A Study of National Identity Elements in the Poems of Nima Yushij and Sohrab Sepehri

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Abstract

National Identity is the new, updated form of ethnic identity. It is a nascent concept, having emerged in the late 19th century, in contrast to ethnic identity, which is as old as myths. National identity is the foremost component of human identity, formed and preserved by the members of a large group. Nima Yushij, as a trendsetting poet possessing a distinct personal style, used a plethora of symbols and signs in his works, as he lived in an era filled with the strangulation of the human spirit. Nima's true follower, Sohrab Sepehri did also emulate this style. Adopting a semiotic approach, the present paper addressed these two poets' national identity elements, including names, titles, geographical locations, languages, (religious) festivals, dishes, clothing, beliefs, religions, and the luminaries in order to answer these questions: Which aspect of national identity was of the greatest importance for Nima and Sohrab? What steps did Nima and Sohrab take to strengthen the Iranian national identity?

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1. Introduction

Identity and its effects on the constitution of memory and social values are the main means of advancement and growth. A solid sense of national identity creates motivation and hope for the people of that country, and in the same fashion, a hampered spirit of national identity can create long-term detrimental consequences for the country as a whole. "Active identities, cultures, and different ethnicities are an integral part of the concept of nation-state. Therefore, in our age and basically for every living society, identity should retain its tenacity, while it does not conflict with other foundations of society" (Kachouian, 2008, p. 23).

National identity is a fundamental component that contributes considerably to the development and progress of any nation (country) and requires undivided attention. Strong national identity generates motivation and raises hope in the people of a nation; whereas weak national identity causes irreparable damage to that nation. When people of a nation do not take pride in belonging to their hometown, they show no enthusiasm to take any step for the good of the nation. National identity, first and foremost, interlocks with national identification and a sense of belonging to a long-standing community. "Geographical borders and political communities shape various national identities. The sensation of national identity per se enables people to possess a geographical location in the surrounding world and relate themselves to collective identity of a land" (Moeini Alamdari, 2002, p. 36).

In literature, identity deals with the fact that what is now called identity encompasses a range of concepts. No exhaustive definition has been so far proposed for identity due to its complications and ambiguities, which give rise to contradictions and conflicts. Qassemi (2004) defines identity as,

> the product of multifunction, free flow, and constant movement; in a similar way to moving nomads and tribespeople whose identities and residence places are not defined and determined, humans leave an identity and assume a new one

under the influence of their surrounding material and spiritual space. (pp. 23-24)

The strength and weakness of national identity are in a direct relationship with how developed a country is. A number of scholars deem it as a constituent of a nation because a sense of national identity entails the awareness of a national group's existence. The strength and intensity of national identity are observed in the pride the people of a country take in their historical buildings, mansions, architecture, rural heritage, points of interest in cities, and natural sceneries, all embodying that certain country. Because of its utmost importance, studies on national identity need to be always conducted.

"National identity is a process that combines several strains of dimensions and elements including language, race, religion and culture which play a significant role in the analysis of national identity" (Hayati & Hosseini, 2007, p. 90). Persian language as a bonding and solidarity unit across history retains a vital status in the formation of Iranian identity. Sattari (2007) deems the role of a nation's language of prime importance in constituting its identity and identification, the meaning and structure of what shapes a nation and an important tool to maintain and transfer the culture, the ideology and their worldview. Consequently, he concludes, that the role of the language in the formation of national identity and cultural influence is undeniable (Satari, 2007). Today, national identity is one of the underlying foundations of the culture in every society. For this reason, poetry, one of the most important constituent elements of a society's culture, reflects the collective spirit and national aspirations of a society. That is why the role of the poets in forming and shaping culture and subsequently in the construction of identity becomes important. Prominent figures of Persian poetry bring Iranian national culture and identity to the center of the world. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to locate the elements of national identity in the poetry of two of the most renowned Persian poets: Nima Yushij and Sohrab Sepehri. It also attempts to find out which aspect of national identity was of the greatest importance for Nima Yushij and Sohrab Sepehri and what steps Nima and Sohrab took to strengthen the Iranian national identity.

2. Theoretical Framework

As social creatures, all humans possess identity, which is based on the image people have of themselves and is not an inborn quality. Identity arises from agreements and disagreements among people. What bestows identity on a human group distinguishes it from other groups. Jenkins (2002) believes that similarities and dissimilarities are concepts formed by humans and realized by human cultures and communities. The cultural devices, which establish identity, also shape identity categories in human communities. Among the items generating intra-group similarity and extra-group dissimilarity are language, religion, clothing, aesthetic tendencies, recreation and fun, sport, food, etc.

Following Wodak, Cillia, Reisigl, and Liebhart (1999), national identity "is constructed and conveyed in discourse, predominantly in narratives of national culture. National identity is thus the product of discourse" (p. 22). Conceived in language, rather than blood (Anderson, 1983), nations and national identities, when perceived as imagined communities, are essentially socially constructed. Because they are "mobilized into existence through symbols invoked by political leadership" (Dryzek, 2006, p. 35), the power of discourses lie in the fact that they have the potential to construct, perpetuate, transform or dismantle national identities (Wodak et al., 1999).

Social construction of national identities are indispensably associated with media representations (Anderson, 1982; Hallett, Kaplan-Weinger, 2010; Milne, Tregidga, & Walton, 2009). As Thompson (1995) states, "we feel ourselves to belong to groups and communities which are constituted in part through the media" (p. 35). Our understanding of ourselves, our selfhood and out function in and relation to our surrounding environment are heavily affected and in part caused by media images (Cottle, 2009). News media in particular continually propogate a branded, simplified national identity in that they "draw on certain dominant discourses which relate to ideas associated with everyday understandings of notions of 'objectivity' and 'mainstream'" (Huijser, 2009, p. 60).

Different parts of a nation's identity can be highlighted on global scale as a result of their representation on news media coverage at different times (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2000). But also within the imagined national community, people's concept of who they are and what national identity means to them can be formulated by new narratives (Wodak et al., 1999). Clearly, identity and image are context-dependent, with image open to change as societal expectations change (Roper, 2012). To sum up, our understanding of the concept of selfhood, our relation to the world around us and our sense of national identity are shaped and affected by discourse, language, and the media influence.

Identity comes to the fore when the concept of 'We/Us' is discussed. There are clear lines of demarcation between 'We' and 'Others/Them', underscoring the utmost historical and sociological importance of national identity. It is historically important because this concept is formed within the framework of time and community, affected by historical events and changes. In addition, various identities observed in community and among social groups are derived from historical movements in different eras. Sociologically speaking, national identity is of the essence because it is a major factor in social cohesion and national adaptability.

> Throughout history, national identity, or, in other words, the collection of language, culture, customs and traditions, rituals, myths, and folktales have always been sacred and revered, and have given birth to chivalric and heroic deeds in the throes of plights and predicaments. (Hejazi, 2009, p. 10)

In this section, we will review the different categories which encompass the concept of identity.

2.1. Constituents of National Identity

Historical analysis tells us that the concept of national identity along with the notion of nationalism was formed in late 19th century and early Mashrouteh Era through the activities of a number of intellectuals and avant-garde forces in Iran. The concept of 'Iranian National Identity' was gradually formed through the

changes that were made to the structure of the society at that time. The concept of 'Nation' is a political term which has various definitions. A number of scientist define nation as a group of people living in a shared territory have a single governance structure. Another group of scientist defines nation as a group of people who have a shared language and religion or have a similar past history (Ravasani, 2000). Any nation which has long resided in a certain geographical area forms certain interests and unique specifications throughout time. These specific elements, in turn, help differentiate one nation from another. The whole concept together is called "National Identity" (Rabbani, 2002, p. 88).

There are various elements that make up the concept of national identity. The list is long and not all the scientists agree on the specific items. However, all these elements satisfy the psychological, social, cultural and political needs in society. On the other hand, a claim is made which states the fact that neither of these facts can decisively define national identity. Just as the very concept of identity is a non-fixed and fluid concept, the elements that define it are not fully fixed and permanent either.

2.1.1. Culture

Cultural functions have had a significant role in the formation of Iranian national identity. Since a citizen of Iran is most recognized in the world through his/her Iranian culture (Sattari, 2007). Some contemporary poets in Iran have tried to draw on Iranian culture and history in order to keep alive the old customs and traditions through reviving the authentic and traditional culture of Iran. Such poets help transfer the past heritage and historical experiences from one period to another and at the same time try to envisage a novel approach to them.

2.1.2. Religion

Religion is a constant element in the formation of all civilizations. It also functions as unifying elements among different sections in the society. In Iran, religion and government have long been intertwined. Since the time of the Achaemenians, the governments have legitimized themselves through their connections to the religious bodies in society. Likewise, institutions have flourished in the light of the governmental structures. Thus, religion can be singled out as a fundamental unifying element in societies.

Islamic values alongside national cultural elements have always existed in contemporary poetry. Such codes encourage individuals to defend their religion and to sacrifice their lives for their countries. Patriotism goes hand in hand with religious teachings in contemporary poetry in a way that defending the country equals defending the religion.

2.1.3. Common Historical Background

History is, without doubt, one of the most elements in shaping the concept of national identity. Most historians have tried to transfer the values, beliefs, and achievements of their fellow-citizens and ancestors and in doing so, have led to help shape their sense of national identity. Human beings have formed attachments to their past history and the feeling of belonging to history has long been a vital constituent of personal and social-historical consciousness. Therefore, history as science which possesses deep connection with the understanding of the past helps create an essential part of the sense of national identity. Contemporary poets of Iran have made effort to shape the concept of national identity by focusing on the culture and history of Iran. They have tried to transfer the experiences and heritage of the past generations to the next ones and in one sense to revive it too.

2.1.4. Ethnicity

An ethnic identity is a form of national identity which unites different individuals from different linguistic, historic, and racial background. Smith (1998) believes that an ethnic group is a specific demographic population which is related to each other through a shared ancestral mythology, memories, cultural elements, shared historic land, and responsibilities.

Iranian ethnicities are made up of Turks, Turkomans, Arabs, Balouch, Lor, Kurds, and Fars, and also religious minorities such as Jewish people, Ashouri people, and Armenians. An ethnic factor can both reinforce and weaken national identity. Contemporary poets try to avoid ethnic tendencies as much as possible and instead try to penetrate the origin of the human

beings' ideologies and respectful sociologies which are based on humanistic values. The use of ethnic beliefs and elements, attention to dialects, the use of folklore language and applying the culture and geographical location is the main feature of such poets. They have encouraged various Iranian ethnic groups to unite together in order to protect their country.

2.1.5. Shared Land

Some scientists consider the shared land as the primary feature in creating unity among the people of a nation. People living in a shared geographical area inevitably form cultural and historical attachments. As a result, individuals cannot be considered a nation without belonging to a shared land. The elements of national identity need to be located within a certain geographical area in order to be able to create national unity. This shared geographical area can be called homeland which functions as the generator of national identity. In this regard, national identity means a sense of belonging and attachment to a place. In the same way, Iran for Iranians is more than a name. It equals the mindset, history, and culture of the people who belong to that land. Thus, national identity has its roots in geographical area. In other words, land is a fundamental element in the formation of sense of national identity (Lak, 2004).

2.1.6. Persian Language and Literature

The primary function of language, linguists believe, is to establish communication between people. Communication between people leads to the creation of shared concepts and ideologies and in a similar fashion, shared concepts can lead to social understanding and unity. National identity in Iran has always had an indispensable tie to its language and literature. Persian language and literature, due to its unique properties, has always existed as one of the main constituents of Iranian culture and civilization and also as a unifying element. Poets, as the forerunners of Iranian culture and identity, have long protected Iranian identity in a way that in some of the contemporary poems references are made to monumental poets such as Ferdowsi, Hafez, Saadi, and Khayyam.

3. Methodology

The scope and the significance of Persian literature reaches far beyond national and historical heritage, and is a perfect instant to demonstrate that what has happened in the past is important and part of the importance of Persian literature for the world, is the question of its long history.

A thousand years ago, a book such as 'Shahnameh' was composed. Works such as 'Golestan', or 'Divan Hafiz' were written 800 years ago. These works are crucial to Iranian culture and history since not many countries, with the exception of Greece, possess the life of literature which exceeds 400 years. The humanitarian concerns presented in Persian literature reach further than national level and include transnational and humanitarian concepts as well. The ontological question regarding the existence of man has long been one of the fundamental topics throughout the times. Identity is one of the quintessential requirements of any human being; meaning that every human being desires to be remembered and avoids oblivion.

Given the above definitions, the purpose of this paper is to identify the cultural and national concepts through an examination of the element of language and literature in the poetry of two of the most influential contemporary poets who composed the bulk of their works during a tumultuous historical period when the need for establishing and reinforcing the sense of national identity was felt more than even before in the contemporary history of Iran. For this purpose, the elements of 'Time and Space', and 'Events' were examined in *Darvag* (literally, 'Tree Frog'), *Hast Shab* (literally, 'Night, it is.'), *Ghayegh* (literally, 'The Boat') by Nima Yushij. Similarly, from Sohrab's collection of poetry, the elements of Time and Space, Beliefs and Tenets and the use of Mythology were examined in *Seda-y-e Pa-y-e Ab* (literally, *Water's Footsteps*) in order to locate the national and cultural elements which contribute to the concept of Iranian national identity; as each of these concepts are deemed relevant for the purpose of developing the above concept. The reason beyond the selection of the above-mentioned elements lies in the fact that while the two poets had an immense similarity in their attention to and concentration on the cultural

semiology which make up the national identity in their respective country, they differ in their individual stylistic trends which, in its own turn, has its root in their very personal ideologies and experiences as well as their unique worldview. Hence, an exact similar set of elements may not have been fruitfully applied to both poets at the same time.

4. Findings

4.1. Time and Space in Nima Yushij's Poems

National identity has been reflected deeply in Iranian contemporary poetry. The history of the development of national identity in Iranian history and literature dates back to the Mashroutieh Era and even earlier. Changes to the patterns of communication and a large amount of data and information transferred daily through social media during the digital age have created serious identity crisis for the Iranian community, which in turns leads to cultural and social problems. Having recognized the need for the establishment and development of a collective national identity, Iranian poets have constantly composed poetry with that concept in mind. Two of these poets are Nima Youshij and Sohrab Sepehri. In the following sections, we will analyze their selected poetry in order to extract the elements of national identity in their poems.

Nima formed his poetical career in one of the most strangulated and critical eras in Iran both historically and politically. The context would oblige him to either get directly involved in political skirmishes and wipe off the poetry sphere or to keep his status through poetical techniques and accomplish his poetical mission; a dilemma out of which Nima chose the latter. Inspired by his homeland and themes from his local environment--he was originally from the north of Iran--he used nature words symbolically. As a matter of fact, these nature words in Nima's poems take on symbolic meaning and function while preserving their denotations. Nima might have concealed the secrets in his heart behind these words with the intention that they would become imperceptible to the censors; even if they realized, Nima could always deny and behave as though he meant what he said. In other words, Nima always used alternate signifiers as sign creation and resorted to metaphor and metonymy. In the following

section, the analyses of cultural signs in three poems by Nima (i.e., Darvag (literally, 'tree frog'), Hast Shab (literally, 'Night, it is'), Ghayegh (literally, 'The Boat')) are presented:

Darvag
Ran dry my land
Alongside the neighbor's land
They shed tears in a near beach, they say
Mourners among mourners wriggle and sway
The rain-messenger, Darvag, when is the rain?
To fill this empty feast with crop and grain
My dark hut lacks life and freshness
The body of my reed-flute is brittle from dryness
As the separation of the lovers, who would fain meet again
The rain-messenger, Darvag, when is the rain?
(1996, p. 504)

A distinctive feature of Nima's poetry is that its imagery originates in the personal experience of the poet, in contrast to previous works, where the poets' imagery was established based on the works of their predecessors. Thus, the local color is palpable in the works of the poets of the new poetry (Nima's New Poetry). For instance, there are numerous examples of the northern Iran lifestyle in Nima's poems, and of urban lifestyle in Forough's poems (Shafiei Kadkani, 1995).

This side of the country lies our 'country/land', and on the other side, our neighboring 'country/land'. Our country refers to Iran and the neighboring country refers to the USSR. The cultural signs my land and the neighbor's land signify respectively my, or, generally, our, country and the neighboring country (the USSR), divided by a border. Our country is 'dry' and our neighbor's country is 'rain-sodden'. 'Dryness' signifies the lack of a revolution and social change, and 'rain' embodies a revolution. Dry and sodden are distinguished by a border. 'Vag' means a frog, and 'Dar' means a tree, and 'Darvag' refers to a type of tree frog. Mazandaranis believe when a darvag croaks on a tree, asking for rain, it will definitely rain. This is the surface (literal) meaning/denotation of the sign Darvag. In Nima's opinion, those who grasp only this meaning are stuck in a rut of stereotypes, so as to avoid censoring and suppression. On the other hand, Nima pays special attention to those who reflect. Darvag, in fact, signifies an understanding (insightful/informed) person

who thinks and goes beyond the status quo. Darvag objects to the insensate people who do not harbor change and development; Darvag addresses the understanding person. This insightful, understanding person seeks out development and harbors a rain of development and revolution in his mind, putting utmost effort in its realization. Nima asks such a person about when our community would wise up and attain a social revolution (rain). Though the neighboring country (the sign near beach signifies the neighboring country) may be plagued with sadness and misery (they shed tears in a near beach, they say mourners among mourners wriggle and sway), Nima does not give up hope and waits delightfully for the rain of change; he believes that revolution may not secure all ideals, we should always be thinking about it. He does not formulate this personal belief pessimistically and implies that "They say", emphasizing that this thought is not his and he has heard it.

An implicit contrast begins the second part of the poem: *Empty Feast* (besat-e bi bæsat) in contrast with a grand feast (besat-e ba bæsat). /besat/ refers to the feast and /bæsat/ signifies the comestibles, beverages, and refreshments in the feast. In order to fill this empty feast with crop and grain, Nima encourages gently the readers to think and compare their empty feast with the grand feast of their neighboring country. This comparison may make him think why our feast is empty, and theirs is grand. The last part of the poem insinuates the inequalities and deprivations in order to remove the blinders.

4.2. Events in Nima Yushij's Poems

Events occurring in a country constitute the national identity of that country. The reflection of major events such as imposed wars, protests, festivals, and other items enriches national identity in literary works. In Hast Shab (Night, it is.), Nima portrays an important historical event.

Night, it is
Night, it is a muggy night
And the soil lacks light
Wind, the cloud's progeny
From the mount side, rushes toward me
It is night, a body swollen in still air
And a wayfarer is lost in despair

The body warm, the desert vast
The dead in grave confined cast
It stays with my broken heart
My worn-out body rages with fever
It is night. Yes, night, [and it's o'er].
(1996, p. 511)

It is not clear that Nima or Sirus Tahbaz, the compiler of his poems, dated these poems. Whatever the case, the date 19 May 1995 may guide us towards a better understanding of the poem. This date is near two dates of importance: July 21, 1952 and August, 19 1953, when major events took place. This poem was composed a bit after these dates. Therefore, it is possible to detect a link between the signs used in this poem and these two political-historical events. The most marked contrast proposed by Nima in this poem is the implicit contrast of night with day. Day is left unexpressed in the poem, so this is an example of implicit contrast. Night is a cultural sign which assumes a connotation due to its allegorical sense: political strangulation of the human spirit and all-out repression in that period when there was not even a tinge of light in the political sphere. Soil connotes the homeland, bled dry, or as Nima has it, 'And the soil lacks light.' Mount refers to a firmly-established government that sees its people as easy prey. Mount is transfixed in one place and siphons the nation's dynamism. In any case, a promising wind starts to blow in this strangulated, repressed situation. Wind signifies the revival of Iran, in the wake of relative political freedom, secured thanks to the campaigns of Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq. In this period, people could act and see their demands satisfied in the 30 Tir Uprising (1952). This wind is the cloud's offspring; this cloud refers to the divine blessings in the Persian literature. This wind blows around the mountain of the oppressive government and, in that muggy night, alleviates the sufferings. However, this freedom is coming to an end, as The 1953 Iranian coup d'état (28 Mordad) draws nigh, and the repression resumes.

End contrasts with continuity and dynamism. In the expression Hast Shab, hast is topicalized and focalized, stressing the end of the night. Another feature repeated three times in this poem is that the clitic pronouns leave a gap between adjectives and nouns, whereas, canonically, they should be affixed to adjectives. Once the pronouns hop over

adjectives, adjectives warm (garm), confined (tang), and worn-out (khasteh) gain prominence. In addition, they are seemingly pronounced with emphatic stress, rendering the strangulation and repression more tangible. Adjectives such as muggy, still, and confined show the political tensions of that period. Day is left unexpressed in the poem; however, Nima allows the reader to think and understand that there is a day in contrast with the night. Nima's local color enabled him to submerge the readers in meanings using signs in the form of nature words.

In *The Boat*, Nima expresses his dissatisfaction with Iran's situation and calls people to protest by saying, 'It takes two hands to clap (Union is strength).'

Sadness covered my face all around
And the boat of mine ran aground
My word is not stained by ambiguity
Strength is to be found in unity
I reach out my hand to you for help
I have a painful lump in my throat
Keeping my loud ringing call in yoke
To liberate you and me, I cry and yelp
I cry and yelp
(Yushij, 1996)

4.3. Time and Space in Sohrab Sepehri's Poems

Sohrab uses equation instead of contrast. For Sohrab, a Kashani origin is not a distinguishing feature, and he believes he might have hailed from India, Sialk, or Bukhara. His disbelief in borders/lines caused him not to consider a prostitute/lady of leisure an example of counter-culture and pass judgments about them. Sohrab does not judge others in his works, wherein borders fade.

I'm a native of Kashan
But my hometown is not Kashan
My hometown has been lost
Overcome with fever and with impatience
I have built another house on the other side of night
(1984, pp. 285-286)

'The other side' is a cultural sign, and it may be in contrast with this side, but they are of equal value in Sohrab's eyes. Kashani origin is not a distinguishing feature, and he does not contrast it with 'the other side'. He even sees not the distance between him and nature:

I can hear the garden breathing
(1984, p. 286)

A downside to human knowledge is its positivism, which has overshadowed all the fields, especially the humanities (human sciences). Phenomenology, as a school of philosophy, emerged as a reaction to this approach. "Putting sensory perception under criticism, phenomenology believes the sole way to unconscious and non-human (metaphysical) knowledge is to get to the truth of every phenomenon" (Faryar, 1994, pp. 174-176). *Seda-y-e Pa-y-e Ab* (literally, *Water's Footsteps*), addresses this issue. In this poem, Sohrab (2003, 285-286) puts two existential spaces and spheres against each other: here vs there, unity vs plurality, being vs becoming/getting, shadow vs light, earth vs heaven: *I'm a native of Kashan / But my hometown is not Kashan*. Although Sepehri declares he is from Kashan, he does not deem Kashan his hometown by criticizing sensory perception. Sepehri's dialogism (dialog's logic) and his hermeneutic approach exclude any obstacles to intuitive perception. Sepehri calls these preconceptions the dust of habit or the system of preference. Bacon calls them fetish, and the Holy Koran calls them dogmatic ignorance (See Rahmdel, 2003). Adopting this hermeneutic approach, Sepehri transcends his era in quest of his lost city (Kan'ani & Hassanzadeh Mir'ali, 2012).

The following lines prove the non-existence of a division (border) between Sohrab's perception and nature. Nature contrasts with culture, but, the transcendence beyond the borders withers the contrast in Sohrab's mind. As a result, he does not differentiate between natural elements and cultural ones.

I know the flapping found of quail's wings
The color of bustard's belly, footprints of a mountain goat
I well know where rhubarbs grow
When starlings come, when partridges sing
When falcons die
(Sepehri, 1984, p. 289)

Sohrab does not restrict himself to a specific time period and emphasizes his timelessness.

I am close to the beginning of the earth
(Sepehri, 1984, p. 287)

Belief in borders and lines is the point of departure in cultural semiotic studies. Cultural semioticians typically consider a line, to the inner side of which is the poet, and on the outer, another culture; they delve into the interrelationships among the cultures. On one side stands the text creator (poet), and on the other side, the other culture. The poet may react in two fashions: they may focus on the content, attributing the super-culture to themselves and subjugating the other (sub)cultures; or adopt an expressive stance and call the other culture(s) a counter-culture. In this case, it is best to beware of that culture and block the channels of interaction. However, Sohrab treats this problem overly unconventionally and unpredictably. The close examination of two poems, Ab ('Water') and *Seda-y-e Pa-y-e Ab ('Water's Footsteps')* culminated in this remarkable finding: Sohrab is the most democratic poet, who wants for others whatever he wants for himself. He sees no difference between himself and the other; he does not see himself possessing a super-culture, whose mission is to purge and optimize the other culture(s). He does not call the other culture counter-culture, and something to beware of, and nips those poisoning thoughts in the bud. Sohrab Sepehri equates his culture with the other culture. In essence, Sohrab asserts that the culture sees everything optimistically.

Let's not muddy the water
Maybe, down the river a dove is drinking water
Or, on a distant land a little bird is washing her wings
Or, maybe in a nearby village a pitcher is getting filled with water
(Sepehri, 1984, pp. 345-346)

4.4. Beliefs and Tenets in Sohrab Sepehri's Poems

Beliefs and tenets establish identity. In *Seda-y-e Pa-y-e Ab*, Sohrab uses words carrying religious identity, such as Qibla, prayer-rug, Ka'aba, Qad-Qamat (be ready), Hajar Al-Asvad (Black Stone). Sohrab has profound insight about God and religion. He uses God's signs on the earth and defamiliarizes them in a novel fashion for the readers. Before Sohrab, no one saw the rose as qibla.

I am a Muslim
The rose is my qibla
The stream my prayer-rug, the sunlight my clay tablet
My mosque the meadow
I rinse my arms for prayers along with the thrum and pulse of windows
Through my prayers streams the moon, the refracted light of the sun
Through translucent chapters I look down at the stones in the stream-bed
Every part of my prayer is clear straight through
I begin my recitation when I hear the wind's call to prayer from the cypress tree minaret
I start to whisper after the grass proclaims the allahu-akbar,
after the stream's surface sings qad-qamat-as-salaat—prayer time has arrived!
My Ka'aba is there on the stream-bank, in the shade of the acacia trees.
Like a light breeze, my Ka'aba drifts from orchard to orchard, town to town.
(Sepehri, 1984, pp. 345-346)

Krishna Moretti believes that every look (glance) is comprised of three constituents: observation, observer, and observed. There should be no gap between the observer and the observed. Our prejudgments give rise to this gap (Shamisa, 1989). The mental link between Sepehri and the eastern mysticism gives birth to a kind of enlightenment which can be called intuitive awareness. Sepehri uses this awareness to transform his inner self into a symbol to show his communion and identification with the universe. Intuitive awareness is the highest level of awareness and is interpreted as a unity where the difference between the observer and the observed fades away. In the scope of intuitive awareness, habits, mindsets, and relationships in the material world--called intellectual identity lose force (Chopra, 2007). Denying his individuality and elevating it to the position of an infinite self, identified with the universe, Sepehri enables himself to observe and perceive the beauties of the world directly. His self may pervade into the elements and phenomena, identifying with them. Symbolically, this self takes on the shape and features of various phenomena, portraying all aspects of life:

In this house, I feel closer to the moist obscurity of grass

I can hear the garden breathing
And the sound of darkness when dropping from
a leaf
And the sound of a light coughing from behind
a tree
I can hear the sniffing of water at through the
crack of each rock
...
The pulse of dawn in the pigeon's well
The heartbeat of Thursday evening
The flow of clove pink in thought
...
I can hear the blowing of the female
...
And the sound of the shoe of faith in the alley of
longing
And the sound of rainfall on the eyelid of the
love's body
Over the sad music of puberty
Over the song of pomegranate groves
...
I pick up the pulse of flowers
I am familiar with the wet fate of water and the
green habit of the tree
...
I well know where rhubarbs grow
(Sepehri, 1984, pp. 345-346)

Sepheri lives in an idealistically pleasant world, originating in the past. Some consider this description of the lost utopia by Sohrab a universe of meaning, which was referred to by Rumi/Mevlevi centuries ago: I do not exist, am not an entity in this world or in the next

My place is placeless / a trace of the traceless
(1984, p. 371).

Although there are numerous similarities between the promised paradise and the garden described by Sohrab, the latter is a dreamy place filled with wistfulness, located in this material world and not the world of meaning, where the primitive human used to inhabit far from the current complications. Some poets lay the foundations of the utopia in their imagination and achieve peace and security by describing it. A perfect example is the poem Posht-e Darya-ha ('Beyond the Seas'), in Hajm-e Sabz ('The Green Volume'), where Sohrab depicts such a utopia. In Posht-e Darya-ha, Sepehri places two universes/worlds against each other: the first world is dark and silent, and its legends and heroes lack realization; the second world is home to freedom, knowledge,

and pleasant people. To reach this utopia, Sepehri forsakes everything and shows no attachment.

In this poem, as his other poems, Sepehri coins a poetic code, and, resorting to nature and its elements as mythical, opens a scenic outlook; this outlook (window) is a channel through which the poet observes his utopia, which might be Sepehri's nowhere, but he cannot help going toward it. Sepehri's utopia, free from the concept of today's cities, has nothing but the return to primitivity and simplicity. It is simply a mirage just like any other utopia. Like Sadi, Sepehri adopts a reformist approach toward society. He wants his society prosperous, affluent, honest, and competent. Their insults matter not, I keep on, under the aegis of light (Sepehri, 1984). Sepehri looks at nature with love for creation, altruism, and benevolence.

"Let's not muddy the water, maybe, down the river a dove is drinking water" (Sepehri, 1984, p. 345). If we cannot eradicate poverty, we should not give rise to it either. Sohrab's ideology is modesty. He introduces emotional and rational concepts perfectly into the objects; he reflects the days of all walks of life in his poems.

4.5. Myth in Sohrab Sepehri's Poems

Myth is another component of national identity and is widely used by Sohrab Sepehri. He is a renowned poet of the contemporary era, who, following Nima's new poetry, establishes a connection between fundamental and mythological concepts of classical and modern (contemporary) Persian poetry. The frequency of mythological elements in Sohrab's poems is much greater than that of other contemporary poets; in other words, it is easy to find a thematic, conceptual link between Sohrab's poetry and mythological and symbolic concepts. If the readers of Sohrab are well versed in myths and archetypes, they can easily grasp the core of his dramatic poems. Sohrab Sepehri and his profound understanding of myths in modern Persian poetry are indubitably lofty phenomena in modern humanistic literature. The emergence of mythological elements and concepts in Sohrab Sepehri's poems are connected to the origin of creation and existence, enabling the modern human to reflect upon his past days and origin.

Literature, particularly in its theosophical field, plays an essential role in the transmission of traditions. In highlighting history, literature, religion, art, and culture of any nation, the role of myths is observable. Sepehri's poems are among the most effective elements in which theosophy is revealed. Investigation on Sepehri's mythical frame of mind enlightens his worldview. His mythical world is alive and sensible since he considers human beings at the center of his worldview. 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 the 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 interdependent correlation between the myths and his poems.

Without a shadow of a doubt, the broad perspective of Sepehri provides a cherished opportunity for the practice of traditions. People and the societies alike are deeply influenced by the invocation of God as presented in literary texts. The general assumption holds that the majority of Iranians consider themselves as traditional and religious people; a fact which means that they could be easily controlled through a religious message. In Iranian culture, religion has been around for thousands of years. Since myths make up part of the religious beliefs, people continue to be still affected by them in the modernized, developed world. Impressively, Sepehri's poems have been translated into various languages, providing the ground for the transferring of his legacy, his feelings, values, and ideas to other nations and cultures. In a likewise manner, the concepts included in myths along with its historical flowing travel and transmission have been disseminated and welcomed through generations and times (Ebrahimi, Mousavi, & Ghashghaei, 2015).

5. Concluding Remarks

The existential question of man's ontology is among his earliest concerns. It has shadowed other spheres of his existence and has long landed on the top of his to-know list. Questions such as "who am I?" and "who are we?" have inevitably resulted in the formation and development of the concept of 'self' and 'selfhood', 'identity', and 'existence'. Meanwhile, these concepts have undergone substantial alterations and variations throughout time in the midst of political, cultural, national and social turbulences. Therefore, the present concept of "national identity" that is formed within and without our consciousness is a product of miscellaneous forces and factors including the literary heritage.

As a poet well-versed in both oriental traditions and religions as that of Buddhism, mysticism and Western traditions, Sohrab Sepehri combined the Western concepts with Eastern ethics, and as such created a medley of poetry unsurpassed in the history of Persian literature. Sohrab brought a new form of literature and used romanticism and descriptions in his work. The beauty of his poem is because of nature and existence of tender and simple language. New forms were tools in his hands through which he could express his thoughts and feelings. Sohrab Sepehri introduces himself, his family, and his way of thinking in a poetic way.

His philosophy of literature and poetry is two-folded and has two aspects; the inner and outer aspects. Inner aspect of this poem addresses God's recognition through the beauty of nature. For one thing, *Sedaye-Paye-Ab* is like a biography and the introduction of the poet at the present and in the past. People during that time were adhering to strict religious norms and were evidently prejudice in their beliefs. They were not enlightened, so they did all religious things blindly. In this poem, Sohrab beautifully explains that he is Muslim but not like all Muslims who blindly do their religious duties. And in this way, by distancing himself from rigid traditions of Islam and/or any other religious form, aligns himself with the national identity of Iranians which has always existed on the other end of the binary opposition to that of religious rites.

Nima Yushij's works are replete with national identity elements. Criticizing the status quo, Nima calls people to a mass protest. Nima expresses his attachment to Iran by mentioning every part of this country. Sohrab Sepehri is a true follower of Nima, whose poems transcend the borders and lines. He adopts an international stand, not a view restricted only to Iran. He knows no borders, and it is not possible to attribute a certain ethnicity to him. There are

abundant instances referring to national identity elements in Sohrab Sepheri's poems, however, they are not as many as the ones in Nima's poems. Sohrab addresses identity to know one's self better, and the ontological subjects in Sohrab's poems draw attention toward the link between Sohrab and existence.

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