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Using Islamic Feminist Discourse to Unfold Gender Issues in Qaisra Shahraz's *The Holy Woman* (2001)

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ABSTRACT

The 9/11 attack on New York World Trade Centre has somehow popularized the term 'Islamophobia' and contributes to the marginalisation of Muslims in America and Britain. Being minority in Britain, the Muslims find it hard to be accepted among the western societies. It is hard to be a Muslim in Britain and even harder for its Muslim women. Placed in a double bind situation, the contemporary Muslim women writers have yet to counter lopsided and inaccurate notions about their perceived gender oppression. In a climate of mistrust and marginalisation of Muslims, British Muslim women writers have played a significant role in informing the mainstream society about their religion and identity. One of them is Qaisra Shahraz (1958-). In *The Holy Woman* (2001), Shahraz explicates the gender question according to the teachings of Islam and locates the fine differences between Islamic teachings and culturally inflected practices; such as the imposition of the unislamic, 'barbaric' ancient tradition of *Shahzadi Ibadat* (The Holy Woman) by the feudal class. Within the setting of a traditional patriarchal society in Sindh Pakistan, Shahraz has finely crafted her work revolving around the internal conflicts as experienced by her protagonist, Zarri Bano. Following the death of her brother, Jaafar (the sole heir), Zarri Bano's bleak *kismet* is cruelly set upon her by her feudal lord father. Using the discourse of 'Islamic feminism', this paper shall highlight some instances where the status of women in Islam have been justifiably elevated.

Keyword: Islamophobia; Holy Woman; *kismet* ; Islamic feminism

1. Introduction

Being the second generation of migrant community, the contemporary Muslim writers who have either been born or bred in Britain, or even in exile due to (in)voluntary emigration have undergone an array of new social experiences that place them in tandem with social integration (voluntary or forced) in the host country. Their narratives are often influenced by several elements such as the writer's personal experience, conviction in life and observation, particularly those that reflect their diasporic identity. British Muslim male writer, Hanif Kureshi (1954-), for instance, has published literary works depicting migration issues (nostalgia, exile and the restlessness generated by the migration process) and received a lot of critical and academic reviews. For the contemporary British Muslim women writers, however, their literary works not only depict the common migration experience, but they come with a gendered perspective.

One of these diasporic writers is Qaisra Shahraz (1958-). Her writings have often intricately dealt with issues ranging from 'barbaric' old traditions ('Haq Bakshish') feudality against modernity, sexuality (taboo subject), family honour or *Izzat*, women as object, to the donning of *hijab* as an act of Muslim woman's own choice. The focus (subject) of Shahraz's works differs from those written by other earlier counterparts, namely Amrit Wilson, M. Prescod-Roberts and N. Seele (Wilson, 1978). The latter (first generation migrants) have used their homeland (South Asia, African Caribbean) as the cultural centre of their lives, whereas the second generation (such as Monica Ali, Leila Abouleila), have the tendency to include nostalgic elements in their works and constantly give prominence to the idea of ethnic identity (Hussain, 2005).

Interestingly, in the novel, *The Holy Woman* (2001), Qaisra Shahraz has used her novel as avenue to channel her demanding voice by highlighting on femininity issues. Through her protagonist, Zarri Bano,

whom is portrayed as a strong character, perseveres against the society prescription while succeeds in asserting her own individuality. With the intention of opening the eyes of many Muslims and non-Muslims alike, this paper will present detailed analysis on several propounded themes using Islamic feminist discourse.

1.1 Qaisra Shahraz and her Feminist Works

A Pakistani born, Qaisra Shahraz, has been living in Britain since 1966. This prolific and diasporic Muslim women writer of present day has just released her third novel, “*Revolt*” in 2013, claimed to be a trilogy to her earlier two novels, *The Holy Woman* (2011) and *Typhoon* (2003).

According to Siddiqui (2011), Qaisra Shahraz is indeed a diasporic writer. In her two earlier novels, Shahraz has used the elements of nostalgia of the homeland (Pakistan/the East) and making full use of her diasporic identity (living in Britain/the West) to depict both cultures and “confrontation between old and new, male and female, East and West” (Shaw, 2005: 3). In an interview promoting the article “The Holy and the Unholy: Critical Essays on the Art and Craft of Qaisra Shahraz’s Fiction” published in *Solidarity* (Pakistan Journal, 2011), Siddiqui points out to the advantages of Shahraz’s diasporic identity:

In her case it is not lack of something but rather the abundance of experience, Pakistani and Western. She can look at both cultures with an open eye. In her work she shows the limitations of both Western and non-Western feminism. (www.transculturalwriting.com)

In the *Author Statement* column of British Council Literature (2012), Shahraz admits to her commitment in empowering women and how that has very much influenced her literary works. In *The Holy Woman* (2001), Shahraz depicts the women characters as being repressed by patriarchal society, but somehow these characters manage to alleviate and pull through the test of time (Shaw, 2005). In the same note, Siddiqui (2011) argues that some of Shahraz’s characters are ‘self-consciously’ feminist (28).

1.2 Writings as Avenue for Expostulation

Similar to other contemporary British Muslim women writers, Shahraz has used her writings as a means to channel her thoughts and opinions on conflicting issues as faced by Muslim women in general, as well as experienced by those in Pakistan. The deep-rooted cultural customs and unreasonable cultural expectations imposed on the women such as arranged marriages, domestic seclusions, and other unthinkable practices. These inflicted cultural practices, for example ancient ‘barbaric’ tradition (‘Haq Bakshish’), arranged marriages, bring more harm than good to the Muslim women in the Sindh province, Pakistan. Therefore, intricate conflicts (family issues, love and others) arise when these cultural practices are often made legal under the name of Islam even though it is not at all stated in the holy Qur’an or *Hadiths*. Consequently, these cultural practices affect the psyche of the Muslim women as well as invite scepticism and misconception from the West.

In expressing her protest, Shahraz has delicately and brilliantly tackled these issues (dodging cultural expectations) by inserting some verses and sayings from the holy Qur’an and *Hadiths* respectively embedded in the narration and characters’ dialogues. In other words, Shahraz has gone to the extent of redefining feminism for Pakistani society. By highlighting the conflicts of the Muslim women characters in putting up with the cultural expectations as inflicted on them, Shahraz wants Muslim readers to think deeply and resort to adopting to the true Islamic teachings (the holy Qur’an and *Hadiths*). In addition, this distinctive framework of Islamic feminism, as defined by Cooke (2001), provides a platform for Muslim women like Shahraz to vocalize their needs and represent themselves in accordance with the needs of their religious teachings. Hence, Cooke (2001) suggests that the British Muslim women writers should do a re-reading of the corpus of Islamic texts by going straight to the holy Qur’an and the *Hadiths*.

2. Islamic Feminism

Islamic feminism is a movement that emanates from Third wave feminism and makes an appearance in the 1980s. Margot Badran in “Islamic Feminism: What’s in a Name” (2002), defines it as “a feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm [it] derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur’an, seeks rights and justice for women, and for men, in the totality of their existence” (1). Though Badran’s definition of Islamic feminism is derived from her study based on the experience of Egyptian women as feminists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, her ‘fluid’ (subject to change) and not rigid definition has ensured the applicability of it not only to the Egyptian feminist experience, but also to Muslim women in other societies. In other words, Badran (2002) emphasizes on the ‘fluid’ nature of the feminist discourse as it defies boundaries and can be used at anytime, anyplace.

By definition, Islamic feminism is a feminist discourse using the classic Islamic methodologies or basic *ijtihad* (independent investigation of religious sources) and *tafsir* (interpretation of the Qur’an) and how both are used alongside “the methods and tools of linguistics, history, literary criticism, sociology, anthropology” and others (Badran, 2002, 5). This branch of third wave feminism is only applicable “within an Islamic paradigm”, where intentions and actions must be used in the context of Islam (Badran, 2002, 7).

Proponents of Islamic feminism (Islamic feminists like Asma Barlas, Elizabeth W. Fernea, Leila Ahmed, to name a few) have secluded themselves from the rigid restrictive interpretations of the female gender and declared their opposition to discriminatory cultural practices, which is played out in false calls for Islamic identity and obedience. One strong example would be in their firm stand when it comes to domestic or sexual violence to women by husbands or male perpetrators. In re-examining the *Qur’an* and *Hadiths*, Badran (2002) and her Islamic feminists’ sisters have presented the public with pertinent *surahs* and *sirahs* that condemn any acts of violence against women. As stated in the Qur’an:

“...But consort with them in kindness, for if you hate them it may happen that you hate a thing wherein God has placed much good.”

(An-Nisaa, 4:19)

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) further emphasizes this:

“The best of you is the best to his family and I am the best among you to my family”.

“The most perfect believers are the best in conduct and best of you are those who are best to their wives”.

(*Hadith* narrated by Ibn-Hanbal)

As the interpretations exposed by the Islamic feminists taking into the various opinions of reformist Ulama, this has contributed to the construction of a social discourse on Muslim women that calls them to be active, intelligent and remains faithful to Islamic teachings. Islamic faithfulness sets Muslim women free (liberated) before God and does not subject them to the masochistic imagery of either East or West (Ramadan, 2004, 141-142).

Relatively, Islamic feminism allows Muslim women to restore their place in Islamic societies as well as stand resolute among non-Muslim community “with a type of liberation that adheres to the principles of Islam” (Ibid: 2004, 142). As nicely put by this great novelist,

I always felt strongly about women’s lives, because I’m always comparing my life to other women’s lives, and I think I’m so lucky because I live in the West, I have an education, I have a career and opportunity and I want other women to have the same. I am not a Western feminist: (I am) a feminist within a Muslim framework. I must be a feminist because I feel strongly about women’s lives and women’s issues.

(Shahraz, 2001)

The meaning of emancipation to the Islamic feminists is when the Muslim women are allowed to use their moral sense, sound convictions and religious beliefs in dealing with making choices (Ramadan, 2004). Therefore, when Muslim women want to don the *hijab*, the West should respect their choices and way of life. To exemplify, when Zarri Bano in *The Holy Woman* (2001) decides to wear the *burqa*, that decision should

neither be termed as being subservient nor indoctrinated. Instead, in her response to the Western media representatives, Shahraz was quoted as saying, “We are just women who like to dress in a modest fashion and believe in covering ourselves well” (Shaw, 2005: 2).

In the above quotation, Shahraz is clearly refuting the West’s idea of fashion sense and claim as to possessing the key to liberty. The veiled Muslim women are portrayed as being the victim of oppression, resulting in Islam being blamed for the backwardness of Muslim women. The veil is perceived as a mask of sexual innuendos of Muslim women, to escape the presumed shackles of the Arab Muslim world. In other words, Muslim women and other subaltern women are seen more as subjects of analysis rather than sisters in plight.

3. Literary Analysis

3.1 Status of women in feudal Pakistan as depicted in *The Holy Woman* (2001)

All Muslims are brothers and sisters to one another (one single *ummah*). Each Muslim men and women have a calling and place in nature (Qaradawi, 1998). Neither has a greater value, nor is one of greater importance. The most elevated status in Islam is those who pray and double-up their *ibadaah* (worship) to Allah.

Unfortunately in Sindh, one province in Pakistan, women are tied down by ancient patriarchal tradition to protect their wealth from changing hands. In *The Holy Woman* (2001), Shahraz presents the nightmarish reality faced by its protagonist, Zarri Bano, and other main characters as a result of the feudal traditions as set by the feudal lords. These feudal lords are known to have great power in politics and authority in religion (Chaudary, 2013). Within the Islamic entity and society’s cultural traditions (Asian Muslim in Pakistan), Zarri Bano and her mother, Shahzada have yet to gain equal value and worth in the eyes of Muslim men. This can clearly be seen in the narrator’s comments:

In a culture and land where sons were traditionally cherished, an only son was the most precious commodity of all worldly goods for any father. Hence, to lose your only son was like losing life itself – the worst calamity one’s worst enemy could face (58).

As indoctrinated by the patriarchal traditional practice, Zarri Bano experiences internal conflict, from someone who is beautiful, independent, sociable woman to a Holy Woman, who has been tied down by the “barbaric traditions” of the feudal class by her grandfather, Baba Siraj-Din and father, Habib. These “male tyrants” are depicted as being responsible for the setting of unIslamic, absurd tradition, *Haq Bakshish*. This ancient tradition is practiced by Pakistani feudal families, whereby a woman (heiress) is not permitted to marry any man (but forced to live in celibacy) for the fear of inherited lands and wealth to change hands (Kidwai & Siddiqui, 2011).

To these male-tyrants, their insistence on Zarri Bano to remain a celibate and be married off to the Holy Qur’an is due to their irrational assumptions that one cannot devote herself fully to the studying of the Holy Qur’an and *Hadiths* if she were to become a wife and a mother. Apart from that, a *Shahzadi Ibadat* has to present herself to the public as one who adorns to the religion’s ruling of covering her *aurah* in a burqa. With her pious appearance and devotion to religion, a *Shahzadi Ibadat* would not only regain high recognition in a society but her family would also gain eminent respect.

Proudly calls herself as a feminist within Muslim framework, Shahraz’s take on Islamic Feminism (*ijtihad*) counters the culturally inflected practice of forcing a Muslim woman to be a celibate. Thus, through Zarri Bano, Shahraz has made it a clear *da’ie* mission for her to educate the public (Muslim and non-Muslim alike) of the necessity to abolish the traditional culture of *Shahzadi Ibadat* or *The Holy Woman* as practiced by the folks in Sindh, Pakistan. In support of Shahraz’s plight to champion Muslim women in Pakistan from the cruel subjugation of being a Holy Woman by her patriarchal family members, we can take a look at these Qur’anic verses such as Surah An-Nur (24:32) and Surah Ar-Rum (30:21):

“You shall encourage those of you who are single to get married. They may marry the righteous among your male and female servants, if they are poor. GOD will enrich them from His grace. GOD is Bounteous, Knower”.

(An-Nur, 24:32)

“Among His proofs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves, in order to have tranquility and contentment with each other, and He placed in your hearts love and care towards your spouses. In this, there are sufficient proofs for people who think

(Ar-Rum, 30:21)

These two verses have clearly shown how Islam really glorifies the institution of marriage. Even in the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), Islam is strongly against celibacy and encourages marriage, as getting married is one of the Prophet's *sunnah*:

"Marriage is my Sunnah, whoever disregards my (sunnah) path is not from among us

(Hadith narrated by ibn Majah)

It is much known to us how our Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is so proud of his expanding number of Ummah through marriages. From the humanitarian aspect, the ancient tradition as practiced by the feudal lords in Sindh, Pakistan can be categorized as a *zulm* tradition. Indeed, it denies the biology nature of a woman to be a wife and mother by forcing Zarri Bano to be the unmarried *zeminder*; out of fear for having the lands and wealth changing hands to future “unwanted” son-in-law

3.2 *Izzat* or family honour in *The Holy Woman* (2001)

Being in a diasporic Muslim community, these contemporary British Muslim women writers usually present the theme of feminism within “the experience of migration, settlement, racism and ethnic identity in a hostile society” (Hussain, 2005: 132). Their protagonists are often portrayed as one of a strong character, who perseveres the society prescription against her, as well as succeeds in asserting ‘her own individuality against social constraints’ (Ibid, 2005: 132).

Within the Islamic entity and society's (Asian Muslim) cultural traditions, Muslim women, as portrayed by Zarri Bano and her mother, Shahzada in this novel have yet to gain equal value and worth in the eyes of Muslim men. This can clearly be seen in the narrator's comments:

In a culture and land where sons were traditionally cherished, an only son was the most precious commodity of all worldly goods for any father. Hence, to lose your only son was like losing life itself – the worst calamity one's worst enemy could face. (58)

Upholding *Izzat* or family honour is an overprotective act (cultural traditions) where the influential male in a community is obliged to preserve his family members (especially the women) from any form of threat involving religious belief, inheritance, descendants and traditions. This act is practiced in some sections (traditional patriarchal community) of the South Asian, Mediterranean, as well as the Middle Eastern societies (Ali, Kalra and Sayyid, 2008). In Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (2000), the Hindus is recorded as holding on to this ‘honoured’ practice. Evidently, during the separation of India and Pakistan in 1947, bloodshed had occurred in the name of preserving one family's honour. Nevertheless, in upholding *izzat*, her findings revealed that the Muslim community were more receptive compared to the Hindus (ibid, 2000).

As Wilson (1978) claims that *izzat* is a “reflection of the male pride” of the family (be it husband's, father's or brother's), the only way to restore the *izzat* is by severely punishing the transgressor (the women) (5). In *The Holy Woman* (2001), Shahzada has received a stern warning by her father-in-law, Siraj-Din for her bold move in giving consent to Zarri Bano to go to Sikander's residence unchaperoned without the approval of her own husband, Habib. Disapprovingly, Siraj-Din has this to say:

But I must be allowed to say that my clan hasn't yet had the misfortune to become so outrageously “advanced”, so morally corrupt that we let our beautiful young unmarried daughters stay in strange people's houses unchaperoned. Alongside our land, our wives and daughters, our *izzat* – our honour – is the most precious thing in our lives. We never ever compromise on the issue of our women and our *izzat*! No matter what age we live in; no matter what the world outside dictates; no matter what

evil lies outside our door. Even if you sacrifice, forget, or part with all the other etiquettes of our-landowning class of feudal landlords, we will never let you sully our *izzat* or our women's honour, Shahzada. (34)

Further emphasizing on his patriarchal indoctrination, Siraj-Din questions Shahzada's bold actions (bypassing her husband) and reminds her of her rightful place:

Amazingly, you have by-passed both Habib and myself. I hadn't realised what an industrious daughter-in-law I had. In fact, I am beginning to wonder who actually rules this home. Who is master in this house? You or my son, Habib...? (44)

In addition, inherited cultural traditions on the status and duty of Muslim women in Asian Muslim societies have created conflict of subjugation and liberation among its modern Muslim women. This male-dominated order within a section of the Muslim community privileges the male to exercise their power in asserting "the importance of appropriate gender roles, codes of dress and family honour" under the name of religion (Ansari, 2004: 22). In an act of safeguarding the family *izzat*, there are cases where parents would go to the extent of forcing their daughters to remain celibate if their daughter refuses to the marriage arrangement or even worse, if her *kismet* is to be the heiress of the family's inheritance. In *The Holy Woman* (2001), the patriarch Habib has used his veto power in going ahead with the "barbaric traditions" (Shahzadi Ibadat), of having her eldest daughter, Zarri Bano as *Shahzadi Ibadat* or The Holy Woman. With his patriarchal tyranny, Habib rebukes:

She is not going to marry. I have decided!...I have lost a son, and I am not going to lose my inheritance to a complete stranger. I want you to support me in this. That is your duty as a wife. If you don't do it, our ancient traditions will outweigh your opposition, so you had better get used to the idea. Remember what I said: I will divorce you on the spot if you rebel against us. (69-70)

When his wife, Shahzada accuses him of being *zulm* in sacrificing their daughter to be the unmarried *zeminder*, Habib snarls:

And stop talking nonsense about sacrifice. My beautiful Zarri Bano was destined for this fate. Her brother's death sealed her future as a Shahzadi Ibadat. This is what has always happened when only sons died in people of our class: the inheritance then was passed onto the next female member – you know that. (70)

Therefore, one of the possible pathways to counter the abovementioned incidents could be in the form of utilizing Islamic feminism as a discourse to rescue these Muslim women from the perplexities of patriarchal customs (homeland) and religion (rigid interpretation) (Badran, 2009).

4. Conclusion

In this section, two subsections are included.

4.1 Islamic Feminism as Literary Discourse

As the meaning of *Islam* (Arabic for "the mercy of Allah upon the muslim") indicates no preference to sex, as well as being associated with the concept of *Ad-deen* (Arabic for "the way of life"), Islam condones any attempts to castigate or marginalize fellow human beings. Both are subject to Divine Retribution, which is equal for the capacity of each. Hence, with regards to Muslim women in non-Muslim countries like Britain, Muslim women will be able to vocalise their needs and represent themselves in accordance with the Islamic Feminism discourse that adheres to the needs of their religious teachings. By performing a woman-centered readings of the holy Qur'an and *Hadiths*, the classic methodologies of *ijtihad* (independent investigation of religious sources), and *tafsir* (interpretation of the Qur'an), a feminist hermeneutics of an issue, arranged marriage, for example could be realized.

4.2 Islamic Feminism as Platform to Understand Gender Issues

This discourse also promotes one's individual and collective obligations. Apart from serving people to lead their individual lives, Islamic feminism can also be a guidance for a community to be a united *ummah* that addresses on *amal makruf nahi mungkar* (doing good deeds, avoid evil deeds). As far as Muslim women in Western diaspora communities and in Muslim minority communities are concerned, second generation Muslim women are often caught between the practices and norms of the original home cultures of parents who migrated from Middle Eastern or South Asian countries to the ways of life in their new countries. Islamic feminism helps these women (the second generation) untangle patriarchy and cultural inflicted customs and presents them with Islamic ways of understanding gender equality, societal opportunity, and self-potential (Hussain, 2005).

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ICLLCE 2015-7 Mansoureh Ebrahimi

Recognition of National and Religious Myths in Sohrab Sepehri's "The Traveler": An Investigation on Traditions and Cultural Beliefs

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ABSTRACT

One of the Iranian contemporary prominent poets is Sohrab Sepehri who his poetry is very famous in theosophy because of the addressing of inner subjectivity difficulties, naturalism, and finding linkage between human beings and nature and God. The aim of this study is to examine, in what manner and for what reason, national and religious myths were delivered into Sepehri's poetry of "the traveler." On one hand, it focuses Sepehri's unconscious mind, and on the other hand, it highlights the link between specified myth and the theosophical origins of presented myths in his poetry. Also, this study clarifies the above-mentioned myths to which nations they have belonged, Iranian or adapted traditional forms of the other nations, in order to manifest their place and period in different cultures, particularly, to analyze the relation of myths to religion, history, and sociology. This article applies a qualitative method for its discussion. The resultant study reveals that the demonstrated construction and interpretation of these myths will emphasize the human beings' life issues.

Keywords: Iran, Sohrab Sepehri, the traveler, national and religious myths, theosophy

Introduction

Indeed, literary study is identical with the history of civilization. As a matter of fact, literature is a gate for both manifestation and transmission of traditions from one place to another. The essential gate with its exclusive terminology is carrying constantly the strength of myths and archetypes. Myths are archive of archetypes and one of the oldest traditions including a unique expanded power in which clarifies the reality and the original of existence. They are significant inseparable part of new and old literature having influential transcendent energy on mankind's thought and mind. Doubtless, mythologists have been beginners of literature and art. For that reason, they have an ideological role to teach people how moving things forward on successful management of the affairs for the betterment of their activity in social culture.

However, myth has no rational explanation. It signifies that myth's fundamental life concerning its mythical meaning has been lost by intellectualism. Due to its definition, myth is the symbolic story about creation, gods, angels, saints, heroes, demons and beyond life beings and creatures. (Ismailpur, 1382) In myths, the challenge between any person with himself or in his life is obvious because myths sometimes legitimize events and connect them to the other world in order to benefit metaphysical archetypes. For their enduring and lasting presence and meaningful link, myths have a vital role worth considering in Persian language.

National and Religious Myths in Sohrab Sepehri's "The Traveler"

Due to his plenty journeys, Sepehri is knowledgeable about the myths, the religions, and the culture of different countries. They had an impressive effect on Sepehri that eventually composed mythical concepts in his poetry. National and religious myths in "the traveler" are fixed given from different religions although they are talking secretly to us in a complicated verbal skill that is specially belong to symbols. In this article, myths will be analyzed respectively based on their mentioning in "the traveler."

In theosophical belief, people have to know themselves first before reaching godliness. In the following of that awareness, mankind is the small appearance of the manifestation of God. Without a doubt, man's grief in this world is because of separating from his origin. With insight and awareness, Sepehri was

finding what the reality of life is. He has digressed from the beautiful appearance of life to its hidden interior. He saw himself in a boat that in Indian myths, rescues human being in order to reach to their faraway ideals. "May Agni carry us through all our troubles, through grief as in a boat across the river." (Griffith,1896:53)(the Rig Veda,19)

"At midnight, on the ancient boat of theosophy
They set sail on the waters of guidance
And they sail on till the emergence of bewilderment" (Sepehri,1383:26)
-"I am still on my journey
I fancy
There is a boat on the waters of the world
And I, the passenger of the boat, have been chanting
The lively song of the ancient mariners
To the ears of seasons' chinks for thousands of years
And I am sailing on." (Sepehri,1383:28)

Then, Sepehri has mentioned "Eve" exactly with the same name and meaning of the old myth. According to The Qur'ān, Sūrah Al-Baqarah (The Cow), Adam and his wife were forbidden to approach to "the tree". "O Adam! Dwell you, and your spouse, in the garden, and eat (of the fruits) thereof to your hearts' content where you desire, but do not approach this tree, or you will both be among the wrongdoers." (The Qur'ān, 2:35) "But Satan (tempting them to the forbidden tree despite Our forewarning,) caused them both to deflect therefrom and brought them out of the (happy) state in which they were. And We said, "Go down, (all of you,) (and henceforth you will live a life,) some of you being the enemies of others. There shall be for you on the earth a habitation and provision until an appointed time." (The Qur'ān, 2:36) There is the same believe in Iranian Zoroastrian holy book, too. (Oshidari,1371:249) Sepehri reveals clearly that "Eve" has been deceived.

"Life is
Eve's one-minute colorful negligence." (Sepehri,1383:34)

In advancing along the road, Sepehri was seeking "the Ronus Rock." In fact, some of the rocks have holy aspect such as Koma made of jade, in Japanese believe. In archaic ethnic groups, some of the rocks, in their natural and original source, were like a god considered as holy beings. For instance, in Asia Minor, Cybele (Kybele) was an originally the Mother Goddess of Nature who was worshipped as a sacred rock. In 204 BC, a temple for Cybele was built by Romans on the Palatine Hill in Rome. Also, in Canaan, James, patriarchal Hebrew, was using that rock as a pillow. (Hall,1383:213) Moreover, in Borhan-e Ghate, "Ronus" rhyming with "Folus" is the name of the rock which allegedly if everyone wears a signet-ring on one's finger, it will never be in sorrow. (Tabrizi,1342:966) However, "runes" is crossed Shamisa's mind taken from Greek alphabet so that it can be engraved on stone and wood. It was customary among Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian people and had religious aspects. (Shamisa,1382:172) In this line of famous poem, Sepehri displays his sadness and sorrow. With nostalgia, he has written a line memorial over the tree.

"Where is the Ronus Rock?
I come from the vicinity of a tree
On whose bark the plain hands of nostalgia
Had engraved:
"In the memory of a nostalgic feeling." (Sepehri,1383:36,38)

Subsequently, Sepehri has expressed one of the most tragic episodes of The Shahnameh (The Book of Kings), Sohrab who is the outcome of a simple love between Rostam and Tahmineh, daughter of the Turanian king of Samangan in Azerbaijan. According to The Shahnameh, on the third days of the wrestling between unknown father and son, Rostam gained the advantage and stabbed Sohrab's side. He declared that Rostam, his father, would take revenge of his death, and showed an onyx to Rostam. When Rostam saw and recognized the onyx, the same as he had given to Tahmineh to bind on the arm of any son. However, there

was no hope. Goodarz has been sent to Kai Kawous in order to bring Antidote for Sohrab, but he had flinty heart. Then, Rostam returned to get Antidote maybe Sohrab would have healed. However, Rostam was informed that Sohrab was died. (Ferdowsi, The Shahnameh, Rostam and Sohrab) The proverb “After death the doctor” coming from that episode. Sepehri states miserably that tragedy. He asked wine to reduce his grief arising from the epic which is related to history of Creation of the world and the first day of Creation of everything. For this reason, we can say that his sorrow is eternal and never-ending.

“Pass the wine around
One should haste:
I come from a journey in an epic,
And I know
By heart
All the legend of “**Sohrab and the Antidote**.” (Sepehri,1383:38)

However, Sepehri’s grief did not leave him, but directed him to another land, instead. At that time, he has pointed out “Psalms” of Dawud known as David and his lyre playing. According to Psalms, “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down. Yes, we wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows in its midst, we hung up our harps. For there, those who led us captivate asked us for songs. Those who tormented us demanded songs of joy: “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How can we sing Yahweh’s song in a foreign land?” (Holy Bible,Psalm 137) Sepehri has entirely understood their beleaguered feeling, and has emotionally imagined the same situation for himself even he has listened their crying and the voice of their lyres’ swinging.

“And once, under the sky of “Psalms”
On the journey at the banks of Babylon River
When I came to
There was no melody of the “lyre”
When I listened carefully, I could hear someone weeping
And few impatient lyres
Were swinging on the wet boughs of the weeping willow.” (Sepehri,1383:40)

Soon after, Sepehri has identified the Prophet Jeremiah (Irmiya), the weeping prophet, the messenger of the promising of Christians, who preached in Jerusalem and had prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem. His mission was to prevent people of doing many sins. However, he was imprisoned by king Zedekiah until Jerusalem fell to the Babylonian army in 587 BC. The Book of Jeremiah, Lamentations, in Jewish Bible consists of a collection of poetic laments about the fall of Jerusalem. (Holy Bible, Lamentations) Hopelessly, Sepehri has talked about the futility of the world. He found out the same perception in “Ecclesiastes” in Hebrew Bible belong to son of David, too.

“On the route of the journey, the pious Christian monks
Pointed towards
The silent canvas of
“The Prophet Jeremiah”
And I read “Ecclesiastes” loudly” (Sepehri,1383:40)

Afterward, on his way, Sepehri has reviewed “world papers.” Then, he has interpreted the world differently. Here, he put emphasize on the philosophy of Hinduism about the River Ganges. His attention is to bath not only the body but the inside. In Indian myths, Ganga is the River Goddess of the River Ganges having its source in heaven. The sacred river is worshiped by millions Hindus who take a bath in the river for doing religious practices. They believe that bathing in the river causes the purifying and the remission of sins. In fact, there was a common belief in the most ancient cultures that the origin of life is in the waters. (Campbell,1383:153)

Besides, after ten years of rigorous self-discipline in Himalayas Mountains, Siddhartha Gautama moved from Sarnath Road to Varanasi known as Banaras, a city on the banks of the river. “The Buddha sat

under the Bodhi tree and vowed not to get up anything until he was enlightened.” (The Complete Book of Buddha’s Lists-Explained, Right Effort:46) After that, he went to Banaras and delivered the four evolutionary stages of religion including devotion, discipline, tranquility, and understanding (wisdom). By means of the philosophy of the innovative outlook, Sepehri has put the dust of the habits away, and has newly viewed the world. By looking at Buddha’s statues with the ornamental ears, he has described the secret and the truth of Buddha for Varanasi’s girls.

“I am the interpreter of the sparrows of the valley of “Ganges”
And I have interpreted the mystic signed earrings
Of Tibet to the ornamentless ears of Banarass girls
Alongside the Saranat Road.” (Sepehri,1383:50)

Followed by his feeling, Sepehri has talked about hymns of “the Vedas”. The Vedas is Hinduism’s ancient holy book including the four large canonical Vedas in Sanskrit related to 1200 BCE, The Rig Veda, The Yajur Veda, The Sama Veda, and The Atharva Veda. Among the Vedic texts, The Rig Veda is the oldest historical monument, a more credit-worthy text consist of the hymns on praise and controversy between gods and the legendary various beings. (Shayegān,1362:44) In terms of linguistic and culture, The Rig Veda is very similar to Iranian Avesta, the sacred book contains five books: the Yasna (including the Gathas), Visperad, Vendidad, Yashts, and Khordeh Avesta. Also, Sepehri has pointed to the Vedic Fire Ceremony of Hindus. The ritual of yanji known as havan, homa or Agnihorta, first, begins with reciting hymns of The Atharva Veda, then, The Rig Veda and The Sama Veda. Finally, they place the gifts into the sacred fire (Agni, the fire God). (Hezareh,1383:97-98)

“O morning hymns of “the Vedas”!
Pull all the weights of freshness on my shoulders
Since I am
Desirous to talk” (Sepehri,1383:50)

At the same time as Sepehri’s feeling was on top of the world eagerly to talk, he has illustrated Prophet Moses, via addressing “Mount Sinai”. According to The Qur’ān, Sūrah Ṭā. Hā, “Has the report of Moses come to you...when he saw a fire, and so said to his family: “Wait here! Indeed I perceive a fire far off. Perhaps I can bring you a burning brand from it, or find guidance by the fire.” Then when he came near to it, he was called by name: “O Moses! “Indeed it is I, I am your Lord. So take off your sandals, for you are in the sacred valley of Tuwā.” (The Qur’ān, 20:9-13) Also, According to The Qur’ān, Sūrah Maryam (Mary), Moses, Kalimullah, was a prominent messenger who talked to God (Allah in Islam). “We called out to him from the right side of Mount Sinai, and drew him close for communication.” (The Qur’ān, 19:52) Sepehri, is a lonely traveler who has passed along Mount Sinai. He wishes to be addressed by the actual voice through the olive trees of Palestine’s mountains like the same voice that is called Moses in Mount of Sinai.

“O all olive trees of Palestine!
Address to me all the abundance of your shades
To this lone traveler who has come
From the journey around Mount Sinai
And is impatient of the heat of “talk”” (Sepehri,1383:50)

In the following, Sepehri has pointed out the birth of Zoroastrians’ the promised who will advert after thousands year shining the earth by righteousness. As said by the Avesta, the sacred Zoroastrians book, a world saviour, was an Iranian prophet who incredibly had three sons who have been born after the prophet’s death. In dictionary of the legends, Saošyant, the promised of Zoroastrians, is Zoroaster’s son who will be born at the beginning of Judgment Day. His mission is to make the dead rise being ready for everlasting life which would be full of brightness. (Yahaghi,1369:260) According to The Avesta, the seeds of the prophet are preserved in the Lake Kāsava known as Kaşaoya, Hamun Lake. “At the appointed time, it will be united again with a maternal womb: 99,999 Fravashis of the faithful watch over it, lest the fiends destroy it.” (The Zend-Avesta, Bund. XXXIII; Eznik, Yast XIII,61;vendīdād XIX,5) Based on Zoroastrians’ belief, a virgin girl will

take a bath in this lake and become pregnant with a child by the prophet. She will give birth to a son, Astvat.ərəta who represents justice and fairness. “Astvat.ərəta will be Saošyant, the Saviour who will bring about Frašō.kərəti, smiting “daēvas and men”.” (Boyce,1975:282) Eventually, in the final battle with evil, Saošyant will be miraculously won. Here, Sepehri was waiting for revival, the restoration of happiness for the world and human beings!

“At the banks of “Hamun”, one still may hear:
 -Evil has contaminated the earth
 -One thousand years passed
 -No one has heard the wash of a bathing
 And no water has reflected the figure of a maiden” (Sepehri,1383:52,54)

In his halfway of journey, Sepehri has pointed up the River Jumna known as Yamuna which is one of the seventh sacred rivers in Hinduism. The source of the River Jumna is Himalayas Mountains, Yamunotri. As the largest branch of the River Ganges, the River Jumna has especially clear transparent with good quality water that connects to the River Ganges in Allahabad. The River Jumna is one of the Indians mythical rivers holding onto a legend of a girl and a boy within a fish, nymph. In the Indian Golden Age, perhaps 400 B.C., King Vasu overcame by a crisis while he was hunting. He thought that he must keep his seeds. Therefore, he gathered them up in a leaf and called a hawk to send to his wife, “who is in her season.” On the way, another hawk came down to the leaf and the seeds fell into the River Jumna. The seeds were “immediately swallowed by a fish, who was actually a nymph under enchantment.” After ten months, a boy and a girl were astonishingly found inside the fish by a fisherman. (Campbell,1962:327-329)

Here, the interpretation of Sepehri is different from the appearance. He has evidently seen the picture of Taj Mahal in the clear water of the River Jumna. However, his vast viewpoint has actually discovered the wonderful power of this river which is brought about two mankind’s life in the peak of death and destruction. Sepehri, even deeper than the myth, says that the real bliss life is after death. He believes that only a small spark is enough to light the inner darkness. Hence, with escape from darkness, man will be full of brightness looking at the life newly and profoundly.

“On the half way of the journey, on the coast of “Jumna”
 I was sitting
 Looking at the reflection of “Taj Mahal” in water:
 The marble constancy of elixir moments
 And the protrusion of the volume of life in death
 Lo! Two large wings
 Are traveling towards the edge of water’s spirit
 There are some strange sparks next to the arms
 Come and light the darkness of perception
 One hint only suffices:” (Sepehri,1383:54)

Furthermore, Sepehri has said that for gaining access to real life, a particle of light can destroy darkness as it can be made a sound by a pebble on the rock of “Maghar”. According to Greek myths, in ancient Greek City-State Megara, there is a rock that if someone hit it with a gravel or small stone, sound is heard exactly like a lyre. Allegedly, the reason is that Apollo, Greek god of music playing a golden lyre, laid down his lyre on that once. (Cambridge University Press,2012:64) As a result, the power of human being’s mind and thought is able to ruin the darkness.

“Life is a tender stroke
 On the rock of “Maghar”.” (Sepehri,1383:54)

In the end of his traveling, one more time, Sepehri has affirmed the myth of man’s creation rooted in ancient myths. Indeed, Totem or spirit-being is related to Neolithic period. Totemism is one of the ancient phenomenon of mankind believed in which each man has a spiritual connection with a Plant Totem named Rhubarb known as Ribas, a species from polygonaceous family. In Aryans’ beliefs, the father and the mother

of mankind, Mashya and Mashyana created from Ribas. In Zoroastrian creation myth, Gayōmart known as Keyumars, the progenitor of mankind is the first man. In the time of his death, two drops of his semen fell to the ground that was fertilized by the sun and was kept in the soil. After forty years, a plant like two attached rhubarbs grew in the Month Mehr (the Day of Mehregan). Afterward, that plant changed into two human beings named Mashya and Mashyana, who their stature and facial was the same as each other. After fifty years, they married to each other, and after nine months, a pair of child, a male and a female, were born from them. Then, seven pair of girl and boy were born from the first pair accordingly. (Oshidari,1371:435,436). Also, there is the same belief in Bundahishn, Zoroastrian Cosmogony, about Primal Creation.

“We thought
We were floating
Amidst the mythical context of Ribas convulsion
And that few seconds of negligence
Caused our Being.” (Sepehri,1383:58)

Finally, Sepehri has discovered the secret of actual life. His only request was:

“And show me
The presence of a tender “Naught”.” (Sepehri,1383:64)

The Overall Analysis on “the traveler”

With focusing on the myths, Sepehri’s target is to find the reality of the world. In particular, he used Indian, Greek, and the Far East myths more than Iranian myths. The worth considering point in Sepehri’s poetical viewpoint is that although the myths referring to prehistory time, he believes in fresh look at objects like Krishnamurti’s approach, Indian mystic philosopher. Sepehri makes the myths alive and dynamic in the mind of man. Sepehri attempts to identify the world, and to realize the right and the secret of eternal life. He is a traveler who passes through the material world in order to attain his ideal world. In his poetry of “the traveler”, Sepehri starts from a mental journey, and then he accomplishes to a global journey.

“The traveler” is the symbol of a mankind in the terrestrial world that never stops moving from the creation and the beginning of birth until the end of life, and even continues to the end of world, too. The traveler of Sepehri does not entirely stop anywhere. He is a man who goes everywhere in the traveling, and only settles for a short time somewhere, and then continues to his traveling, again. (Torabi,1382:155) Sepehri’s spiritual travel is internal. He wants to gain the inner truth of things through essence and nature of objects and elements of nature. Actually, he wants to achieve the secret of life relating to truth and creator via physical journey and unified with the essence of nature. Sepehri’s spiritual path is scientific following founded on knowledge and experience. Hence, his poem’s process introduces his spiritual progression.

Conclusion

Literature, particularly in its theosophical field, plays an essential role in transmission of traditions. In highlighting history, literature, religion, art and culture of any nation, myths’ role is observable. In Sepehri’s “the traveler”, one of the most effective elements which is theosophy, is revealed. Investigation on Sepehri’s mythical frame of mind enlightens his worldview. His mythical world is alive and sensible considered as human beings’ one. By applying myths, Sepehri’s purpose originates from his profound viewpoint to know God, himself, and the environment around. With his mythical expression, he propounds life’s issues. Sepehri looked out to internal layer of myths more than their external shell. The expansion of Sepehri’s myths is significantly large. It can be said that there is an interdependency correlation between the myths and his poems. In “the traveler”, a huge number of myths, notably seventeen national and religious myths, have become alive. Beyond doubt, Sepehri’s vast perspective is an absolute practice of traditions. Invocation of God by the literary way influences tremendously on people and the society. As a basic linkage, majority of Iranians are traditional and religious whereby they could be easily controlled through a religious message. In Iranian culture, religion has the antiquity for thousand years. People have been influenced through myths even in modernity development time because they are part of generation’s religious beliefs. Impressively, Sepehri’s poems have been translated into various languages. Thus, the legacy of his feelings, values, and ideas is smoothly transferring to the other nations and cultures. By a long way, globalization ultimately will pave the

way for an important development in modern poetry towards the fundamental instrument of transition of traditions to the future while the practices of them display patterns of theosophical setting. The wondering of their advent and function, myths' historical flowing travel and transmission have been smoothed and occurred.

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