

**A Comparative Study of
Torah's Samson and Delilah and
Shahnameh's Siavash and Soudabeh**

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Abstract

Comparative literature helps the world's works of different nations become better recognized. Comparative literature is helpful in the national arena. It leads to familiarity with foreign literature, comparing it with one's own literature and decreasing inadvertent prejudice on national language and literature. In addition to these, from among the other benefits of comparative literature, it is identifying the genuine issues from the non-genuine ones. Comparative literature is also capable of bringing two countries closer to each other due to their similarities. Thereby, nations come to know each other better and the mutual respect between them also increases. In this research, a comparative study has been applied to the stories of "Siavash and Soudabeh" from *Shahnameh* and "Samson and Delilah" from Torah. The definition and characteristics of epic and myth and their similarities and differences have also been stated.

Keywords: Epic, Biblical, Mythological, Soudabeh, Delilah, Siavash, Samson.

Introduction

"Myths are imaginary narratives about the nature, history and fate of the universe, the gods, humans and society" (Kavandish 17). Several great writers and critics have defined myth in their own way; one of which has been Northrope Frye. According to Frye "The myth is the easiest

and the most common meaning, a story or a narrative in which usually a god or deity and divine beings are concerned. In this sense, myth is related to the primitive cultures or advanced courses of the ancient culture and when we call some of the effects of our age myths are have stabilized forms or vestiges of the past” (Frye 101). The influence of supernatural forces and human forces are explained in this type of story. The border between myth and history in mythology is so subjected to the transformation that at times a historical human from one time turns into a mythic creature of an abstract time. Of course, not every story can be regarded as myth; only those stories can be called the myth that can show us the creation or creation of things and the world. "There is a strong connection between myth and epic, and many epic characters have mythological model" (Mozaffari 25).

Myth satisfies deep religious and moral needs; it can even in some cases satisfy daily needs of humans. According to what has been mentioned it can be stated that the scope of myth is so extensive that no matter how we study it, it can still be studied from different angles. In this research, two works are studied in the comparative literature viewpoint and their similarities and differences are also stated.

Epic

Epic is a type of narrative and descriptive text that describes the heroic deeds and achievements of great ethnic and individual deals. Epics are generally written in verse; in other words, an epics is the literary narration of the extraordinary action of the super-heroes seeking the great ideal in grandios style. "It has symbolic, ambiguous and totally mysterious structure and mythical beliefs are embedded in it. This glorious event often occurs with the help of supernatural powers of the hero or heroine and is generally in the form of seeking immortality in the presence of heavenly determinism” (Ghobadi 70).

Epic literally means courage and bravery and "as a term it is a long poem and a narrative that is centered on new topics and martial arts, written in a grand and lofty style " (Daad 119). The central them of an epic can be regarded as what has actually occurred in the past and it indeed belongs to the past for it is in a way "a reflection of what has been done to people or

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nations in your life's past. It is a description of what people in the early days of their lives had of the world, their place there and their attitudes toward it. " (Ebadian 28). The fundamental elements contained within an epic are introduced as follows:

- 1 - The great and glorious causes and incidents
- 2 – Extraordinary and mythical actions and deeds
- 3 - Heroism and struggling with the enemy
- 4 - Beauty and art in speech
- 5 - Mysteries and symbols in the images or structures " (Ghobadi 71).

Epic is an original work that "expresses the general character and ethnic or national culture is accepted and the people of the community or nation rate of their past life in the national epic stories and deeds of people feel it" (Ebadian 15). An epic link is established between myth and epic and many epic characters have mythological patterns. Eliade's definition of myth in "The Myth (Mythology) is centered on a sacred and spiritual story "behind the incident that occurred at the time of opening. In other words, the myth says that in the light of outstanding acts of supernatural beings, the reality of the universe, certain plants, heroic deeds and come into existence, thus, it always includes a narrative of creation "(Eliade 15).

Shah nameh

Ferdowsi's name in Persian literature has always been involved with *Shahnameh*, for to this very moment it has been regarded as his chief masterpiece. Also, the only work that "has been proven to be owned by Ferdowsi is "*Shahnameh's* text (excluding the part that is attributed to him, to be exact)" (Mozaffari 94). *Shahnameh* acts as a type of mirror viewing all of Ferdowsi's spiritual and emotional thoughts and beliefs. "In other words, the genius of his race in this exquisite work is reflected in the accuracy " (Karimiyan 27). Mortazavi observes the story of *Shahnameh* as a "joint and coherent issue of Iranian people, including the mythological, heroic and historic stories of people's lives". (Mortazavi 141). On the other hand, Safa wrote in his book: "The subject of *Shahnameh* is the ancient history of Iranian race from the beginning of its reign to its extinction by the Arabs. It's a testament to the long history of Iran divided into fifty periods of kingdom which are different from each other in terms of time and content" (Safa

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216). According to Safa, three different periods in *Shahnameh* can be distinguished: (1) The Mythological period, (2) The Heroic Period and (3) The Historical period.

As Yaghmaei states the essence of the stories of *Shahnameh* has not been made by Ferdowsi and "the stories have long been popular among Iranians and Ferdowsi has made use of oral and written traditions and literature in writing *Shahnameh*. The main reference book of *Shahnameh* has been a book collected and compiled on the orders of Shah Mansoor bin Abdul Razzaq (murdered in the year 350 AH) " (Yaghmaei 7).

Torah

Torah is the most important Jewish text by Jehovah (God) revealed to Moses. "The word Tora means training or guidance." (Sadr Haj Seyed Javadi et al 139). "The Bible consists of the Old Testament and the New Testament. "Old Testament" contains the scrolls of the Torah and the prophets. Torah is the first five books of the Bible.

The five books are as follows:

- 1-Genesis or "Genesis" (humanity)
2. Exodus (Shmut)
3. Leviticus (Vayikra)
4. Numbers (Bamidbar)
5. Deuteronomy (Devarim) (140).

Synopsis of "Siavash and Soudabeh"'s Story in *Shahnameh*

Siavash was born of the marriage of a woman from the offspring of Garsivaz with, Kaykavus. Kaykavus gave Siavash to Rustam, and Rustam, in Zabulistan, taught Siavash Corps ruling and statecraft. When Siavash returned to his father's palace from Zabolistan, his father treated him favorably and out of merriment for his son's return, he held celebration. Soudabeh, the daughter of King Hamavaran and Keykavus's wife, was fascinated by Siavash. In secret, she sent a messenger to Siavash and asked him to come to bedchamber and Siavash refused. The next day, Soudabeh went to the king and asked him to send Siavash to their chamber so that he chooses a wife from among the girls.

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Siavash went to the yard and for the third time, Soudabeh summoned Siavash to her presence. Siavash got angry and bitterly stood up. Soudabeh informed Kaykavous of this and charged Siavash. Kaykavous thought of taking Siavash's life on the penalty of sin, but in a test king Kavous first smelled Soudabeh's attire and found the smell of wine there and on Siavash's hand and body, felt rosewater and knew that his son was innocent and Soudabeh had spoken in untruth. He intended to kill Soudabeh, but thought of King Hamavaran's arising to take a revenge on him. Therefore, following Zoroastrian priests' words, he proposed to set fire to separate the guilty from the innocent. Siavash accepted this test. He entered the fire that Kavous had prepared, with his night-colored horse Behzad and came out of it unhurt. When the king aimed at killing Soudabeh, Siavash prevented it.

Synopsis of the Story of "Samson and Delilah" in Torah

One day the angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah's wife from the tribe of Dan who lived in the town of Zorah. The woman was barren and had no children. But the angel said to her: "Although you were ever barren, but soon you will become pregnant and give birth to a boy" (Old Testament, Judges 13: 252). This boy who, upon a vow to God, was born. They named him Samson. He who was dedicated to the Lord by birth was decreed upon not to ever cut his hair. Samson grew up and fell in love with a girl from Palestine. When he asked his parents to go and propose to her, they objected to it because the girl was Palestinian. Samson eventually sent his parents to propose to her. Upon some incidents, without making Samson aware, they made their daughter marry another man. Out of his wrath, he set all of Palestinians' harvests on fire.

One day Samson went to the Palestinian city of Gaza and spent the night with a harlot. Gaza's men who became aware of his visit, came with the intention of taking him but did not succeed. After a while, Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah from the Valley of Sorek. Five Palestinian leaders came to Delilah and told her "We want to know what makes Samson so strong. Try to trick him into telling you his secret. Discover what's behind his great strength and how we can tie him up and humble him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred silver pieces" (Testament, Judges 13: 254).

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So, Delilah asked Samson to tell her the secret. Samson told Delilah three times in different ways, but each time his power was able to beat the leaders. After this Delilah went to Samson and said, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when you do not trust me? If you love me, tell me the secret". Finally, Delilah wore Samson down, and he told her the truth about his strength and said: "My hair has never been shaved because I have made a vow to God and if I shaved my hair, my power would be destroyed." In a plot, they shaved Samson's hair when he was asleep and when he woke up, he found all his strength gone. They blinded him and bound him up, threw him into prison. Before long, his hair started to grow up. Palestinians were preparing a celebration in which they planned to sacrifice him for their idol Dagon. They brought Samson to the temple and tied him to the pillars of the temple. Samson asked God to give him strength again to destroy the wicked. He put his hand on the column and when the crowd gathered at the temple he started shaking them and destroyed the temple and brought it down on their heads and his own. His relatives buried his body beside the grave of his father Manoi. "Samson had been the acknowledged judge of the people of Israel for twenty years" (ibid: 256).

Siavash

Shahnameh's ever sad face was born under bad star. Rostam who feared the Kavos's court and perhaps his temperament 's having negative impact upon his temper, took Siavash to Zabulistan. where he was made a full-fledged hero, and sent him again to the court. Obviously, he had the positive aspects of his personality from Rostam and his environment; from among these were the courage, prudence, dignity, patience, and good decorum of its covenant. Rostam unconsciously loved Siavash as his killed son. All are fascinated by his beauty; he is Joseph of *Shahnameh* and his mentality and some aspects of his life including the forbidden and capricious love of the married woman for him and his innocence in this matter are all similar to what befell Joseph except for the consequence that unlike the latter he fell from dignity to humiliation. His father tested him for seven years and he "did not do anything except purity" (Hamidian 285).

Soudabeh

She is the most vicious and the most wicked of all women in *Shahnameh* in all periods. At

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first, she was faithful to Kavous and even when her father plotted conspiracy to captivate Kavous, she informed her husband of the plot. When Kavous was put in king Hamavaran's prison due to his irrationality and not listening to others, Soudabeh became his sweetheart and companion and would keep on moaning and weeping for the miserable husband. This very Soudabeh, though in a striking contrast with her past features, fell in love with her husband's son and developed a forbidden love in her heart. When she found her efforts fruitless, she plotted one conspiracy after another and even aimed at the youth's death. Kavous said to her that "you still play tricks" and her playing tricks did not end until her death" (Hamidian 215).

Samson

Samson is a mythical hero who made a vow to God and the Torah. He, like many mythic heroes, was inherently pure, and protected his people. Samson was betrayed by his mistress. He was drawn to death and he died innocently.

Delilah

Delilah was one of the women in the Torah with whom Samson, who was the son of Manoah who have made a vow to God, was in love. She, like Samson's previous fiancé who stated the Samson's answer to the riddle he raised on the dinner which was organized to draw the youth of that time to her tribe's youths, betrayed and insistently asked about the secret of Samson's strength. At the promise of five Palestinian leaders she revealed the secret to them and through Delilah's cooperation they captivated Samson and this led to Samson's destruction.

Comparing "Samson and Delilah" Story with "Siavash and Soudabeh" Story

Siavash and Samson's Similarities

According to what was mentioned, it is a feature of the epic hero to be a supernatural creature with divine and superhuman essence. In the story of Siavash and Soudabeh, Siavash as its hero, is the most innocent face of *Shahnameh*. He intends to build a utopia called "Siavashgard" which is far away from every kind of evil and foul. One of the extraordinary features of Siavash appears when he must pass through the fire to prove his innocence. His

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innocence is proved by his passing through the fire and he is not hurt in the least. Siavash's purity is as such that he can even foretell the future malice as well. In fact, he has a prophetic knowledge and his kind heart is the mirror of the future.

I can give awareness of God's grandeur/I am also aware of the great high
heavens' secret
From the malevolent speech and unfortunate fate/I this innocent upon me arrives
bad and foul (Ferdowsi 166)

When Siavash is beheaded by the hand of a hostage, "The Storm of dark dust rises as the consistent story of Prophet Jesus crucifixion when he rose up. Where his blood is shed a plant grows out of Siavash's innocence and is the one who does not let this blood be wasted and praises this innocent one. Siavash is forever memorable and will be alive in the hearts of others and this is the meaning of that plant" (Hamidian 284).

Samson as Siavash is the kind of person who is oppressed throughout his life and his right is also violated. As an extraordinary creature who has made a vow to God and because of his long hair which has not been shaved since birth he has powerful divine force. His force, however, is lost if he loses his hair (like Achilles's heels and Esfandiar's eyes). When at the young age he overcame a lion easily, it was the time when God's spirit was placed in him. It is also when he goes to the city of Ashkelon and kills thirty of the natives. When with the chin bone of a dead donkey that had fallen to the ground he goes and kills thousands of Palestinians. It is also when he blows away the gates of Gaza City by the framework, puts it on his shoulders and carries it to the top of the hill in front of Hebron that he demonstrates his power and strength. In struggling with five Palestinian leaders who are intent on destroying his powers he once again reveals the extraordinary power of his own. At the time of his death that he loses his power due to his hair's being shortened, he once again asks God to give him strength. Then he puts his hands which were tied with a rope on the pillars of the temple and shake it. He buries all the people who have come to the temple see him and himself under the rubble of the temple and thus demonstrates his last display of power.

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Looking at the two stories and exploring the lives of two main characters (Siavash and Samson) we see that these two characters, in addition to their eminent families, own high social status. Also, these two characters because of their having a spirit of philanthropy and a compassionate heart and the duty that they feel they have, they love their people, protect them and seek good for them. Siavash and Samson live innocently and are killed as strangers and both get involved with women who push them into the abyss of destruction.

Differences between Siavash and Samson

In addition to these similarities that were mentioned, there are also some differences between these two characters. One of them is that, unlike Samson who is someone simmering unrest, Siavash has a calm personality and acts peacefully. He submits to his father; he takes his father's words for granted and does not act against him. Because of his calm character, Siavash is quiet and introverted and at times his behavior clearly shows that there is not much certainty in his character. Samson, unlike Siavash, is the one who decides quickly because of his roaring and relentless character, and puts his decisions into action rapidly. We see that he acts against his parents' will who were opposed to his getting married with a Palestinian girl and eventually makes them propose to the girl for him. Samson aims at taking revenge and throughout the story, according to what happens to him, we see that he takes his revenge on Palestinians. For instance, when he becomes aware of the first girl's marriage to another man, he sets Palestinians' farms on fire. At the end of the story we see how he destroys both hundreds of Palestinians and himself due to their betrayal, whereas Siavash regarding his calm character chose not to think of taking revenge and preferred peace instead. For example when at war with Afrasiab, because of the dream he had he asks Siavash for peace. We see that Siavash gladly accepts and prefers peace over war and bloodshed.

Similarities between Soudabeh and Dalileh

In the epics and myths women have always had basic roles, just as we see it in these two stories. On the one hand, we see Soudabeh, King Hamavaran's one and only daughter who in order to get married with Kavous, acts against her father's belief. She thinks of Kavous as the

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king of the world even though he has never been her favorite kind of man. From this choice one can assume that she has been in love with kingdom not the king, for she all the time seeks to boost the values of the time in herself. She is so dear at her father's court that all, even though aware of her mistake in choice, agree with her demands.

She is the Queen of Love and is obsessed with life and flesh. After the release of Kavos, we do not hear from her. When the king of Iran chooses another wife to give him a son (Siavash) and asks Rustam to train him until he is grown to be a young man and returns to his father, Soudabeh appears again. She is another Soudabeh though who loses her heart and faith and asks Siavash to her chamber room, but he refuses her request. The disappointed Soudabeh whose life and world has been set on fire by Siavash, starts a battle for destroying Siavash thereafter. She tears her dress and scratches her face to accuse Siavash. She even forces a sorcerer to abort the twins she is bearing in her womb to make the king believe that Soudabeh was pregnant and Siavash was to blame for the abortion of her children. When all of Soudabeh's tricks prove to be ineffective, and every time Siavash's innocence is revealed, she is given to the test of fire.

In *Shahname*, we encounter two Soudabehs: one is the daughter of King Hamavaran and is known to be smart, opinionated, selfless and brave and leaves father, homeland and freedom and willingly accepts death and bondage for her husband's sake to be his companion in his pain. The other is the reckless Soudabeh who is audacious and ambitious. This aspect of Soudabeh's character has been paid more attention in *Shahnameh* and also public opinion. These are two Soudabehs that complement one another.

On the other hand, we see the beautiful, clever and deceitful Delilah who falls in love with Samson, draws him towards herself; Samson accepts her love and falls in love with her. In this story, like the story of "Siavash and Soudabeh", Dalileh also takes a negative character and her ambition and selfishness cause Samson to be drawn to his death. She accepts Palestinian leaders' monetary promises and deceitfully asks Samson about the secret of his loss of power.

What Causes Betrayal?

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What makes women like Delilah and Soudabeh with all the love that they appear to have for their beloveds to betray them? Maybe this is because their love is not a real love to have devotion and dedication with itself. Soudabeh's love for Siavash is a physical love that has a physical thought behind it. She just desires Siavash's body not he himself, for if she had desired Siavash himself and not his body, she would never have played tricks on her way to her love to hurt him.

On the other hand, we see Delilah who seeks a material love for Samson and Samson who has trusted her, reveals his secret to her quite unaware that his mistress because of material promises that she has been given intends to destroy him into the abyss. This is the sign of the love that is material and is devoid of the sense of spirituality. It is a kind of love that think so the beloved as nothing but something that can be sold.

Differences between Soudabeh and Delilah

But if we look at some of the differences between these two figures these points can be noted. The first is that Soudabeh who is King Hamavaran's one and only daughter, someone who loves power and the reason for her marrying King Kavous does so out of her love for kingdom not for the king. She is the one who has always attained what she desired and on her way to her demands she never succumbs. Soudabeh is the woman who is never satisfied with little and moves forward with time. On the other hand, Dalilah, in addition to her being a harlot from the low and neglected class of society, little amount of money can easily deceive her into betraying Samson.

In the story of "Siavash and Soudabeh", we encounter a Soudabeh who is a princess and King Kavous's wife. She is the one who falls in love with Siavash and is not afraid of expressing her love. She even accepts the scandal and reveals her intentions to her beloved. On the other hand, in the story of "Samson and Delilah", it is Samson who due to his divine power and the judgement authority that he owns, steps towards the harlot Dalilah. He does not mind that his love for a Palestian girl be revealed.

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Epic and Religious Stories

Apart from the similarities and differences between the characters, it should be noted that epic *Shahnameh* is epic and Torah is religious. Considering this and through reviewing the story of "Siavash and Soudabeh", we find that not only this story is not deprived of religious teachings, but also because of Ferdowsi 's Shiite belief in one God, his religious thought can be noticed everywhere in *Shahnameh*. Siavash's passing through the fire unharmed and proving his innocence is reminiscent of the story of Abraham and the fire's turning to garden for him. Also, Soudabeh's love for Siavash corresponds with Zolaykha' love for Joseph which is referred to in Quran.

From what has been mentioned about the story of "Siavash and Soudabeh" from *Shahnameh* and "Samson and Delilah" from Torah, it can be inferred that they are similar in terms of their being the mythological epic and that their heroes have epic and mythological features. Another identical feature is the role of the woman as the main factor in the heroes' destruction. Also, love in both is material rather than spiritual.

Conclusion

With a look at mythology, epic and studying their features one can conclude that myths have identical characteristics regardless of where they belong. The myth in its entity involves the essence of phenomena and even the creation of the world and what became of them after creation. Myths are placed in the heart of culture, history and literature of all ages. In fact, myth and epic provide a place for a demanding perfectionist to fulfill his ideals and aspirations in the field of endeavor. That is why myth characters in some respects are at the peak of perfection. As one can see Siavash is unique in *Shahnameh* in beauty, purity and innocence. With Samson's power, strength and bravery in Torah and Soudabeh's beauty and wickedness in *Shahnameh*, also Delilah's beauty and greed in the Bible, all signs of perfection in characteristics which are either physical or moral.

Women in the myth of "Siavash and Soudabeh" from *Shahnameh* and "Samson and

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Delilah" from Torah are not independent from men as most women are in other myths. They are marginalized and it is in their relation with men that they are to be noticed.

Similarities referred to in the two stories can be regarded as a sign of similarity between the cultures, customs, and beliefs of the two nations. This fact cannot be overlooked that in both nations whose religion is monotheistic, there are similarities in their basic principles of living style, morality, etc.

The last point to be mentioned is that myths are the mirrors of all nations and appear through elements like symbols; these symbols are symbols of reality.

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