



## Homer's the Odyssey and Taskin-e-Shirazi's Falaknaz Nameh: A Comparative Study of the Role of Women

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### **Abstract**

The book Falak Naz Nameh is among the love-epic couplets and one of the lyrical works of the Persian Literature in the thirteenth century AH which shares some similar epical features with European romance and was said by a poet of Arab descent named Yaqub ibn Masud with the pen name of Taskin-e-Shirazi. The present inquiry has a comparative look at the aforementioned book and the epic written by Homer (the blind Greek poet) and compares and contrasts women in both epic books. Through a profound view, the similarities and differences of the two foregoing poets with regard to women were investigated and scrutinized. In both stories, the presence and participation of women are among the main focuses and some or all part of the epics are based on their roles and activities; moreover, the logical and reasonable procedure of the story are taken by them. Therefore, the topic of woman and the part she plays are among significant features in both epopees, for women are the causes of the establishment and continuation of what happens in the two stories.

**Keywords:** *Comparative Study; The Odyssey; Falaknaz Nameh*

### **Introduction**

One of the permanent and pivotal roles in stories is the element of “woman” and the role that she plays in the establishment and continuation of occurrences in stories. The element which is quite various and different and most of the time is among the main themes of stories. The woman image varies in different stories. Sometimes she is a kind and compassionate figure or she is a benevolent mother who displays great sacrifices, while at times she is an orgulous and ominous figure who takes control of affairs with deception. She sometimes brings love and affection and the story is based on love towards her the

and glorious affection between lovers and beloveds. Therefore, this figure is counted as one of the pivotal subjects in the literature of all countries due to its different features. Moreover, the base of many stories is shaped by the presence of “woman” without whom the story is in vain.

In this article, the presence of “woman” is investigated in the two stories of Falak Naz Nameh by Taskin-e-Shirazi and the Odyssey by the Greek Homer, since she is a shared topic in the foregoing stories and she is comparable in some respects. Therefore, it comparing the two books with respect to comparative literature is rather feasible and some invaluable points can be obtained regarding the present similarities and differences.

## ***Background***

With regard to the element of woman, many works have emerged; however, no previous comparative and investigative works have been done on the books Falak Naz Nameh by Taskin-e-Shirazi and the Odyssey by Homer and this article is the first of its kind. Hor Parimi (2001) compared another literary work, that is, Darabnameh Tarsoosi with the Odyssey in his master’s thesis in Tehran university and a small part of his thesis was allocated to the subject of woman in the Odyssey. However, the present article is quite novel and unique.

## ***Comparative Literature***

One of the newest and in the meantime most popular study areas in literature, is pertinent to comparative research. The aforementioned area emerged years ago between 1820s to 1830s in France and was soon prevalent in all countries in the world in all universities (Mohammadi, 2007, p. 43).

Moreover, as Mohammadi asserted, in the first half of the eighteenth century, a change in social status of Europe induced a transformation in thoughts, reaching the understanding that the world is more complicated and has more varieties than can be thought. With prevalence of trips over the world, tourists, merchants and adventurers were attracted by other cultures, customs, traditions and works of other nations, thereby translating them into their own languages. This resulted in a transcendence of thought limits by writers and philosopher and the idea that tastes and beauties are comparative gained popularity.

Believing in the comparativeness of literary tastes and beauties gradually became prevalent among Europeans. In addition, it led to some fundamental changes in the realm of literary schools, thereby both art and literature moved from Classicism to Romanticism. In Romanticism, there were no limits to art and literature. The followers of this school created close links with other nationalities little by little and exchanges and bilateral communications were made. Therefore, literary works of nations came closer to those of other nations.

In contrast to authors of the Classicism school who were only inspired by Greece and Rome artists, Romanticism authors were merely inspired by the Christian literature of middle ages, Renaissance and national tales of their countries. Moreover, they followed the example of contemporary literature of other nations (Seyed Hosseini, 1968 p. 104).

Comparative literature gradually gained popularity and different literarians offered various definitions. For instance, Caden (1984, p. 6) stated “Comparative literature is testing and analyzing the links and similarities in different ethnicities and nations. It is rather novel, the same as comparative studies of religion, and before the 19<sup>th</sup> century few traces of it exist”. Moreover, comparative literature, which is called Al-Adab-ul-Mugharin in Arabic, is one of the new branches of literary sciences which has received the attention of researchers and scholars in the last century. It is an investigation into the effects exerted by and the influences made by the literature of different nations. It includes a survey of the

relationships and occasions of the literature of different nations and the superintendence of thoughts and literature which occur from the borders of one territory and ethnic language to those of others (Ghanimi Helal, 1994, p. 31).

In fact, comparative literature deals with texts. These texts are mostly related to different countries and cultures and function as analysis and synthesis. Synthesis is worth exploring; some of the qualities of a work are detected by other works (Javari, 2004, p. 47).

Thus, it can be realized that comparative literature is one of the fields which tackles literary studies in the world and encompasses very widespread realms in literature (Sharifpoor, 1981, p. 62). It reminds the point that developing and thriving the literature of each nation without its literary and national thoughts is far-fetched (Parimi, 2001, p. 2).

In Iran, the swing of the pendulum has shifted towards comparative literature in recent years and significant studies have been conducted in this regard. In this article the focus is on the topic of woman and its investigation in the two works of Falak Naz Nameh by Taskin-eShirazi and the Odyssey by the Greek Homer. A summary of the topic and story of the forgoing books are provided below. Then, the topic of woman is compared in the two works.

### ***The Iliad and the Odyssey***

Around three thousand years ago two well-known epopees were said which received universal recognition. One of them was the Iliad which is one of the epic poem books of ancient Greece. Its etymology returns to Ilium which is one of the names of Troy in Asia Minor.

This long epopee incorporates 24 poems, each of which is called "Iliados". That is why the whole book is called the same. In some of the European languages the aforementioned word is pronounced as "Iliad". In the Persian language convention, the word Iliad is also used.

The second epopee is called "Odysseus" in Greek language and "Odyssey" in some of the European languages. In Persian the latter word is utilized, too. Though these works have been ascribed to different authors, many scholars believe that one poet named "Omerus" in Greek and "Homerus" in Latin wrote both works. In Persian, he is known as "Homer".

No documented work remains from Homer; only one romantic tale tells that he was a blind vendor. The topic of the Iliad has historical origins and is pertinent to the war which occurred in Troy and the adventures which the champions encountered.

The second epopee, viz., the Odyssey is about the events after the fall of Troy and the return of Greek champions among which the return of Odysseus is the most well-known. These epopees, similar to Iliad, contains 24 poems and provides a description of the return of Ulysses from his trips and the ten-year Trojan war to his country Ithaca.

On the whole, Ulysses has been far from home for 20 years and for a long time he strived to reach the borders of his beloved city Ithaca; however, his efforts were in vain because gods did not want that and at the end they took pity on him and let him return to his city to his faithful wife Penelope and his son Telemachus. Though his rivals were trying to access Penelope and to marry her, she remained loyal to Ulysses.

### ***Falak Naz Nameh***

The book is known with different names such as Falak Naz Nameh, Falak Naz and Khorshidafarin, Sarv and Gol, Falak Naz and Khorshidafarin and Sarv and Gol-e-Tannaz, etc. This work is among the love-epic couplets and one of the lyrical works of Persian literature.

Its epical qualities are similar to European Romance and is a poetic work which belongs to the Zand Dynasty (12<sup>th</sup> century AH; equal to 18<sup>th</sup> century CE). It was written by a poet of Arab descent named Yaqub ibn Masud with the pen name of Taskin-e-Shirazi. Inasmuch as he lived in Shiraz for a very long time, he was called Taskin-e-Shirazi.

In none of the biographies, the aforementioned poet has been mentioned and all the information about him comes from occasional references to him in the work. The poet in the last pages of his work mentions his name and his pen name. He mentions that he has a father of a Hebrew origin and his Qatifi mother who is called Arnuyeh is descended from the Prophet Jacob. He adds that during a voyage, the ship in which he was sailing was on the verge of being drowned, that was why he tried to reach a safe place and he entered Shiraz and decided to live near the Shahcheragh there. In his verse, Taskin wrote:

As I was relieved of grief,  
 My pen name turned to Relief (Taskin)  
 I am of an Arab origin belonging to Qatif  
 Now being both feeble and frail  
 I am descended from the Prophet Jacob  
 And I belong to the Prophet Jacob's family  
 My father is a Hebrew and my mother is a Qatifi  
 If I am frail, that is due to my sadness  
 Masud and Arnuyeh are the names of my parents  
 And I've two brothers called Mojed and Saad  
 My bad luck led to the sinking of the ship  
 And I had to come and stay in Shiraz  
 If any of my friends asked about my whereabouts  
 Please tell them I live near the Shahcheragh

(Taskin 1775, cited in Ketabchi 1985, p. 167).

The date Falak Naz Nameh was written, as stated in the work, returned to 1189 AH which was contemporary with the Zand Dynasty; however, some of the historians claimed that it was written in 1182 AH.

If you want know about the date of the book  
 I will tell you the whole thing very clearly  
 After the migration of Prophet Muhammad and his family  
 1189 (or 1182) years have passed  
 (Taskin 1775 cited in Ale Davood, 2003, p. 6)

The poet, in his work, has expressed that the source which inspired him to write his work was a book called Sarv and Gol (the names of two princess) and the story was well-known among people of the past, especially in Egypt and China, it was very prevailing and well-liked by a majority of people. Different versions of the story existed in verse and prose and some of the versions differed from one another.

The book Sarv and Gol is famous all over the world

Some versions are complete and others incomplete  
 In Egypt and China, it is well-known by many people  
 Though here the verse forms are incomplete  
 It has different versions in verse and in prose  
 However, each writer has expressed it differently  
 (Taskin 1775 cited in Ale Davood, 2003)

Moreover, Taskin has declared that all the champions in the book were real and were all the progenies of prophets Joseph and Jacob. About the foresaid champions, Muhammad Ibn Khavand Shah Balkhi has expressed in the Book Aroos-ul-Mulk:

Muhammad the son of Khavand Shah Balkhi  
 Who has experienced good and bad events in the world?  
 He has authored some of the stories  
 However, his name is not mentioned in these narratives  
 If you do not believe what I have just expressed  
 You can read the whole Aroos-ul-Mulk Book

(Taskin 1775 cited in Ale Davood, 2003, p. 163)

Falak Naz Nameh poem book is a narration and description of the life of an Egyptian prince called Falak Naz who sees a picture of a princess from another country and decides to take a faraway trip both to join with the princess and to visit Mecca. On the way, he encounters a multitude of hazards and he bravely overcomes them till he incidentally reaches Chin and Machin (a far land) wherein after lots of adventures fights with a Roman hero called Khorshid Afarin and after defeating him Falak Naz and Khorshid Afarin marry two princesses who were sisters. After lots of wars, he returns to his homeland in Egypt in which he hears that the enemy has murdered his father. Therefore, he wreaks vengeance on the enemies and ascends the throne as the king of the country and lives happily ever after with his wife Sarv, in the company of his loyal friend Khorshid Afarin and his wife Gol.

### ***“Woman” the Shared Topic of the Two Stories***

Though both stories have many topics in common such as voyages by ships, reaching unknown lands, fighting with monsters, the transcendental strengths of heroes and divine luck received by the champions of two stories, the topic of “woman” and “her role” are of paramount importance in both poem books and the cause of establishment and continuation of events.

According to Parimi (2001, p. 80), “Woman and her relevant characteristics have been the theme of many stories and narrations from the start, without which many stories lacked liveliness and stimuli”. In both stories, the existence and presence of women are the key essence and the whole or part of the story is based on their roles and functions and they establish the logical and sensible trend of the story.

In the Odyssey, “woman plays a very significant and crucial role as the subject revolves around the proposals of Penelope’s suitors and their insistence on marrying Penelope who is Ulysses’ wife and the whole story is pertinent to this issue. After 20 years, suitors are still trying to win the heart of the Ulysses’ wife and shamelessly strive to marry her at any cost. Though they were great in number, they gathered in Ulysses’ magnificent house and used his riches extravagantly while engaging in hobbies, games and dances and spent all day there and then returned home (Nafisi, 1992, p. 48).

The suitors conceived that because Ulysses has not returned from his long trip, he must be dead and their impertinence increased day by day so far so that they insulted Telemachus and when he set off his trip to find his father, they decided to murder him in case he returned. On the other hand, Penelope is a very loyal and patient woman who may never forget her love for her beloved husband. She manifests forbearance to the harassments of her suitors and as she watches how her husband's riches are extravagantly used by them, she only weeps because of her separation from her beloved spouse and torments she receives due to the behaviors of her suitors. She also asks her son to display patience and deliberation (Nafisi, 1992).

It is crystal clear that in the *Odyssey* if this subject and taking revenge was not dominant, no topic would be existent for narration and the only topic would be the return of the champion after some years of isolation from his home which would not attract the attention of the reader nor the listener. Accordingly, one of the principal topics of the *Odyssey* is the topic of "woman" and "her love for her spouse Ulysses".

Likewise, in Falak Naz Nameh, women play a key role and the start and movement of the story initiates with the presence of a woman. Falak Naz who is an Egyptian prince, who is celebrated for his good looks and bravery, falls in love with the daughter of an Eastern king called Aftab (meaning sun) after seeing her picture. He sets off his voyage to reach the beloved and faces a huge storm which led him to a far land near the China Sea and instead of reaching his destination he arrives in Khanbaliq. There he meets an unflinching princess called Sarv and falls in love with her and forget about Aftab.

By helping Sarv and Gol who has now ascended the throne and defeating the enemies, Falak Naz is very much admired by the two sisters. Sarv, having witnesses the braveries of Falak Naz and knowing that he is an Egyptian prince, falls in love with him. After defeating the powerful enemy of Gol, who is a Roman young man, and after his life's being saved, a brotherly bond starts between Falak Naz and Khorshid Afarin which lasts forever.

After a while Falak Naz marries Sarv and Gol is married to Khorshid Afarin. The Eastern Aftab had some time ago fallen in love with Falak Naz by seeing his picture and is waiting for him to come. A year passes and Falak Naz does not appear; thus, she, her maids of honor and her servants move to Egypt. There she notices that Falak Naz has set off a voyage to East and has encountered a storm in the sea and the Potiphar of Egypt does not know what has fallen on him and is companions. She stays in Egypt, looking forward to meeting Falak Naz, and faithfully awaits his return.

One night, Falak Naz sees his father in his dream and remembers why he has left Egypt and that it is a long time that he has been far from his father, his home and his family and does not know anything about them. With the consent of Sarv, Gol and Khorshid Afarin, they move to Egypt. Upon his return, he notices that his father has been murdered by his enemies. Falak Naz takes revenge and ascends to the throne and becomes the king of Egypt.

Khorshid Afarin by seeing the Eastern Aftab and hearing all the pains and sufferings that she has gone through because of being separated from Falak Naz and witnessing her resoluteness in love, asks Sarv to let Falak Naz and Aftab get married. After Sarv's permission, Aftab and Falak Naz are united; however, Sarv remains as the main queen and most influential wife of Falak Naz (Taskin, 1985).

### ***Shared Elements of the Two Works***

By comparing the two works, many commonalities can be observed, especially with regard to the role of women which is very salient and conspicuous. The shared points which are assessable on the whole include:

1. The role of women in both works is a main one and everywhere they are active elements in scenes and are seen in all episodes.
2. Some of the women in both stories have positive roles, while others display negative ones.
3. In each of the two works, the villain is punished for her bad deeds. For instance, in Falaknaz Nameh, the witch and her daughter Reihaneh are killed due to their misdeeds or in the Odyssey, the betraying maid is hanged by Ulysses.
4. The wives of the main heroes of the stories are patient and imperturbable and never forget their husband to the last moment. For example, in the Odyssey, Penelope, despite all the sufferings, patiently awaits her husband Ulysses and in Falak Naz Nameh, though the two women deeply love and support Falak Naz, they are both loyal, patient and adoring, especially, Aftab tolerate all the pains for years, waiting for Falak Naz to return.
5. Women in both stories are beautiful, enchanting and full of feminine emotion. Not only they demonstrate wisdom and cleverness, but they also manifest lots of feminine grace and elegance.

### ***Differences Observed in the Two Works***

Alongside the similarities, some differences can also have been seen:

1. Women in Falak Naz Nameh are very determined and sometimes enter wars. They are ready to exert themselves to reach their goals and even wear armors. To exemplify, Sarv accompanies and supports Falak Naz in wars, wears an armor and enters the battlefield showing fearless defense or the bold nightly departure of Aftab to reach Egypt and meet Falak Naz. On the other hand, in the Odyssey, Penelope does not show audacity or movement and she prefers to patiently wait for Ulysses. She even asks her son to portray forbearance and silence when faced with the harassments of the suitors.
2. In the Odyssey, some women are superhuman goddesses who love Ulysses. In contrast, in Falak Naz Nameh, all women are terrestrial and goddesses are not talked about; except the witch and her daughter, all other women are earthly and ordinary.

### ***Conclusion***

The presence of women both in Falak Naz Nameh and the Odyssey is conspicuous and significant and women are among the active elements of the scenes in the stories who are present in all episodes. In both works, some women play positive roles, while some others have negative features. The wives of champions are depicted as positive, beautiful, forbearing and faithful figures who tolerate all hardships for the returning of the heroes. Though the two works share many commonalities, some differences of overriding significance can be observed between them with regard to women's capabilities, will power, and enterprise.

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