MYTHOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE IMAGE OF RUSTAM AND THE ARTISTIC TRANSFORMATION OF HEROIC ETHICS

Turaboyeva Hakima Usmonjon qizi,
2nd-year PhD student, Namangan State University, Uzbekistan
turaboyevahakimaxon@gmail.com

Annotation: *The article explores the multifaceted image of Rustam in Abulqosim Firdavsi's epic poem, the "Shahnama," focusing on the transition from ancient mythological foundations to a sophisticated system of heroic ethics. From a philological perspective, Rustam is analyzed not merely as a literary character but as an artistic transformation of archetypal conceptions of heroism. The study highlights how supernatural elements—such as the patronage of the Simurgh, the symbolic significance of the horse Rakhsh, and the invulnerability of the Babr-i Bayan—serve as a framework for the hero's moral development. Central to this analysis is the "Haft Khan" (Seven Labors) cycle, interpreted as a spiritual pilgrimage of purification and the subordination of physical power to social responsibility and divine justice.*

Keywords: *Shahnama, Abulqosim Firdavsi, Rustam-i Dastan, Mythopoetics, Ethical Transformation, Archetype, Haft Khan, Heroic Ethics, Philological Methodology, Javonmardi.*

The monumental epic "Shahnama," authored by Abulqosim Firdavsi, transcends its status as a cornerstone of Persian-Tajik letters, functioning instead as a comprehensive aesthetic compendium of the Eastern world's metaphysical and spiritual heritage. At the heart of this vast narrative resides the figure of Rustam-i Dastan, a monumental character who represents the absolute zenith of epic heroism. Rustam's persona is a sophisticated

amalgamation, where archaic mythological strata are seamlessly integrated with Islamic ethical principles and broader, universal moral benchmarks.

From a philological standpoint, Rustam is far more than a mere historical record or a fictional entity; he is the artistic manifestation of primordial heroic archetypes that were once central to the collective identity of the ancient Iranian and Turanian nations. The academic significance of the present inquiry is rooted in the premise that mythological components—ranging from the divine guardianship of the Simurgh to feats of superhuman power and duels with legendary monsters—are far from being simple literary ornaments. On the contrary, these elements constitute the essential ontological framework that defines and sculpts the hero's moral and ethical persona.

A scholarly examination of the courage and ethical attributes inherent in Rustam's persona demonstrates that Firdavsi systematically subordinates supernatural "super-powers" to the higher mandates of social obligation and spiritual commitment. Within the field of literary criticism, this conceptual shift is recognized as the "transformation from myth to ethics." In our current era of globalization, deciphering the aesthetic and conceptual core of this classical archetype holds immense scientific and pedagogical value. It serves as a vital instrument for instilling fundamental virtues—such as valor, unwavering adherence to one's word, and a profound sense of justice—within the contemporary younger generation. The present inquiry specifically investigates the trajectory through which Rustam's mythological characteristics evolved into exalted human virtues, while simultaneously evaluating the functionality of this "ideal human" paradigm within the philological frameworks of youth education.

The heroic stature of Rustam is fundamentally anchored in ancient Eastern cosmogony. His miraculous birth, orchestrated by the legendary bird Simurgh, denotes that he is far from being a common mortal combatant; rather, he is a "consecrated" defender of the righteous cosmic order. From a

philological standpoint, the Simurgh's intervention represents a metaphysical bridge between the terrestrial and the divine spheres. Consequently, the gift of the Simurgh's feather functions as a sacred talisman—a mythological link that guarantees Rustam's fortitude and invulnerability when confronted by malevolent supernatural entities [1].

Within the framework of heroic ethics, Rustam's steed, Rakhsh, and his iconic attire, the Babr-i Bayan (tiger-skin), transcend their status as mere physical possessions to become profound symbolic extensions of his metaphysical identity.

Rakhsh: This creature embodies the untamed, powerful spirit of the natural world, successfully brought into alignment with the hero's disciplined will. Unlike conventional animals portrayed in epic literature, Rakhsh is endowed with a "mythological consciousness," frequently perceiving metaphysical threats and sensing imminent danger long before the hero himself [2].

Babr-i Bayan: This legendary garment serves as a visual manifestation of invulnerability. From a philological perspective, it signifies the hero's transition from an instinctual, primitive hunter to a culturally sophisticated and responsible guardian of civilization.

The most profound artistic and moral metamorphosis of the protagonist takes place throughout the cycle of the Seven Labors (Haft Khan). Each specific stage functions as a metaphorical examination of a distinct ethical or spiritual virtue:

1. Stages 1–3 (The Primal Conquest): These labors concentrate on the testing of physical fortitude and the definitive triumph over primordial anxieties, represented by the hero's confrontations with the Lion and the Dragon.

2. Stages 4–5 (The Moral Test): These represent the hero's capacity to resist sensory temptation and various forms of illusory deception, most notably exemplified by his encounter with the Witch.

3. Stages 6–7 (The Intellectual Triumph): These final stages depict the definitive victory of human intellect, strategic wisdom, and spiritual obligation over the destructive agents of chaos, personified by the White Demon [3].

The artistic transformation of Rustam is deeply embedded in the terminology used by Firdavsi. The transition from myth to ethics is signaled by the shift from describing Rustam's "zor" (physical might) to his "far" (divine glory/charisma) and "hunar" (virtue/skill). The Concept of "Lafz" (The Sacred Word): In the epic, Rustam's most defining ethical trait is his adherence to his word. Philological analysis of his dialogues with monarchs like Kay Kavus reveals a unique hierarchy: Rustam obeys the king only as long as the king obeys the laws of justice.

The "Pahlavon" as a Moral Institution: Rustam is not just a soldier; he is a social institution. His "transformation" is evident in how he prioritizes the stability of the "Iran" (as a symbol of civilization) over personal glory [6]. The "Babri Bayan" (Tiger-skin) serves as a mythological "shield" that undergoes an ethical transformation. In early myths, such skins represented the primal hunter. However, in Firdavsi's artistic system, this garment becomes a symbol of self-restraint.

"By wearing the skin of the beast, Rustam signifies that he has 'clothed' his animalistic nature with the purpose of heroism. The myth is no longer about the animal; it is about the man who controls the animal within" [7].

The multifaceted examination of Rustam's persona within Abulqosim Firdavsi's *"Shahnama"* yields several fundamental philological and pedagogical insights. This research establishes that the transition from archaic mythological archetypes to a structured framework of heroic morality

represents more than a mere literary development; it signifies a profound cultural shift in the conceptualization of the "ideal human." The present analysis demonstrates that Rustam is a sophisticated hybrid construct. In this paradigm, supernatural elements—such as the divine guardianship of the Simurgh and the metaphysical invulnerability of the Babr-i Bayan—function as an external scaffolding for internal ethical deliberations. Firdavsi masterfully employs these mythical tropes to elevate the protagonist beyond conventional human limitations, only to subject him to the most taxing moral dilemmas. Consequently, while the myth establishes the heroic "scale" of the character, it is his unwavering commitment to justice (adolat) and fidelity to his word (lafz) that ultimately defines his humanity.

Furthermore, the “Seven Labors” (Haft Khan) cycle is identified not merely as a chronological sequence of martial triumphs, but as a symbolic odyssey of spiritual and psychological maturation. Within the framework of philological education, this cycle provides a robust methodology for instilling resilience, intellectual discernment, and the necessary subordination of individual ego to broader social and national obligations. The artistic reconfiguration of these labors proves that authentic “pahlavonlik” (heroism) is only achieved when raw physical power is governed by the principles of divine wisdom and ethical integrity.

The tragic confrontation between Rustam and Sohrab functions as a profound concluding lesson, illustrating the inherent limitations of personal power and the immense weight of social obligation. This episode underscores the critical necessity of historical consciousness and interpersonal awareness, serving as a solemn warning against the corrosive nature of pride (kibr) and the catastrophic consequences of a failure in communication. These themes maintain an enduring relevance in our contemporary, globalized society.

From the perspective of modern youth education, the heroic image of Rustam transcends both national and linguistic boundaries. Within a

philological classroom setting, analyzing the “Shahnama” through the lens of mythological and ethical evolution provides students with a vital “spiritual compass.” This academic approach fosters a worldview in which physical strength is viewed as inseparable from compassion, and where power is deemed meaningful only when it is dedicated to the preservation of peace and the advancement of justice.

In the final analysis, Rustam stands as an eternal archetype of the “Protector,” effectively bridging the ancient wisdom of the East with the rigorous moral imperatives of the modern era. Through this sophisticated artistic transformation, Firdavsi has constructed a timeless paradigm of integrity that continues to serve as a catalyst for the intellectual and ethical development of future generations.

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