

# Analysis of Zahhak Story from the Perspective of Resistance Literature

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## تحليل قصة الضحاك من منظور أدب المقاومة

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## **Abstract:-**

Perseverance and endurance, courage and bravery against the oppression are the most important categories which have a certain place in the political thought of the Ferdowsi. He considers injustice and the oppression of governors as the root of all economic, social, moral and cultural disorders. As in the story of Zahhak, he considers tyranny and despotism as one of the reasons of government weakness which are eventually eliminated and destroyed by Fereydoun who comes from a superior race. Therefore, not only resistance means a moral concept in Shahname but it is one of the fundamental principles of the government and a virtue which the heroes of Shahname have been adorned by it.

**Key Words:** Shahname, Ferdowsi, Resistance and Endurance, Zahhak, Epic, Myth.

## **المخلص:**

تحمل عنا صر المقاومة والمثابرة والشجاعة ومحاربة الظلم مكانة خاصة في الفكر السياسي للفردوسي. يعتبر الفردوسي أن جور الحكام وظلمهم هو أساس كل الاضطرابات الاقتصادية والاجتماعية والأخلاقية والثقافية، كما هو الحال في قصة الضحاك، فإن أحد أسباب إنهيار حكومة الضحاك هو ما يقوم به الحاكم من قمع واستبداد، الذين يقضيان عليه على يد فريدون الثائر. ومن هنا، فإن مفهوم المقاومة في الشاهنامه ليس مفهوماً أخلاقياً بحتاً، لكنه يعتبر أحد المبادئ الأساسية للحكومة والفضيلة التي تزين بها أبطال الشاهنامه. يسعى هذا البحث أن يتطرق إلى مفاهيم الأدب المقاوم ومكوناته في شعر الفردوسي من خلال قصة الضحاك المشهورة. توصل البحث إلى نتائج منها أن فردوسي دعا الشعب الإيراني من خلال قصة الضحاك إلى المثابرة في وجه القمع، وأنه إذا اتحد الشعب يمكنه الإطاحة حتى بأقوى الحكومات وربما يكتن القول أن الفردوسي يرمز بشخصية الضحاك إلى شخصية السلطان محمود الغزنوي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** شاهنامه، فردوسي، المقاومة والتحمل، ضحاك، ملحمة، أسطورة.

## Introduction

Every great nation creates epics to maintain its existence and country and find evidence and credit suggesting its own originality and root in history. Therefore, Shahname can be considered as resistance literature.

Although, resistance literature is the most important category in today's literature and it is extensively related to the eight years of holy war, it is said that Ferdowsi's Shahname is considered as a glorious document and Iranians' identity and the first resistance poem. But prior to this, it is necessary to have a definition of resistance literature.

"Resistance literature refers to poems, stories, plays, songs and lyrics which occur in certain periods of the history of a nation or ethnic and it aims to develop struggle and resistance morale in people. This kind of works usually occurs in certain fields and if they are addressed artistically, they will come out of the narrow scope of ethnical and national literature and will be persistent as literary masterpieces. Resistance literature is a kind of stirring, dynamic and expressive one enjoying Islamic and political thoughts and serving humanity, realistic literatures originated in Islamic rich culture and elements such as Ashura, war, altruism, martyrdom and ... have vitalized this kind of literature. "Resistance literature is the voice of resistance which never comes down and there is no end for it and it is a category that always is accompanied by people." (Kamrei, 2011: 13)

"Resistance literature is the people's cry for justice and land which has historically opposed against inequalities and Ferdowsi's Shahname is considered as resistance literature in addition to epic work. It describes the Iranian courage and resistance against foreigners' invasion, whether enemy or devil and it is the song of hope and triumph of the oppressed people of this land. Never Iranians be oppressor, rebellious, cruel in Shahname, but they have resisted against the enemies' invasion. Whenever a cruel king has wanted to reign in a land, the divine splendor and people's will have rejected him. Finally, Jamshid became cruel, and Zahhak strayed from the beginning and both of them were punished. Interestingly, no unpleasant behavior remains unanswered in Ferdowsi's stories and this inspiration is one of the Islamic and Quranic teachings.

Uprising of Kaveh the blacksmith (who belongs to a low class society) against Zahhak, is one of the oldest and most amazing uprisings in the history of Iran in Shahname in which Ferdowsi narrates the unity and struggle of true-hearted Iranian against cruel and oppressor king. The story of Kaveh the blacksmith's uprising and uniting the people through leading this movement by Feridun and overcoming Zahhak is one of the historical lessons expressed in Avesta texts and this story has been eternal in Shahname by eloquent processing of Ferdowsi.

The components of resistance literature such as tyranny, challenge to war, hope to win, and mass uprising have been clearly stated in this story. This symbolic story has been described beautifully in the way that if it turns into prose, it will corresponds to the revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century." (Mirqaderi, 2010: 16) and according to Nedoushan: "the torn leather of Kave's is the sign of power and glory of the misery and oppressed people who overthrow the tyranny by their own efforts and select Feridun as the king who represents light, truth and justice. It is really strange and glorious that there are heroes like Kaveh in Iranian's fiction in the way that his modernity, modesty and freshness and his real image represent him like revolutionaries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries." (Nedushan, 1989: 51)

According to the mentioned words, "the story of Zahhak" is an example of fiction representing the resistance and endurance spirit of Iranian people of all ages and centuries. It suggests that resistance is a universal and general concept and it is human's main concern from beginning of creation to present. In this context, a kind of literature titled resistance literature has been formed and developed.

Therefore, resistance in society appears in various forms and everyone resists against events in different forms. An artist and a poet resist against enemy respectively by drawing a beautiful painting and composing a delightful ode. Ferdowsi shows his resistance against the tyranny of Qaznavi kings by creating the story of Zahhak and Kaveh's uprising against him.

Unlike people who think that Shahname tells a history of kings and describes their behaviors and words, it should be said that Shahname is a description of ideal kings. It is a record of our fathers'

history and shows how they tried to survive, perpetuate and live appropriately, how they made an attempt to win over vain and protect the land by their souls and bodies and how they follow the truth and faith and in one word how they resist against tyranny. All of these categories are the epic of our land and Ferdowsi's Shahname is a kind of resistance literature." (Amini, 2009: 51)

### **Political and Committed Literature**

"If it is accepted that resistance literature is a kind of political and committed one" (Aeine vand, 1991: 34) it will be necessary to have a look on committed literature, but before addressing the issue of committed literature, first it requires to explain about the relation between literature and quantitative society, because the literature of every nation is highly influenced by its society.

The relationship between literature and society: literature is like a mirror which reflects the important events of the society. Of course it should be noted that this mirror is not an ordinary one; as if it was normal, it was considered as history. Literature represents reports and events more interesting, complete than the history.

Literature is influenced by society, because events and incidents are part of society and the author and the audience belongs to this society. Literature and society have a direct relationship. In other words, if a community changes, literature is also involved in.

Of course, there are two theories about committed literature: 1. Those who believe in the theory of art for art. 2. Some who believe that art should serve the ethics, morality, politics and promotion of society's thinking and be written with a specific purpose.

Therefore, those who believe in the first theory disagree with committed theory. For example, Jean Paul Sarter rejects committed literature. He believes that dancing is the prose of walking and poetry. Poem is accompanied with beauty. We are dealing with words in prose which have only one meaning, but in poem we are seeking a sense of beauty and inspiring the audience. He claims that we cannot expect committed category from the poem.

But the second group believe that commitment can be intrinsic in a poem and even those who believe that art is for art are committed that art is just for beauty. Therefore, the type of commitment and

poet's point of view should be recognized, for example, the poets who composed poems during the holy defend believed strongly in it, due to the fact that defense of nation and the land had been internalized in them. This idea was perfectly reflected in their poems. Therefore, it is said that resistance literature does not belong to a certain period, but it is related to other eras. For example, Ferdowsi's Shahname is the prominent example of resistance literature in 4<sup>th</sup> century, because Ferdowsi considers himself as a responsible and committed poet for the future of the Persian language and Iran. He made an attempt to compile Shahname to preserve values and keep alive the Persian language. As he himself explains, in addition to leaving an eternal memento and preservation of the Persian language and culture, his aim was to answer to the following questions that what is the reason and source of all oppression and injustice at the present? And have previous rulers done wrong in the same way? And he states the reason of preparing his book in this way:

*One of them was rural, and a courageous, great and wise champion*

*Researcher of early times asked about the past events*

*An old priest from every country remembered this letter*

*They asked kings and well-known and lucky ones*

*How was the world at the beginning, since disgrace was left  
(Shahname, Moskau: 38)*

### **Shahname, the First Work of Resistance**

Resistance literature is a kind of committed and political literature, the oldest examples remained from Dari poem are placed in the realm of resistance literature. The poem of Balkh's people in blaming Asad ibn Abdollah, the governor of Khorasan is one of these examples. He went to fight Amir Khatlan Tork Yadan Saman in 198 AH, then he failed and returned to Balkh:

*He came from Khatlan*

*He came to devastation*

*He returned homeless (Khanlari, 1998: 58)*

Another example is a poem from Yazid ibn Mufaraq in blaming Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad:

*There is water and wine*

*The throne is splendid*

*Somayyeh is innocent (ibn Qatibe, 1964: 58)*

As it is observed the mentioned poems have more local format than formal and classic. Therefore, it is a question that when and by whom did resistance literature begin?

“With a rich and certain mythology and thoughts of Iranian people, naturally, the epic composing should be begun much earlier than the fourth century. It seems that epic and heroic story have been started from beginning of cultural activities of Parthian reign and continued to the end of Samanids rule.

This feeling are stronger in Ferdowsi’s era and since Ferdowsi’s time coincides with the Abbasid Caliphate, Iranian people appeal to the epics remained from the past and those attributed to their lands for showing their excellency and nobility.

There are different narrations about the origin of collecting these myths. But what is certain is that a young poet named Dqiqi had started this work before Ferdowsi. He transferred thousands verses of Shahname from prose into poem, but he was killed by his servant and his work remained unfinished and maybe since then the set of these stories was called Shahname.

After knowing the death of Daqiqi, Ferdowsi was aware of the idea of Sultan Mahmud Qaznavi for arranging Shahname and transferring it to poem completely. He himself also decided to begin this work, but he have no access to all books and documents collected. However, Ferdowsi began to compose Shahname and decided to represent the personality and pride of his own nation in the form of Shahname to be eternal forever. His words suggest that his aim from composing Shahname is for perpetuity of name and stability of culture and history of ancient Iran.

*When a letter was written by this well-known man*

*Many words are scattered in the country*

*Since then I am alive*

*That I have scattered the origin of words (Amini: 52)*

On the other hand it must be recognized that when there is injustice and chaos in a society, resistance literature will appear and this category occurred in Ferdowsi's time. Because there was relatively a welfare community in Samanids era which was before Ghaznavids and there was no protest and discontent. But after the weakness and failure of Samanids and reign of Ghaznavids, the poem became more important in Ghazne, the capital of Ghaznavids and the poets went to their court for collecting gifts. The only poet who did not follow the norms of his time and created another kind of poem was Ferdowsi.

“Even if we do not consider Ferdowsi's thoughts based on the Shu'ubiyya movement, it was in the way that Ferdowsi attempted to establish a great work during the time of Arab conquest and extensive state advertisements on this issue. Pure Persian language was the most important material of national and epic stories and language and it was similar to a kind of cultural resistance.” (ibid: 52)

Of course it is useful to note that Iran's national epic has a mythological foundation and most of the scientists agree on this subject. Myths of every nation is related to creation, gods, human and nature, and relation between human and the universe, and the ancient holder of instances of that nation. Therefore, myths mentioned in Shahname narrate the social structures, rituals and ethical and behavioral examples of ancient Persians.

Although, it is clear that Shahname has a mythological foundation, Iran's national epic is considered in its final preparation as surface part written about the history and kings which is now in access. Its outline is prepared in the way that myths have been narrated deliberately when recounting the history of the ancient Iran and represented as a part of history.” (Sarkarati, 1999: 72) “Generally Shahname is divided into three groups: mythological, epic and historical and Zahhak story is related to the mythological part of the Shahname. In fact, almost the three thousand years belong to Iranians' epic history from Pishdadian to Keykhosrow period including three parts: from the earliest days to Zahhak, Feridun era to keikhosrow's time when went to heaven.

In the first millennium, kings are glorious, in the second millennium Zahhak is stateless and follower of Satan and in the third millennium, Afrasiab is killed and Keikhosrow reign over the people and the monarchy and religion are established based on the righteous. According to Shahname, since Pishdadian reign for 1441 years, Zahhak 1000 years and Kianians to Keykhosrow 310 years, historically from Kiumars to Keykhosrow's going to heaven lasts about 2750 years." (Bahar, 2007: 5)

Now, since it is obvious that Zahhak story belongs to the mythological part of Shahname, the category of myth and its meaning is briefly discussed.

### Myth

"Myth is deliberate narration of the life of those tribes faced with mysterious world in their social life and wanted to discover the world's reality. Their ideology toward the world and its riddles was not conceptual and argumental and it originated from their imagination. They considered life as a living creature. The sun, moon, stars, water, fire and ... were not physical materials but manifestations appeared from the invisible horizon and remained and then disappeared in order to appear again.

It is said that myth is the story of a heaven which is aware of the beginning of everything and behavior, and it is not a historical narration, but it is formed in the depth of the human nature. Then, this "eternal role" comes out and appears in rituals by the help of symbolic words and stories and is put into practice, in other words, these stories and manifestations come out from the beginning and depth of the universe and unconscious one to conscious level and according to Jung, they appear as "old patterns" from "collective unconscious" and they appear and reappear in literature, religion, history, culture and arts.

John Toulard believed that myth is the collection of vanities showing exclusively that the beginning rational unity has a tendency toward corruption."(Sarkarati, 1996: 116)

"Eliade, one of the contemporary researchers believes that myth narrates only what actually happened and appeared to all. Mythological creatures are heavenly ones and are certainly well-

known because of works performed by them at the beginning of creation and destruction. Myth reveals the creator's attempt of those characters." (Eliade, 1983: 31)

Regarding these conflicting judgments, myth sometimes becomes an absurd and meaningless belief and thought and sometimes a subjective and humanistic category, but it should be understood that myth relates neither to the beliefs of followers of myth who believe that myth is a sacred story nor to those who disagree with myth who believe that myth is a superstition and false speech. There are streams of reality in every myth which can be appeared in poetry and fiction by the help of history, anthropology and linguistics. It can be considered as the subject of artistic sociology and psychology research. Therefore, if scientific standards are considered as judgment criteria, myth will be a superstition and if believable standards are used, they will give news of reality and truth. If someone is interested in the second theory, it is understood that myths and legends are beautiful and pleasant and develop literary talent and creativity in artistic level. Myths about Zahhak, heroes like Rostam, Feridun, Kave, the blacksmith, Hektor and the adventurous travels of Odysseus provoke not only human's talent but also his interest in justice and its administrating. It is soothing that Ferdowsi has paid more attention to it and provokes human's will for justice and its administrating. (Sarkarati, 1996: 115)

### **Zahhak Story**

As it is known, another name of Ferdowsi's Shahname is "Kheradname". Ferdowsi believes that a foreigner domination is due to the irrationality and tyranny of individuals inside a territory. He never believes in foreigners' domination. Shahname is a conscious rebellion against political and colonial domination of Turkish groups. Even the way which Ferdowsi uses to narrate a story indicates this idea completely. The popular uprising of Kave against Zahhak shows his xenophobia character and spirit. Although this story relates to the mythological part of Shahname, if considered deliberately and politically, it is clear that this popular uprising figures out the spirit of unity, solidarity, courage way of resistance against injustice. Therefore, the characters such as will for justice and epic morale are clearly observed in this story.

The first mythological kingdom of Shahname begins in Pishdadian era and by reign of Kiomars. Then, Hushang and Tahmores come to throne and Jamshid rules for seven hundred years. Jamshid's era can be regarded as Ferdowsi's utopia which ends by wrongdoing Zahhak. Zahhak is the symbol of tyrant kings who eventually disintegrated by the unity of people.

Regarding Zahhak's rule, Ferdowsi describes beautifully:

*When Zahhak comes to the throne, thousand ones follow him*

*The whole time was under his reign, he reigned for a long time*

*Sages' deeds were hidden, and maniacs more scattered*

*Art was inferior and magician valuable, the secret was the truth and the truth was hidden*

*The devilish hands were stretched for devil, speaking about goodness was only in secret (Kazazi, 2006: 41)*

As mentioned above, Ferdowsi believes that Zahhak is a tyrant one because he is far from sages and their consulting. This category is considered an important one in Plato's Jomhur. Consulting with sages is one feature of righteous ruler for creating utopia. Then, Ferdowsi informs about appearance of Feridun who is from a sacred race, one who destroys Zahhak.

"Therefore, by such perspective, the reader faces with a systematic and regular political idea that not only criticizes the present political system, but suggests a certain governmental political approach and system and explains its principles, a government which originates from divine and heavenly confirmation. This divine feature belongs to whom is from a sacred race and have supreme virtues such as piety, courage and superior to all of them wisdom and justice." (Barcheloei: 6)

*Feridun is asking his mother about his race*

*When sixteen days passed*

*He came down to the plain from Mount Alborz*

*And said to his mother, tell the truth and explain "who is my father?"*

*Who am I? From which race?*

*Faranak told him: O! You, an ambitious one!*

*You are from a bad man named Abtin from Kian race*

*Who was aware and harmless from Tahmures race (ibid: 43)*

Resistance morale against oppression is one of the prominent features of Shahname, as kaveh, the blacksmith resisted bravely against Zahhak.

... He shouted loudly and hit his hand over his head and said:

*O! The king, I am righteous Kave*

*I am the silent man, the blacksmith, fire comes over me by the king (ibid: 46)*

*Elsewhere he speaks about arranging army and feridun's warlike:*

*All the army were gathered in his court, all heroes and cows and*

*Some luggage was taken by them and they set off fast like wind, with a head full of hatred and a heart full of justice (ibid: 47)*

In this mythological story, all the people, the young and old gathered around the leather of kave, the blacksmith and they could to destroy infernal Zahhak by divine will.

*Since then everyone has glorious hat on his head*

*From silk and velvet, in this way the stars were shining*

*The sun was seen in the darkness of night*

*The world was filled with hope (ibid: 48)*

Nedoushan claims: "the torn leather of Kave is the sign of power and glory of the oppressed and poor people who overthrew the tyranny ruling by their efforts and selected Feridun as the representative of light, truth and justice. This story is beautiful because such a splendid epic is not observed in myths of other nations. Although, God's will is designed to destroy Zahhak, Kave's presence gives a humanistic and humble aspect to it. An old hunchbacked man uprises by the help of usual people which reminds the French revolution. It is really strange and glorious that there is a hero like Kave in our fictions, in the way that his modernity,

freshness, humility and realistic image of him make him like the men in revolutionaries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.” Regarding the courage and resistance of Ferdowsi, he has another idea suggesting that Ferdowsi is a Shia’ poet and fonder of Imam Ali. I can not imagin that anyone else has been able to resist courageously against Mahmoud Qaznavi and Caliphate of Abbasid. The words which satirize the entity of Abbasid who considered Imam Ali’s followers as their opponent and enemy and abject Mahmud’s conquests.” According to these words, selection of Shia’ religion by this poet is another category which relates him and Shahname to resistance literature, because Ferdowsi has expressed clearly his devotion to Imam Ali’s family in days of Mahmud’s oppression against religion:

*I have born and I will die while I am his follower*

*You consider in the way that I am Imam Ali’s devotee*

Therefore, Ferdowsi himself is known as epic hero in history, because he obviously resisted against the oppression of Mahmoud Qaznavi and defended Imam Ali’s name and was known as an epic character in resistance literature. (Nedusha: 144, 145)

### **Conclusion:**

“Shahname gives the living lesson, it is more readable than being learnable! Shahname is wholly an illustrated one and struggle between the forces of good and evil and it is art of Ferdowsi who shows two aspects of good and bad characters in the best way by the help of myths and epic heroes. Although, Shahname refers to the legendary history, it is obvious that legends are rooted in reality. Although Shahname is a legendary one, it shows the whole image of society and Ferdowsi’s time. It encourages a kind of resistance literature against evil and ugliness. For example, Feridun and Kave’s fight with Zahhak is far from mythological mode and has taken a social color and it is in fact an example of resistance literature.

Therefore, in Ferdowsi’s idea, the ideal government occurs when there is no oppression against people and people resist against tyrants. He also says about justice and its outcomes as follows:

*Spring clouds were raining, no sorrow remained in the earth*

*The world was green and full of rivers, the sad ones became in peace*

*The earth became a beautiful heaven from justice and donation*

*The world filled with goodness and righteousness and devil hands were cut off*

It may be said that Ferdowsi has described the ideal world which is followed by Sa'di in Boustan later, a world which is outcome of justice, prosperity, security and well-being.

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