year being the type for four periods of day (morning, noon, evening, night ), four aspects of the water-cycle (rain, fountains, rivers, sea or snow), four period of life (youth, maturity, age, death), and the like” (Frye 160).

### **Archetype**

Archetype is a term that is used to describe “Collective Unconscious” or those innate and congenital thoughts, tendency to behavior and suppositions based on certain patterns. In other words, “Collective Unconscious” contains repeated patterns of common human experience as images, ideas, beliefs and customs inherited unconsciously from primeval ancestors and reflected in myths, religions, visions and literary works. Archetypes are atavistic and universal. The fundamental and primordial facts of mankind are archetypal as matters like birth, growing up, death and the structure of family based on tribal life. Plato was the first philosopher to elaborate the concept of archetypal or ideal forms (Beauty Truth, Goodness) and divine archetypes. Cuddon in his entry on archetype writes:

Certain character or personality types have become established as more or less archetypal. For instance: the rebel, the Don Juan (womanizer), the all-conquering hero, the braggadocio (q.v.), the country bumpkin, the local lad who makes good, the self-made man, the hunted man, the siren, the witch and femme fatale, the villain, the traitor, the snob and the social climber, the guilt-ridden figure in search of expiation, the damsel in distress, and the person more sinned against than sinning. Creatures, also, have become archetypal emblems. For example the lion, the eagle, the snake, the hare and the tortoise. Further archetypes are the rose for the state of 'Pre-Fall' innocence and themes to include the arduous quest or search, the pursuit of vengeance, the overcoming of difficult tasks, the descent into the underworld, symbolic fertility rites and redemptive rituals (53).

literary criticism which is centered on archetypal elements and mythical narrative patterns, known as Archetypal Criticism owes much to the school of comparative anthropology at Cambridge, J. G. Frazer's monumental study *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915) about elemental patterns of myth and ritual, and to the psychology of C. G. Jung (1875-1961) who applied the term "archetype" to what he called "primordial images". The "psychic residue" of repeated

patterns of common human experience in the lives of ancient ancestors which, survive in the "collective unconscious" of the human race are expressed in myths, religion, dreams, and private fantasies, as well as in works of literature. This term has often been used since Maud Bodkin's remarkable book *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (1934) and Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1937) and constitutes a valuable source of scholarship.

### **Romance**

Romance is a literary form which has many similarities with the epic as those stories in 11th and 12th centuries which were written about knights, cavaliers and their treatments of chivalry in wars. Usually romance suggests love stories but in fact romance is about wars and brave treatments. Love is in the second stage. There are many similarities between romance and epic. Like the epic, romance has dragons, ogres and bogies who fight with heroes. There are magic weapons and spell.

It is possible to say that romance is epic in another form and age when man continued his epic thought and mythological insights. M.H Abrams writes,

Chivalric Romance or Medieval Romance is a type of narrative that developed in twelfth-century France, spread to the literature of other countries, and displaced the earlier epic and heroic forms. Romances were at first written in verse, but later in prose as well. The romance is distinguished from the epic in that it does not represent a heroic age of tribal wars, but a courtly and chivalric age, often one of highly developed manners and civility. Its standard plot is that of a quest undertaken by a single knight in order to gain a lady's favor; frequently its central interest is courtly love (181).

However the difference between the two forms is that in epic, heroic treatments have mythological resources but in romance treatments seems unreal. Epic usually is the description of national history but romance is the author's creativity and doesn't have historical reference. Sometimes, the epic hero loses a war or is killed but a romance hero wins his wars. So romance has a joyful tone and amusing theme. A romance hero is not real and does not have the equal outside the story. He is smart, loyal, polite and has all positive qualities. Romance authors are not always known and these stories are based on human ideals. It is said that romances have some main purports: sometimes a lord or prince fights to reachieve his reign and dominion which has

usurped by others, sometimes he is going to free a girl who is captive in hands of dragons, or a cavalier is searching for Grail. Other romances are of Charlemagne and his commanders and King Arthur of England.

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