Mahābhārat and *ShāhNāmeh*:
Similarities between Civilizational Epics

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Ancient Indian Epics are verse narratives which have evolved through ages. And, ShāhNāmeh is a song based on those narratives of the ancient times. Hearing the verses of ShāhNāmeh reminds an Indian of the ancient narrative poetry of Rāmāyana and Mahābhārat. Iranians did have their shared Indo-Aryan narratives, and preserved them for centuries. However, these were destroyed in various world changing events and military conquests which Iranians were subjected to throughout the ages. But fortunately, those shared Indo-Aryan legacies were preserved and carried forward in the Indian epics. The original archetypes have found articulation in the stories, characters and other literary elements present in these epics. Later on these also found an articulation in the Iranian epic. Not surprisingly, the articulations have been greatly influenced by the cultural narratives of the two seemingly different yet commonly rooted civilizations. It is extremely vital to understand that the aim is not to exalt one and humble the other, but rather to bring them into an affectionate dialogue with each other.

Oral Culture

The national narratives of both India and Iran, have deep ancient roots and were transferred orally for centuries. Indian culture has been an oral culture since time immemorial, it has been oral in essence, and not because of the widely propagated idea among the western scholars, that Indian culture did not have scripts. Orality has been a cultural philosophy of India. The essence of Indian Oral Culture lies in the fact that Indian Aryans considered this to be an alternative philosophy of creating, storing, transferring and disseminating knowledge; which an Indo-Iranian proverb has supported saying:

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"*elm dar seeneh, na dar safeeneh*" the knowledge is (to be kept inside) in the heart (internally) and not in a book (externally)"; while the world renowned Persian poet Sādi Shirāzi has stressed upon the same fact when he says "*na mohaqqeq buvad na dāneshmand / chaar paayi bar ou kitabi chand*" i.e. even if the horses or mules carry loads of book on them, they do not become learned men. Knowledge in Indian culture was stored in minds and not in any external form and dissemination of that knowledge was by word of mouth; from a Guru (teacher) to a Shishya (disciple/student) at first and through *Katha Pravachan* (story narration) for the wider part of the society. Even in the modern context, we might have a digital library of thousands of books in our computers, but a very few humans possess the knowledge of those books in their minds. The oral transmission of knowledge was proven to be a valid mode of transmission of knowledge since time immemorial in Indian cultural narrative. The idea of becoming a "hafiz" (memorizer) of some knowledge in the Arab culture may have its roots in the Indian mode of orally transmitting and transferring the knowledge.

The oral epic traditions are mostly ancient national narratives which have survived the journey of thousands of years, faithfully transmitted from generation to generation by the method picturized beautifully in Persian language i.e., *Seeneh be seeneh* (from chest to chest). Their lack of bigger framework or narrative in the oral form was felt by the later generations and hence these oral epical traditions were brought together to serve a defined objective or purpose. The purpose in Indian context was to bring these epic traditions together to save the Indian culture for future generations and 'serve' the propagation of dharma among the masses and make them widespread, which in the long run led them surpassing the geographical boundaries of Indian culture. The Iranian epic ShāhNāmeh, although more recent as compared to the Epical narrative and tradition

of Mahābhārat, has an old soul, going back to the pre-Vedic and Vedic and its concurrent Avestan era. Ferdowsi composed the national epic of Iran by threading together all the oral epical traditions of Iranian consciousness to serve the purpose of 'saving' the Iranian language and culture for future generations and from outside influence of cultural and political invasions, his nation was going through. The author in the context of epics becomes a master of erstwhile freely roaming epical traditions and narrative; effectively bringing them under his servitude.

Thus, the purpose of ShāhNāmeh was to save the Iranian culture for generations to come and the purpose of Mahābhārat was also to save the Indian culture for the future generations by guiding them through the right and wrong on their path and stressing upon basing their lives on the Tradition of Dharma. Teaching them moral and ideals of Indian consciousness through the means of an epic poem. Surely Ferdowsi's goal and objective were a bit different from the Mahābhārat from this perspective, but the ultimate goal remains the same; as he also, from time and again inside his narrative provides a moral perspective to certain actions and even talks of philosophy of life and death, destiny and many other morals and values.

Indian Epics and the Western Mould

The western scholars have 'carefully' defined the characteristics of texts which are designated with the title of Epics and others have mostly followed their lead in accepting the widely accepted views. But one thing is for certain that defining the characteristic framework for all the epics of the world is a folly at best. The epics of various cultures or nations have a historical consciousness contained within them, which is overlooked when looking from a conventional European perspective, which limits the potential of Epics from being a source of historiographical information. The European mind was not able to accept the believability of certain aspects of Indian epical narrative; but then again it is more like the eating or clothing habits of various cultures, which seem odd and uncanny to the people who look at it from the outside. The European mind for example could not comprehend the "logic or reasoning" behind certain rituals and practices of Indian society, like the initiation ceremonies of children and adolescents, the wedding and death rituals. Because they could not understand the idea of Dharma or even Karma which has been part of the Indian society for thousands of years; thoughts and ideologies reaching back to the times of Mahābhārat and even beyond, i.e., to the Rigvedic times. Hence the socio-cultural elements are the kernel of 'primarily oral epics'

of India, which flourished for centuries in the oral milieu, before being put in ink during a much later stage.

It is nearly doubtless to say that so called 'markings on stone' pointing to the notion that 'epics cannot ever be history' or are historically unviable are biased in some or the other manner. One of the reasons for such biases can be the fact that Indian epics for example did not fall into the definition framework the west built for categorizing all the works of history of the world; and if they did not fit in that framework, they "had" to be "something else" other than history. The 19th century positivist view of history, narrowly defined the 'historical text'. The non-western literary and historical texts were classified according to their form and content, having proximity to the genres created for and by the European mind and their creations. These forceful organizations and categorizations of texts, by the orientalists, led to force-fitting the Indo-Iranian literary works into the moulds and frames that were not originally meant for them.

The Indo-Iranian epical narratives were an obvious mismatch for the western orientalists' moulds. Things which fit in the mould were widely accepted and the portions which did not fit, were deemed unexplainable or rather proclaimed as 'cannot be a part of the whole framework, as it does not fit in the mould. They failed to accept the fact that the problem might not be with the content but the container they were trying to force-fit the content in. Mahābhārat and Rāmāyana and even ShāhNāmeh of Hakim Ferdowsi were outrightly rejected to be considered as epical narrations of civilizational history of their cultures; even while the texts like Mahābhārat were shouting at their loudest to have been the accounts of the past i.e., Iti-ha-āsa (Sanskrit: verily it is what actually was).

Hence, there is a strong requirement for a different perspective towards historicity of Indian epics. Even though the scholarly community of the world is far from accepting the same and one of the supporting arguments for denying the historicity of Indian Epical narrative is pointed out to be absence of material evidence. For example, the absence of Archaeological signature of Vedic civilization or Mahabharat War are mentioned, to masterfully dilute the importance of ancient Indian texts & epics. Overlooking the fact that texts such as Rigveda and Mahābhārat and Rāmāyan which were once part of oral consciousness of the Indian civilization, before being put to ink in later centuries. Forgetting the fact that Indian civilization has been essentially an oral civilization since time immemorial. Oral transfer of culture in fact requires a higher intellect and exhibits a futuristic approach of the ancient Indians in protecting their heritage; and the ancient Indo-Aryans were clearly the masters of such

traditions. The material remains can be a supporting factor for the culture that ancient literature talks about; but it cannot be the pre-requisite for accepting what the literature has recorded. Unfortunately, in the Indian context, the absence of material /archaeological remains has been the "*pīrahan-e-usmān*[1]" (the shirt of Third caliph after prophet of Islam) for western scholars, taking refuge in the argument as and when required.

The critical differences in western epic genre and the oriental epical narratives can be seen in the idea of time in the western epics pointed out by M.M Bakhtin; 'time of the (western) epic genre, according to him, is distant from real and from present, it is also not localized in the actual historical sequence; it is not relative to the present or the future and it contains within itself, the entire fullness of time'[2].

ShāhNāmeh

ShāhNāmeh of Hakim Abol'Qasim Ferdowsi is considered the national epic of Iran (Persia or Farsi). It was composed in late 10th and early 11th century CE (i.e., 977 CE-1010 CE); in a period of thirty years. The Epic contains the history of Persian civilization from creation till the Arab invasion of 7th century CE. Its voluminous nature of 60 thousand couplets, as well as the multiplicity of characters and vivid descriptions of generations may remind the informed Indian reader of primarily Mahābhārat and secondly Rāmāyan.

ShāhNāmeh begins with the creation myth regarding four basic elements (i.e., Anaser-e-Arba'a) namely fire, air, earth and water and thereafter the human being and later the celestial bodies such as sun and moon. The basic framework of ShāhNāmeh is in fact a chronicle, featuring fifty kings; important events of their lives and moving on from the very first king of human beings (with a closed perspective of Iranians in fact) till the time the Arab invasion breaks the chain, and that is where ShāhNāmeh stops.

One of the prominent themes of Ferdowsi's ShāhNāmeh is nature of an ideal man, ideal hero; which is based upon strong ethical basis. The ethical questions raised by the heroes are abundantly seen in the epic where the ideal character is more concerned about how do I do it right? (it reminds us of Dharma being the central theme of Mahābhārat and Rāmāyana). But it is not the central theme; rather a part of its fabric.

Most of the prominent geographical locations predominantly seen in the pre-alexander portion of ShāhNāmeh, include Balkh, River Oxus, the river Hirmand or Helmand, Kabul, Marv etc; which are not under the modern geographical boundaries of Iran. The "Homeland" in ShāhNāmeh is Khorāsān, which under the Sāmānid rule extended till Oxus. Another important aspect is that the sources used in the earlier sections of ShāhNāmeh are mainly from the legends of this area and Sīstān (i.e., eastern Iran or modern western Afghanistan). The basic conflict is between Iran and Turan; which are mainly the regions of Khorasan and Transoxiana. The Iranians being on the west of Oxus River in central Asia and Turānians on the East. It may remind an informed Indian scholar of the Udichya-grama and Prāchya-grama division of region by Pānini in his Ashtādhyāyi, which can be analyzed and reviewed more deeply in future researches from a geographical perspective. The archetype of conflict among brothers over kingdom in the Iranian narrative of ShāhNāmeh, also reminds the informed reader of the central theme of Mahābhārat, where Kaurav's and Pandav's engage in a bloody battle killing hundreds of thousands on both sides.

Curse

The idea of cursing someone is a deep-rooted concept in Indo-Aryan narratives. The curse in Indo-Aryan tradition signifies a power which both the good and evil have. There are numerous instances of curses mentioned in Indian epical narrative; although it is present in ShāhNāmeh, but the quantity of such instances is scarce as compared to the Indian epics. The archetype of curse in Indian epics is persistently recurrent as the reader goes through the text. Analyzing the reasons for such recurrence of this phenomenon at times provides a quick solution to an issue, and at times connects it to destiny which led to the creation of certain circumstances for utterances of curse, so as to bring forth what was destined. The curse archetype portrays the spiritual culture of the Aryan society.

The curses in Indian narrative have interesting aspects attached to it. It is only at an instance of intense grief that a character in Mahābhārat curses someone; although instances of cursing someone out of anger is also seen; but no curse was unjustified or unprovoked. The deliverer of curse is supposed to have a spiritual superiority as compared to the common folk, which makes the curse effective and potent. Their Tapasya is the credit which they spend on uttering a curse. As most of the curses were uttered by Rishi's and Muni's of the ancient, who had spent their lives in holy penance. The curses once uttered cannot be taken back in any manner. The one cursing insists upon the fact that whatever he/she has said, will surely come to pass, or else he will be considered a liar, which he cannot be, as lying reflects on the dharma of a person and affects their karma in a negative manner. There are instances where a curse giver, modifies the curse at the request of the affected person and his show of regret.

There are also instances where a loophole in the language of the curse is exploited to save someone from imminent death. For example, if the curse is related to blood being spilled, an ear is cut off to fulfill the requirements of the curse and hence it is considered fulfilled. The number of curses found in the ādi-parva of Mahabhrata are far more in number than any other parva of the Indian epic. There is also a provision of curses being nullified by a counter curse, with the only exception of a curse given by a mother; Vasuki, the great serpent distinctly mentions in Astika-parva that "All curses, except those given by a mother, can be met with a counter stroke".

In ShāhNāmeh there are not many instances of curses being given, but the ones present are entirely justified by the overall narrative and compliments the story. The curses of ShāhNāmeh do not have the aforementioned qualities of curses in Mahābhārat. As the idea of Dharma and Karma is irrelevant to Ferdowsi's perspective. Nevertheless, the archetype of cursing someone is clearly seen in the Iranian epical narrative. The first curse given in ShāhNāmeh is in its very beginning, where Kyumars the first man/king curses the Ahriman (demon), when the latter kills his son. Although he seemingly forgets his curse and Surush reminds him of the revenge he had to take from the demon. The curse of Kyumars is not at all elaborate, it just states:

Kyumars wished the worst for Ahriman, raising his head towards the heavens…
The definition of 'worst' is left for the reader's imagination by Ferdowsi.

In another instance, famous Iranian king Fereydun, curses his own sons Salm and Tūr for mercilessly killing their own younger brother. With regards to a father cursing their child, such curse is not seen in the Indian context (in the research done till now). But from the perspective of a parent cursing someone at the death of their children, such an instance is seen when Gāndhāri curses Krishna after the death of her hundred sons at the hands of Pandavas during the great war of Mahābhārat.

The fratricide of ShāhNāmeh is somewhat a tragedy; where the elder brothers kill the youngest when he had gone to sue for peace and surrender his throne and kingdom to them and leave Iran. They not only kill their brother, but also sever his head and send it to their father. When Fereydun learns of merciless killing of his favorite and youngest son, he curses his sons. Fereydun ask the almighty judge to burn the hearts of his sons in such a manner that they do not experience anything other than dark days for the rest of their lives.

Curses in Iranian epic are more poetic images as compared to the Indian curses. Much of what has to befall the evil doer is left for imagination of the reader in Iranian narrative, while the Indian curses are straightforward in what they are decreeing. One curse in ShāhNāmeh is given posthumously to the evil doer; when Rostam's son faramarz learns of his father's death, he laments and curses his killer to die. But as the legend goes, Rostam's step brother Shoghad was killed by an arrow by Rostam himself in his dying breath.

In Mahābhārat, Pāndu, on his hunting trip spotted a pair of deer and shot one of them. The deer was sage Kindama, who had transformed into a deer, and was engaged in lovemaking with his consort. Kindama before dying, cursed Pāndu that "he too will die a painful death whenever he tries to couple with another woman:

O, king, I did not blame thee for thy having killed a deer, or for the injury thou hast done to me. But, instead of acting so cruelly, thou shouldst have waited till the completion of my act of intercourse. What man of wisdom and virtue is there that can kill a deer while engaged in such an act? The time of sexual intercourse is agreeable to every creature and productive of good to all. O king, with this my mate I was engaged in the gratification of my sexual desire. But that effort of mine hath been rendered futile by thee. O king of the Kurus, as thou art born in the race of the Pauravas ever noted for white (virtuous) deeds, such an act hath scarcely been worthy of thee. O Bharata, this act must be regarded as extremely cruel, deserving of universal execration, infamous, and sinful, and certainly leading to hell. Thou art acquainted with the pleasures of sexual intercourse. Thou art acquainted also with the teaching of morality and dictates of duty. Like unto a celestial as thou art, it behoveth thee not to do such an act as leadeth to hell. O best of kings, thy duty is to chastise all who act cruelly, who are engaged in sinful practices and who have thrown to the wind's religion, profit, and pleasure as explained in the scriptures. What hast thou done, O best of men, in killing me who have given thee no offence? I am, O king, a Muni who liveth on fruits and roots, though disguised as a deer. I was living in the woods in peace with all. Yet thou hast killed me, O king, for which I will curse thee certainly. As thou hast been cruel unto a couple of opposite sexes, death shall certainly overtake thee as soon as thou feelest the influence of sexual desire. I am a Muni of the name of Kindama, possessed of ascetic merit. I was engaged in sexual intercourse with this deer, because my feelings of modesty did not permit me to indulge in such an act in human society. In the form of a deer, I rove in the deep woods in the company of other deer. Thou hast slain me without knowing that I am a Brahmana, the sin of having slain a Brahmana shall not, therefore, be thine. But senseless man, as you have killed me, disguised as a deer, at such a time, thy fate shall certainly be even like mine. When, approaching thy wife lustfully, thou wilt unite with her even as I had done with mine, in that very state shalt thou have to go to the world of the spirits. And that wife of thine with whom thou mayst be united in intercourse at the time of thy death shall also follow thee with affection and reverence to the domains of the king of the dead. Thou hast brought me grief when I was happy. So shall grief come to thee when thou art in happiness.[3]

Thereafter, Pāndu sought refuge in ascetic life, living a life of celibacy until one day he could not control his carnal desires, seeing his wife Mādari; and ultimately the curse came true[4].

The curse upon Pāndu was not time based but action based. There was a probability of the curse never coming true, had he abstained from sexual intercourse. Hence it was the cursed only, who made the curse come true. In the larger context, it was thus this curse which led to the succession crisis in the Kuru Empire and resulted in the great war.

At another instance, Arjuna was cursed by an Apsara named Urvashi, when he was visiting his father Indra in the heavens. Urvashi was romantically attracted to Arjuna for his bravery and virility. Her advances were rejected by Arjuna on the account of her connection with his forefathers and addressed her as 'mother'. Urvashi was infuriated because of such disrespect and indifference; and she in turn cursed Arjuna to become a eunuch. After Arjuna plead for mercy, Indra modified the curse and limited it to a period of one year (supposedly of Arjuna's own choosing; as he chose to disguise himself a eunuch named Brhannala, teaching dance and music to Matsya princess Uttara)[5].The archetype of Urvashi's character i.e., an older motherly figure falling in love or having sexual feelings towards a younger man, who considers the woman as his mother is seen in ShāhNāmeh also. Sudābeh the stepmother of Siyāvash falls for him and is rejected by him; leading to her 'blaming' him for sexual advances and ultimately leads to the prince going through fire, to prove his chastity, which shall be discussed in a separate discussion.

Curses were uttered upon Karna by Parsurama. All three of these curses provide reasonings and rationalizations for his death in that particular manner in the great war. i.e., forgetting the knowledge when he needs it the most, dying a helpless death like the cow and his chariot wheel being held tightly by mother earth, like he held and squeezed the earth to squeeze the ghee out of it.

Ashvatthama was cursed by Krishna, because he was night raiding the pandava camp and mercilessly killing the pandava army. An infuriated Lord Krishna cursed him to roam in the jungle with non-withering wounds and not die till the end of the last epoch[6]. Draupadi, the Pandava queen at many instances showered curses on various occasions at people and animals who instigated and infuriated her. Draupadi's curse to Bhima and Hidimba's son Ghatotkacha, that he will 'have a short life' is pivotal in this regard, that Hidimba in turn also cursed Draupadi that her sons will be killed at a young age. This seems to be a justification for Pandava offsprings

and Ghatotkacha being killed in the great war. As such reasonings and rationalizations are provided at various instances in Mahābhārat, in prequel or sequel to the events actually taking place.

Yudhishtra blamed his mother for keeping the secret of Karna's true parentage, which led him to commit fratricide and thus he cursed the entire womankind that "no woman will be able to keep secrets ever". Krishna himself is cursed by Gāndhāri for his actions leading to the destruction of Kauravas; and therefore, Gāndhāri in capacity of a mother, a grandmother, a sister cursed Krishna that his entire clan shall perish and his lineage destroyed along with his kingdom.

Invulnerable man

The Indian and Iranian epical narratives of invulnerable man are rooted deeply in the Indo-Aryan traditions of the pre-historical times. The striking similarities between the narrative of both the heroes, suggests a common origin. Duryodhana, becomes invulnerable from the supernatural powers of her mother's gaze, which she attained after a lifelong Tapasya of living like a blind woman, with her blind husband Dhritrashtra.

Gāndhāri did not want any harm to befall upon his eldest son and hence asked her son to meet her 'just like he was born'. Duryodhana was a bit shy from going bare naked in front of his mother and thus, covered his loins with a leaf, when Gāndhāri's gaze fell upon him, Duryodhana's whole body became invulnerable, except the covered area of his loins. Krishna, knew of this weakness of Duryodhana and when the final one on one battle between Bhima and Duryodhana ensued after the great war; Duryodhana was seemingly winning the hand-to-hand combat with the mace, even after being seriously injured in the great war. Krishna signaled Bhima of hitting him below the belt, which was in fact not allowed in the manners and etiquettes of mace-duel, and strikes a death blow on the invulnerable man.

The invulnerable man of Iranian epical narrative is Esfandiyār son of Goshtāsp (son of Lohrāsp) and Katāyūn daughter of Cesar of Rome. He is a popular, pious and Samaritan character of the Iranian epic; famous for his courage and bravery. Esfandiyār is the only invulnerable character of the Iranian epical narrative, whose invulnerability is due to many variable narratives. The Zoroastrian narrative recalls that he was made invulnerable by consuming the pomegranate which Zoroaster gave him. According to the Iranian epical narrative, Esfandiyar went through seven labors or insurmountable tasks. During the fourth labor, he slayed a dragon, and bathed in dragon's blood, which made him

invulnerable. But as destiny would have it, he fainted and closed his eyes while getting covered in dragon's blood and thus only his eyes remained vulnerable[7].

Esfandiyār claimed the throne from his father Goshtāsp, after killing the Iranian enemy Arjāsp; but the mischievous and shrewd father -not ready to let go of the throne- told him to go on a last mission, to prove his worth for ascending the throne. He asked Esfandiyār to bring the great Iranian champion Rostam to his court, with his hands tied; knowing fairly well that Rostam may come willingly, but will never allow to be brought to the court, with his hands tied, as one of his titles as an Iranian hero is Tājbakhsh i.e., the one who grants crown to the kings, hence a kingmaker in a modern sense. As Goshtāsp anticipated, Rostam did offer to accompany Esfandiyār to the kings' court but declined to accept the precondition set by the king. Therefore, a one-on-one battle ensued between the two champions. Rostam, an old man with Esfandiyār a mighty young champion. The battle continued for three days and as expected, Rostam is on the verge of defeat, but he asks for a nights' pause, which Esfandiyār grants. Rostam takes the help of Simorgh – a mystical and legendary bird of Iranian epical narrative- who cures his wounds and informs him about Esfandiyār's weakness and a step-by-step guidance was given to him, on how to defeat and kill his opponent with deception and trick. Esfandiyār is a shot in the eyes by a special double-headed arrow, made from the branch of a tamarisk tree, as guided by Simorgh.

The Indian and Iranian epical narrative of invulnerable man strike similar in many aspects.

Both the champions are in their youth and contrary to the expectations, both of them have a short life. The invulnerable men of other epical narratives of the world are similar in this aspect. Duryodhana and Esfandiyār both have one specific vulnerable area on their bodies, which leads to their death. Interestingly enough, although the main opponent of the champion is not aware of the weak spot of the invulnerable man; but only one person from the opponents' camp has knowledge of his vulnerability. Krishna in Mahābhārat and Simorgh in ShāhNāmeh are aware of the opponent's vulnerable spots and while Simorgh clearly guides Rostam, step by step, on how to inflict the critical blow on Esfandiyār, In Mahābhārat, Krishna signals Bhima to inflict the blow below the waist.

The Indian and Iranian Epical narratives both portray the invulnerable man as the seemingly probable winners during the course of the battle and it is only near to the end of the battle that things completely change in the favor of the hero and the invulnerable man is defeated and killed with the help of a third character i.e., Simorgh

and Krishna. Both the Invulnerable characters of Indian and Iranian epics, are fighting their last battle to reach their desire of becoming Kings. They truly believe that they are fighting for their birthright and to achieve that goal, they are ready to go to any extent; be it fighting the greatest champion of Iranian land or engaging in a great war with hundreds of thousands of soldiers. Duryodhana could easily have sued for peace, when Krishna came for the last meeting with a final offer and Esfandiyār could easily have achieved the task if he had agreed to take Rostam to his father, with his hands untied.

Dhritrashtra laments at the end of great war, how he knew at fifty-five different instances, that the defeat of Kurus is imminent, but still, he does not accept the final offer of Krishna and ultimately leads to the death of his whole clan. Goshtāsp in the Iranian epic is well aware and even sure that he is sending his son to a certain death; but refrains from abdicating the throne to his son. Therefore, Dhritrashtra and Goshtāsp's characters are morally questioned in each epic respectively. Although the deeper characteristic qualities of Esfandiyār and Duryodhan's characters are poles apart in both the epics; as Duryodhana was never projected as a champion helping the cause of the kingdom or going through seven labors kind of ordeal to prove his heroic character, going on missions to save princess's or killing the archenemy of the nation etcetera; like Esfandiyār has been portrayed in the Iranian epic, but the core or archetype of invulnerable man, in which both these characters were poured into, remains the same. That is what we are looking at and not the differences in their characters which have evolved through time and modified to the need of their narrators through the ages.

The mothers of both the invulnerable men in Mahabhrat and ShāhNāmeh are against their sons going to their last battles. Gāndhāri in Mahābhārat and Katāyūn in ShāhNāmeh insist to their sons to not go to their last battles but the narrative does not allow it and destiny wins eventually. Hence we have an archetype of an invulnerable man, who is fighting the battle of their life to become king, but who is also vulnerable at just one point in his body, with only one person in the enemy camp knowing about their weakness and probably their opponents also not being aware of their invulnerability, their fathers being well aware of their certain death if they go on their last battles, yet not stopping them, the mother of the invulnerable man is against him going to the battle but he embarks upon it and contrary to the popular belief and expectation, the youthful invulnerable prince who is supposed to be immortal with regards to his invulnerability, dies in his youth.

Conclusion

There are points of divergences and convergences in the characters of Indian and Iranian epics. Although a final image in this regard will be formed after the completion of my research but what can be said tentatively is the following: with time, the characters of Indian epical narrative attained a sacredness in the Indian civilizational narrative, diverging from their original stature of just human beings and thus becoming a God /goddess, or demi-god, worshipped in the modern Indian cultural narrative. Looking at ShāhNāmeh from the same perspective, gives a completely different picture. The characters of ShāhNāmeh did not diverge from their original civilizational and cultural role given to them by their author. They did not attain a holy or sacred characteristic with the passage of time. Rostam is still the greatest hero who defeated dragons and witches and achieved the impossible, but he is still a hero and not a God/Demi-God or incarnation of God.

A common aspect seen in the epics of both the nations is the confidence of Indian and Iranian composers of these civilizational epics, in the immortal nature of their creations; as stated in Shahnameh and Ramayan. Ferdowsi realized the importance of his work for the millennia's to come and stated with confidence:

Pey Afgandam az nazm kāxi Boland
Ke az Bād o Bārān nayābad gazand

(I have created a high palace of poetical compilation
Which shall never see any damage by storms or rains)

It may remind an Indian reader of Brahma's proclamation about the story of Rāmāyana stating: "As long as the mountains stand and rivers flow, so long will the story of Rama's heroic deeds be told and cherished on earth."

Notes

1. The bloodied shirt of murdered third caliph, was used by Mua'wiyah to instigate a rebellion against the fourth caliph. This proverb is used in Iranian culture even today for using a phony argument when cornered.
2. Bakhtin, dialogic imaginations, p 19
3. K.M.Ganguly, Mahābhārat of Vyasa, p 246

4. Ādi-Parva, Mahābhārat, Geeta press, Gorakhpur
5. Vana-Parva, Mahābhārat, vol 2, Geeta press, gorakhpur
6. Sauptika-Parva, Mahābhārat, Geeta press, gorakhpur
7. Sirūs Shamisa, Farhang-e-Talmihāt, under Esfandiyār

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