



## A Comparative Study of Two Romances: The English Morte d'Arthur and the Persian Samak-e-Ayyar

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**Abstract.** The present study endeavors to investigate the English romance Morte d'Arthur (1485) written by Sir Thomas Malory and Samak-e-Ayyar (12th c.) a Persian romance compiled by Faramarz ibn Khodadad and extract the most common elements of romance as manifested in these works. The elements studied in this paper include oral tradition, magic and witchcraft, nobleness and gentility, chivalric magnanimity and brotherly ethos, and masculinity.

**Keywords:** Romance, Chivalry, Morte d'Arthur, Samak-e-Ayyar

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Comparative literature has gained considerable attention in recent decades. It passes the geographical borders and adds a global dimension to literary studies. Investigating the literary works of different authors, especially when they come from different cultures, helps to look more carefully into the common concerns of different nations. It also paves the way for a variety of historical, cultural, anthropological, psychological, and political studies. The two works chosen for the present study belong to such variant cultures. Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* is an English romance written in 1469 and published in 1485 and *Samak-e-Ayyar* is a long Persian tale transcribed by Faramarz ibn Khodadad ibn Abdollah al-Kateb al-Arjani. Although romance is a basically European genre, *Samak-e-Ayyar* is usually referred to as a Persian romance. Accordingly, in the present study it is considered as a romance and the most important features of a romance found in both works have been discussed.

Medieval studies constitute an enormous part of English literature. C. Maddern's *Medieval Literature* (2010) is an analytic companion and *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts* (2011) by Cichon and Purdie is another scholarly work in the field. Since its publication *Morte d'Arthur* has been the subject of various literary studies. R. S. Loomis in *Development of Arthurian Romance* (2000) examines the evolution of Arthurian legends in Western literature. In a volume of essays entitled *Aspects of Malory* (1981), T. Takamaya and D. Brewer provide a collection of scholarly works on Malory's prose. As its title suggests, D. Armstrong's *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory's Morte d'Arthur* (2003) concentrates on two aspects of the work. There are however, few comparative studies that have been done on *Morte d'Arthur*. Dr. Jack Ross in a web article entitled "Malory and Scheherzade" (2007) studies *Morte d'Arthur* and *The Thousand and One Nights*.

*Samak-e-Ayyar* is an outstanding literary work which has been investigated in numerous scholarly books and articles. The most comprehensive work on *Samak-e-Ayyar* is done by Dr. Parviz Natel Kanlari who corrected and published the complete work in six volumes. Marina

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Gaillard's *Le Livre de Samak-e Ayyar* (1987) studies the structure of the book. Y. Jalali Pindari and R. Hosseini in an article entitled "Stratagems and Schemes in *Samak-e Ayyar*" (2012) focus on old trickeries used in the story; F. Rostami in "A Female Based Reading of *Tarikh-e Beyhaqi* and *Samak-e Ayyar*" (2011) and M. Karami and S. Hessampour in "The image of woman in folktales of *Samak-e-Ayyar* and *Darab Nameh*" (2005) render comparative studies and female readings of the work and M. Jafarpour and M. Alavi Moghaddam in "A Comparative Study of Ritual and Warfare in *Shahnameh* and *Samak-e Ayyar*" (2012) suggest another comparative study.

Malory's work is usually studied in comparison with other Arthurian legends, and similarly, *Samak-e-Ayyar* is normally compared with other Persian tales such as *Amir Arsalan*, *Hussein Kurd*, *Darab Nameh*, *Iskandar Nameh*, and *Shahnameh*. The present study endeavors to extract the most common elements of romance as manifested in both works; therefore, its focus is on the similarities. The elements discussed in this paper include oral tradition, magic and witchcraft, nobleness and gentility, chivalric magnanimity and brotherly ethos, and masculinity.

### 1.1. Romance

Medieval romances were works of fiction developed in 12<sup>th</sup> c. France and spread to the literature of other countries. The earlier romances appeared in verse but later on more and more romances were written in prose and displaced the earlier epic and heroic forms. There are collections of features and motifs rather than a clear-cut definition for romance. Asserting the difficulty of giving an explicit definition for "romance", Whetter in a 2008 study reviews some of these interpretations and yet finds it haphazard:

Severs's manual... states: 'The medieval romance is a narrative about knightly prowess and adventure'. Similarly, in John Stevens's influential study romance is defined by its idealism and distinguished by such traits as the 'mysterious challenge or call: the first sight of the beloved; the lonely journey through a hostile land; the fight'... Joanne Charbonneau... mentions the dominance of the adventure element (p. 48)

Romance is therefore identified through some main characteristics: It is a long tale of high adventure. "The typical romance is about a thousand lines, more or less (or episodes of a similar length in longer romances)" (Cichon & Purdie, 2011, p. 12). It idealizes chivalry and focuses on a hero-knight and his noble deeds. This hero is a person of noble birth or rank who meets a variety of extraordinary challenges and his triumph benefits his nation/group. The story is set in an imaginary and vague land and includes the rescue of a captive lady or the knight's love for his lady. Romances derive mystery and suspense from supernatural elements.

### 1.2. Le Morte d'Arthur

King Arthur has been surrounded by numerous tales. He is a legendary British leader who apparently lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. and defended Britons against Saxon invaders. In their 2009 work, Archibald and Putter write:

The earliest sources associate him with the shadowy period around 500, when the Romans who had earlier colonized Britain withdraw and left the native Celtic population (the Britons) vulnerable to attack by Germanic tribes... in the first chronicle that mentions Arthur, the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* (sometimes attributed to Nennius) he is already larger than life (p. 3).

The Arthurian legends were one of the dominant narrative themes of Middle Ages. "The King Arthur in the later medieval texts is not the Arthur of earlier works. The current literary

figure known as Arthur found its shape after 1139 A.D. when "Geoffrey of Monmouth (*Galfridus Monemutensis*) completed his *Historia Regum Britanniae* ('History of the Kings of Britain') which glorified Arthur and made him an international warlord" (Green p 4) Malory in his *Le Morte d'Arthur* mediates the medieval Arthurian legacy to post-medieval English writers.

*Le Morte d'Arthur* is a composition by Sir Thomas Malory (c 1405-1471) of traditional tales about the legendary King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table beginning with Arthur's conception and birth, and concluding with his death. The characters of Arthur and his knights were already well-known in England. Malory interpreted existing French and English stories and added original material. He wrote eight individual romances which were assembled by William Caxton into a single epic. Each book within *Le Morte d'Arthur* focuses on a particular circumstance or character.

Arthur, son of King Uther Pendragon and Igraine, is raised by another family but he takes his rightful place as king. Although he rules wisely and is counseled by Merlin the magician, Arthur makes enemies of other kings and is often at war. He establishes a code of ethics for the Knights of the Round Table, which helps maintain the peace of the kingdom. He has a brief love affair with Morgause, the queen of Orkney and one of Igraine's three daughters – and, thus, Arthur's half sister. He conceives an illegitimate child named Mordred. Arthur takes Guinevere as his queen and Lancelot, a French warrior and one of the Knights of the Round Table, becomes the courtly lover of Guinevere. Sir Gawain, one of Arthur's nephews, is an intensely loyal knight and encourages him to invade France. Mordred takes advantage of Arthur's absence and makes himself King of England, claims Guinevere as his wife, and attacks Arthur's army. Upon learning of Mordred's treachery, Arthur and his army return to England. Arthur kills Mordred but is mortally wounded by him. He is taken to the isle of Avalon to be healed, and he dies there.

### 1.3. Samak-e-Ayyar

*Samak-e-Ayyar* is one of the oldest samples of story writing in Persian literature written in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.H. and compiled by Faramarz ibn Khodadad ibn Abdollah al-Kateb al-Arjani (Mohammad Moein, *Persian Lexicon* 1996: Alam). It is transmitted orally and written down around the 12<sup>th</sup> century. *Samak-e-Ayyar* is generally known as a Persian romance but there is not a comprehensive agreement on the its genre; while some consider it as a romance (Meghdadi, 1999, p. 260), (Baraheni, 1989, p. 29), others disagree and insist that romance is a literary genre – or a literary *kind*, as some prefer – which belongs to 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> c. Europe and relates some chivalric deeds of western knights rather than eastern heroes (Nowrouzi, 2008, p. 156). Since *Samake-e-Ayyar* comprises most of the principle characteristics found in a medieval romance, and despite its Eastern provenance, in the present paper it is studied as a romance.

The manuscript of *Samake-Ayyar* is interrupted frequently and some incidents cannot be traced due to lack of relevant passages. According to Encyclopædia Iranica Online the only extant manuscript is in the Bodleian Library in Oxford bound in 3 volumes:

The text has been edited by Parviz Nâtel Kānlari and has gone through several reprints. One of the missing parts of the narrative has been restored from a Turkish translation (Ms. Or. 3298, British Library) dating from the reign of Sultan Morād III (1574-95). The Bodleian manuscript is illustrated (Robinson, pp. 1-7, Plates II and III) and written in different hands. This indicates either that it was copied over several periods or that the missing folios were replaced at a later date.

Marzban Shah, the king of Aleppo (Halab), marries the daughter of the king of Iraq, Golnar. A child is born to them whom they call Khorshid Shah. The young Khorshid Shah in a dream-like sequence sees Mah Pari, the daughter of the king of China, and falls in love with her. Like

the other suitors, he is put through the three trials set by the young girl's nurse, who is a witch and wants her own son to marry the princess. "He hastens to the abode of the young, chivalrous men, the ayyārs, and takes refuge (*zenhār*) with the chivalrous associations, the father (*pater*) of one of the most important of which ultimately becomes *Samak-e 'ayyār*" (Pourshariati, 2013, p. 29). Khorshid Shah eventually marries Mah Pari but she dies in childbirth. Following numerous other adventures he marries Abandokht, who bears him a son. The story continues with several battles among different kingdoms, captivity of princes, princesses, and warriors, and numerous revenge plans. Marzban Shah's health deteriorates and he dies. Khorshid Shah goes on a quest for his son, Farrokh Ruz, and is executed by the enemy. Farrokh Ruz has a son named Marzban Shah and according to his horoscope he will reign for sixty years. Samak is the loyal companion who assists all these kings in their adventures.

## 2. COMMON ELEMENTS OF ROMANCE IN MORTE D'ARTHUR AND SAMAK-E-AYYAR

### 2.1. Oral Tradition

The Arthurian legend (known as the Matter of Britain) is the body of stories concerning King Arthur which were orally transmitted and reshaped centuries before Malory. Arthur's legend is recorded in *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, the work of an anonymous writer dating from 14<sup>th</sup> century, and also in the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*, a work of an unknown 14<sup>th</sup>-century writer. Both works stem from Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century *History of the Kings of Britain*. These English works, some Welsh poems and French sources which shape the basis of Malory's tale, rely heavily on folklore and oral narratives about King Arthur who was a legendary British leader. "He was most likely a Roman-British war-leader living in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century who managed, for a while to check the invasion of Saxon tribes, and bring a period of peace to the country" (Staff & O'Conner, 1999, p. 54). One of the most evident proofs of Arthur's existence is the appearance of his name in the "Annales Cambriae" ("Welsh Annals"). It is a "chronicle of early British History written in Latin by medieval Welsh monks as on-going record of events from the 5<sup>th</sup>-century to the 10<sup>th</sup>-century." (Hughes, 2007, p. 166).

The influence of the oral tradition is very strong in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. Roger S. Loomis recounts two main agents in the establishment of Arthur's prestige and popularization. One of them is Geoffrey of Monmouth's work and the other one is "the wide-ranging activity of professional Breton story-tellers, *contours*, who, speaking French were welcomed as entertainers wherever that language was understood" (Loomis, 2000, p. 32). It was through these various narrations that new elements like the Round Table and the Holy Grail and new characters, Sir Lancelot for instance, were added to the story.

*Samak-e-Ayyar* best represents the oral tradition of storytelling and entertainment in Persian culture and literature. Yamamoto in his 2003 study on *Oral backgrounds of Persian epics* refers to Marina Gaillard's *Le Livre de Samak-e 'Ayyar* (1987) which suggests a structural analysis of the tale and refers to its oral performance:

*Samak-e-Ayyar* is the earliest known *tumâr*... Gillard demonstrated that the *Samak-e-Ayyar* consisted of the four structural units: *histoire*, *episode*, *chapitre*, and *scène*... If the *Samak-e Ayyar* had been a *tumâr* (it was at least part of the *naqqali* repertoire) and if it divided into structural units of varying size, our *tumâr* could also have broken down in smaller units... Gaillard suggested further that the *Samak-e Ayyar* may have been performed by storytellers in installments (p. 30).

Faramarz ibn Khodadad ibn Abdollah al-Kateb al-Arjani recorded *Samak Ayyar* as it was told by a master storyteller named Sadaqeh Abolqasem Shirazi. He repeatedly mentions that his transcription is from the actual storyteller. The indications made by the storyteller who asks for donation and addressing the audience through one of the characters affirm its oral origin. So the existent text comes directly from an oral tradition.

## 2.2. Magic and Witchcraft

White and black magic, marvel, supernatural powers, and sorceresses enrich the medieval atmosphere of Malory's work. Saunders mentions in a 2010 book:

[Malory] brings together different strands of magic and the supernatural... Across the book, the terms 'marvel' and 'marvelous' recur, and their repetition indicates the general ethos of the work... Marvel functions on a continuum from strength in arms, to profound emotion, to quest and adventure, and often shades into magic and the supernatural (p. 234-5).

Merlin, the great wizard, is one of the central figures in *Morte d'Arthur*. He uses magic to manipulate others, to disguise himself, to prophesy the future and to travel great distances in a short time. In the very beginning of story he engineers the birth of Arthur through magic and intrigue. He arranges for him to seduce Igraine by making Uther magically take on the appearance of her husband:

This is my desire: the first night that ye shall lie by Igraine ye shall get a child on her, and when that is born, that it shall be delivered to me for to nourish there as I will have it... and ye shall be like the duke her husband (Malory, 1936, p. 7).

Witchcraft is not limited to Merlin. "In Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, the sorceress Hallewes threatens Lancelot. Hallewes inhabits a chapel, the Chapel Perilous, from which Lancelot must purloin healing relics, a piece of clothes, and a sword" (Levack, 124). Morgan le Fay is another powerful sorceress in Arthurian legends. In medieval literature she is mistress of black magic, in contrast to Merlin's white magic. In Malory's account she is Arthur's half-sister and tries to arrange his downfall.

Marvelous objects and creatures recur in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. The questing beast is one of those fantastic creatures. She is a monster in Arthurian legends and the subject of quests undertaken by famous knights. Malory's description illustrates her segmented, four-part body and the quintessential barking from her belly:

Sir Palomides, the good knight, following the questing beast that had in shape a head like a serpent's head, and a body like a leopard, buttocks like a lion, and footed like an hart; and in his body there was such a noise as it had been the noise of thirty couples of hounds questing, and such a noise that beast made wherever he went (Malory, 1936, p. 316).

Excalibur, the legendary sword of King Arthur, is another manifestation of magic and mystery. Again it is Merlin who goes to the archbishop Canterbury and counsels him to send for all the lords of the realm to show some miracle and become the rightwise king of the realm. The lords are taken to churchyard where "therein stack a fair sword naked by the point and letters there were written in gold about the sword that said thus: – Whose pulleth out this sword of this stone and avail is rightwise king born of all England" (p. 10). Certainly, Arthur obtains the throne by pulling the sword off and gets the power of the sword through the intervention of Merlin's magic.

Dame Liones's ring which possesses a quale to change the colors and prevent loss of blood is another example. She gives the ring to Sir Gareth and reveals its magic property:

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Sir, I will lend you a ring, but I would pray you as you love me heartily let me have it again when the tournament is done, for that ring increaseth my beauty much more than it is of himself. And the virtue of my ring is that, that is green it will turn to red, and that is red it will turn in likeness to green, and that is blue it will turn to likeness of white, and that is white it will turn in likeness to blue, and so it will do of all manner of colors. Also who that beareth my ring shall lose no blood, and for great love I will give you this ring (p. 224).

Marvel and witchcraft are inseparable components of *Samak-e-Ayyar*. Mysteries like magic, spell, fairies, miracle plants and imaginary creatures named *davalpa* – a the mythological creature in Persian stories with human body and long strap-like legs – frequently appear in *Smak-e-Ayyar*. As *Morte d'Arthur* begins with Merlin's intervention for the liaison between Uther and Igraine – which leads to the birth of Arthur – *Samak-e-Ayyar* begins with the presence of magic and supernatural. Marzban Shah who is longing for a child to inherit his kingdom consults his vizier Haman. Haman turns to astrolabe and geomancy to discover hidden knowledge with the aid of supernatural powers and introduces Golnar, a widowed princess in Iraq. Golnar gives birth to a son, Khorshid Shah.

The young prince falls in love with a beautiful princess named Mah Pari. She has a magician nurse named Sherwaneh who wants her own son to marry the princess and puts the suitors through the three trials: taming a wild horse, wrestling with an Ethiopian slave and answering the question of a speaking cedar. Faghfour, Mah Pari's father, warns the young Khorshidsah against Sherwaneh's mischief and reminds him the misfortunes of twenty-one princes who were entrapped in her magic. The prince becomes acquainted with a chivalric group named Ayyars and seeks help from Shoghal-e-Pilzour and Samak-e-Ayyar. Sherwaneh is ultimately killed by Samak.

Sayhaneh is another male magician killed by Samak in the process of story. His magic is averted by the help of Mah-dar-Mah, Zalzalshah's daughter, who helps Samak to conquest Sayhaneh. She declares that:

Sayhaneh's magic can set fire to the corps and combust everybody. If there be a hundred thousand troopers, he can burn them all and no magician in the world can dispel it, except me. Because I have learnt it from my nurse (Fattahi, Vol. 2, 2000, p. 111).

Spell is another manifestation of witchcraft and marvel in *Samak-e-Ayyar*. In his 2013 paper on Talisman in *Samake-e-Ayyar*, Azizifar writes:

The main characters like Farrokh Ruz and Khorshid Shah escape the spells by the help of divine charisma. Three times in the story a spell named fire spell is used and in one other occasion (red ensign spell) fire is the main element of spell. Abrogating the spells is done differently; sometimes a witch or sorcerer does it, like Mah-dar-Mah who dispels the fire spell of Sayhaneh. In some cases spiritual figures like a pious man with a simple tool like a handful of soil neutralizes the spell (Sepahdad's fire spell), or guides the character and rescues him (a pious man named Yazadanparast releases Qebt-e Pari). Khezr and Elias blow God's name to vanish the spell, a sacred man gives a manuscript to the hero to get rid of the spell and in some cases counteracting the spell is not mentioned (Azizifar, 2013, pp. 90-91)

Recurrence of spells and spellers gives an absolute fantastic and magical dimension to *Samak-e-Ayyar*. "Qebt-e Pari has spellbound the pagans and paris opposed to her and transformed them into talking jackals and zebras" (Kooban, 2001, 13). Farrokhrooz goes to see the zebras. He too comes under the spell of Qebt-e Pari. "Yazdanparast recites a spell and blows on Roozafzoon, rendering her invisible to the paris and teaches her the way of breaking the spells on her way to Parishahr" (p. 14).

### 2.3. Nobleness and Gentility

*Morte d'Arthur* is a story set in a royal atmosphere. Most of the major characters as well as the minor ones are kings, queens, dukes, and knights. In medieval romances the prince, who is invested with all the traditional heroic qualities of a person of noble birth, is the subject of the quest and Arthur is no exception. The only problematic aspect of his life is his birth. Although his being Uther's legitimate son and rightful heir is under a shadow, Merlin resolves the problem by Excalibur challenge which gives Arthur the title of "the rightful King of England". Discussing on gentility of knights in Malory's work, Hyonjin Kim in a 2000 study asserts that "Malory's concept of gentility looks, at first glance, far more conservative than those of other medieval poets and prose romancers". He quotes Sir Thomas Wyatt:

In the *Morte d'Arthur* itself, the distinction between noble and churl is fundamental. If there are sparks of nobility in a cowherd's son, like Tor, or a kitchen knave, like Gareth, you may be sure he will turn out to be a king's son in disguise. There is much emphasis in lineage (p. 21).

*Samak-e-Ayyar* is similarly set in majestic realms. Although the story is composed to entertain the ordinary people, it relates the adventures and ambitions of kings and princes rather than those of common people. Khorshid Shah is son of Marzban Shah and princess Golnar. He marries a princess named Mah Pari and their son named Farrokhruz marries a princess named Golbuy. Faghfour, Armanshah, Tutishah, Zilzalshah, Shah Qatoos and many other shahs mentioned in the text prove that the main characters are holders of thrones. Samak and other ayyars are exceptions. They don't come from noble families but their chivalric deeds grant them a high and noble position in the story. As Renard states:

Samak is of humble origin, as the narrator reveals in very rare flashbacks that gives this character a personal history. His education and natural resourcefulness make Samak a perfect foil for the prince, whose heroic attributes of nobility, loyalty, generosity, and physical strengths make him at least indirectly heir to Bedouin ideal (Renard, 1999, p. 57).

### 2.4. Chivalric Magnanimity and Brotherly Ethos

Male fellowship is Malory's main interest and the chivalric magnanimity is one of the dominant features of the work. The code of chivalry which developed among the aristocratic French and English knights of the 12<sup>th</sup> century is embodied in an oath known as "the Pentecostal Oath". It governs the knights' interactions with others. According to Malory:

The king established all his knights, and gave them that were of lands not rich, he gave them lands, and charged them never to do outrageousness nor murder, and always to flee treason; also, by no means to be cruel, but to give mercy unto him that asketh mercy, upon pain of forfeiture or their worship and lordship of King Arthur for evermore; and always ladies, damosels, and gentlewomen succour, upon pain of death. Also, that no man take no battles in a wrongful quarrel for no law, nor for no world's goods. Unto this were all the knights sworn of the Table Round, both old and young. And every year were they sworn at the high feast of Pentecost. (Malory, 1936, pp. 89-90)

A class of warriors in Iran and Iraq known as ayyars play a variety of roles in heroic accounts. "W. Hanaway's study of 'Persian Popular Romances' identifies *jawanmardi* (the Persian equivalent of the *futuwwa*) as the code of conduct pursued by these ayyar characters" (Renard, 1999, p. 56). *Jawanmardi* is a code of behavior for members of brotherhood associated with athletes, warriors and ayyars. As stated in Encyclopædia Iranica website:

Although Samak's role is auxiliary to that of the prince, the narrative as a whole is designed to demonstrate the close "brotherly" ethos between the two, based on the code of *javānmardi*. This code contains a set of ethical principles among which bravery and

generosity are highlighted, and which requires any follower to develop and apply different and distinct qualities in his daily behavior.

## 2.5. Masculinity

In Malory's Arthurian chivalric society there is an explicit link between marginal passive femininity and substantial violent masculinity. Uther's deceptive seduction of Igraine, Arthur's incest with his half sister Morgues and his conflicts with his other half sister Morgan le Fay, as well as his marriage to Guinevere are the most salient examples. Igraine, Arthur's mother, is a passive woman in a patriarchal culture. It seems that men around her make her decisions for her, King Uther tricks and rapes her with help of Merlin and then she loses her baby. While the outcome of Uther-Igraine relationship produces the noble Arthur, Arthur-Morgues relationship leads to the birth of the evil Mordred. Uther disguised as Igraine's husband and she was not aware of adultery but Morgues knowingly and willingly participated in the affair and she is finally killed by her own son for betraying the memory of her husband. Morgan le Fay is portrayed as a hateful sorceress who causes problems with her numerous attempts to destroy Arthur. She is stronger than Igraine or Morgues, but she needs to marry a powerful man to complete her abilities. So she marries King Urien.

Women in *Le Morte d'Arthur* are depicted as clichéd stimulants provoking love at first sight. Their images are almost always accompanied by lust and lure, or simplicity and passiveness. They cannot take dominant roles in such a masculine society in which chivalric duties always outweigh marital responsibilities. In his answer to a damosel, Sir Launcelot remarks that he avoids love because it will restrict him and as a "wedded man" he must "leave arms and tournaments, battles, and adventures" (Malory, 1936, p.166). Guinevere, Arthur's Queen, is loved by Sir Launcelot and as Armstrong mentions in a 2003 study:

If we take Lancelot's assertion to be an honest one (and at this point in the narrative, such would seem to be the case), then Guinevere is an appropriate object of devotion for him: distant and unattainable, she will not distract him from his knightly endeavors; yet, as the highest ranking lady of the land, it is only fitting that the greatest knight should seek out adventures in order to win her favor (p. 102).

A woman is not loved because she is worthy of being loved; she is loved because the love is needed to form and complete the dominant masculinity of knights. Anna Caughey in her essay states mentions two ways for knights of Arthur's court ways to achieve successful masculinity are to have adoration. "a) Participating in violent conflict with other knights, and b) being the subject of female love and/or the admiring female gaze. Both of these methods are carried to the extreme by Launcelot" (Clark & McClune, 2011, p. 163).

In *Samak-e-Ayyar* women don't appear as active and axial characters. The first group of women are those beautiful princesses demanded for royal marriages and give birth to the successors of throne. Golnar, Mah Pari, and Golbuy are such cases. The women of second group have a superior ability which is magic and talisman, like Sherwaneh or Mah-dar-Mah. In the third group are the most active female characters; the ordinary women who help the warriors with their intelligence and patience, Roozafzoon, Sorkhvard, Roohafza, Samaneh, and Abandokht for instance, but their appearance is brief and subsidiary.

Masculine dominance in *Samak-e-Ayyar* is apparent in love relationships. While the female beloveds are loyal, the male lovers go around and fall in love with other beautiful ladies. Karami and Hessampour in their 2005 paper give examples of such cases:



Mah Pari dies when she is giving birth to her son. After her death Khorshid Shah falls in love with Abandokht, and Abandokht bears many difficulties for this love and still stays loyal. However, Khorshid Shah marries other women like Mah-dar-Mah and Jihan-Afroz as well. And Farrokh Ruz who considers himself as the lover of Golbuy, falls in love with Chogol Mah, Gitinomay, Sherwan, and Mardandokht and he marries them (p. 134).

As in *Morte d'Arthur* King Arthur and his knights are at the heart of story and the focus is on masculine activities of ruling, fighting, chivalry, and questing, the same masculine enterprises are emphasized in *Samak-e-Ayyar*. Shoghal-e-Pilzour, and Samak are men of great valor and heroism and meanwhile they are symbols of a male-dominant community. The male characters take active roles; the kings and ayyars are present in battlefields or rescue scenes but the majority of female characters are queens or princesses depicted in palaces or taken as captives.

### 3. CONCLUSION

A comparative study of *Morte d'Arthur* and *Samak-e-Ayyar* suggests that despite their being composed in different geographical locations and historical periods, the two works project almost the same concerns of different nations. Both stories have been entreating people for centuries and they have found their ways into the collective memory of their audiences. The story of Arthur and his knights in Malory's work has been reshaped consistently in the course of history and the *Samak-e-Ayyar* as transcribed by Framarz ibn Khodadad, has gone under a similar process and storytellers of different periods have reformed it in their presentations. Both *Morte d'Arthur* and *Samak-e-Ayyar* relate fortunes, misfortunes, and adventures of noble characters in a masculine dominant society and in a fairy-like world of magic and fantasy. The valor and chivalric deeds of warriors is as important as their loyalty and brotherhood codes.

The common elements of romance in these two works are not limited to the ones mentioned in this paper. A more scrutinized research can pinpoint a wider range of similarity and study other characteristics of these works such as the concept of quest, courtly love, chivalrous acts, folklore motifs, and characterization. While both works are well-known and well-studied creations of English and Persian literature, a comparative study can shed more light upon their less introduced aspects and this calls for further studies.

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