An Intellectual Affinity Between Hašt Ketāb (Eight Books) by Sepehri and Fruits of the Earth by Gide

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ABSTRACT

Comparative study of literature across nations is an important part of literary research. In this regard, making a comparison between masterpieces and popular works is of special importance because such studies can reflect human mute eloquence and pave the way for global unity and the union of hearts. Using a descriptive, analytic, and comparative method, the present study aims to make a comparison between Fruits of the Earth by Andre Gide and Hašt Ketāb (Eight Books) by Sohrāb Sepehri as two seminal works that have aroused the interest of the audiences and received their approval. Gide and Sephri have a close affinity for highlighting human concerns. Their common tastes and interests including purity, naturalism, love for travel, satirical writing, scriptural tone, and ecstatic and melancholic reflections have made their resemblance more conspicuous, insomuch that the predominant ideology in Hašt Ketāb and Fruits of the Earth, apart from some trivial nuances, is identical. The significance of observation, rejecting preference, detachment, and living in the present moment (carpe diem) are the gist of the above-mentioned books, implying an affinity between Gide’s and Sepehri’s ideas.

KEYWORDS

Comparative literature; persian and french literature; fruits of the earth; hašt ketāb (eight books); sohrāb sepehri

1 Introduction

Andre Paul Guillaume Gide, a French author who was born in Paris in 1869, received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1947 and passed away in 1951. He could publish invaluable books during more than 50 years of literary activity. Some of his most significant books include Fruits of the Earth (1897), The Immoralist (1902), The Pastoral Symphony (1919), Strait Is the Gate (1909), If It Die (1920), Corydon (1924), The Counterfeitors (1925), Travels in the Congo (1927), Return from Chad (1928), and Return from the U.S.S.R. (1936) that mostly have been translated into Persian. This article aims to focus on Fruits of the Earth written in 1897 after his two-year travel to Tunisia, Algeria, and North Africa. This book is a relic of that journey and his recovery from a physical illness that had been an incentive for his travel. His spiritual transformation and exuberance after the recovery from illness inspired him to write this lyrical prose including eight chapters, each named a book by the author. Hence this book per se involves eight books plus “Hymn as Conclusion” and “Envoy” at the end.
Then in 1935, Gide wrote four more books (chapters) named “Later Fruits of the Earth” that were in fact, complementary to Fruits of the Earth. Later Fruits of the Earth that is the result of the author’s intellectual maturity and distance from youthful passion and cheerfulness seems more contemplative and thought-provoking. It seems that in Later Fruits of the Earth, contrary to Fruits of the Earth, the author’s philosophical-mystical perspective prevails over his mystical-philosophical perspective, hence the fervor, passion, intimacy, and simplicity of the text is lessened. Fruits of the Earth, like the Golestān-e Sa’di, is grouped under eight chapters that can be renamed according to its thematic content as: Book I: Baḵt-e Ḵāb-Ālud-e Mā Bidār Khād Šod Magar (Our Sleep-Stained Fortune Will, Perchance, Become Vigilant); Book II: Fruits; Book III: Desire and Longing; Book IV: Love and Youth; Book V: A Walk in the Garden and Meadow; Book VI: Ten Commandments; Book VII: Waiting for the Dawn; Book VIII: ... Sa’di Towbe Kard az Pārsāii (... Sa’di Repented of Piety) (Hadidi 1994: 352).

Sohrāb Sepehri is a notable contemporary poet and painter. He was born in Kāšān on October 7th, 1928 and passed away on April 21st, 1980. His resting place is in Mašhad-e Ardehāl in Kāšān. He was brought up in an artistic and literary family. His maternal family traced its roots back to Mohammad Taqī Khān Sepehri (Death:1880), the author of Nāseḵ al-Tawāriḵ that is a general history of the world from the creation of the Prophet Adam until the author’s time. He completed his elementary and secondary school in Kāšān and has written the memories of those years in his book Otaq-e Ābi (The Blue Room), especially in its second chapter named “Our Painting Teacher” (p. 26–44) through his sweet and attractive language and of course economy of words. His attachment to poetry, calligraphy, painting as well as tendency to privacy and solitude are among the notable points inferred from those memories. In that book, his critical outlook on the teaching methods back then implies that, despite his reticence and seclusion, he still had a meticulous look at the affairs and events in his surroundings (Sepehri, 2004, 40). Serving at some short-termed governmental jobs up until 1961, traveling abroad, following poetry and painting seriously, learning French and English, and studying the world literature in English and French are among his outstanding activities until the end of his life. Sepehri’s poetic activity started in 1947 when he published his first book of classical poetry, Dar Kenār-e Čaman Yā Ārāmgāh-e ‘Ešq (Along the Grass or Love’s Resting Place) and continued for thirty years up until 1977 when he published his new poetry collection Mā hič, Mā Negāh (We Nothing but Gaze). His poetry collections include Marg-e Rang (The Death of Color) (1951), Zendegi-ē Kābhā (The Life of Dreams) (1953), Āvār-e Āftāb (The Downpour of Sunshine) (1958), Šarq-e Anduh (East of Sorrow) (1961), Sedāy-e Pāy-e Āb (The Sound of Water’s Footsteps) (1965), Mosāfer (Traveler) (1966), Hajm-e Sabz (The Expanse of Green) (1967), and Mā hič, Mā Negāh (We Nothing but Gaze) (1977) that were published in 1976 in one volume entitled Hašt Ketāb (Eight Books). The name of this book, in addition to recalling the eight chapters of the Golestān-e Sa’di, reminds us of the eight books in Gide’s Fruits of the Earth. Sepehri’s poetic reputation in 1960s is owed to his later books Sedāy-e Pāy-e Āb (The Sound of Water’s Footstep), Mosāfer (Traveler), and Hajm-e Sabz (The Expanse of Green). Shifting from classical into modern Nimāi poetry, inclination from western into eastern culture and literature, uncertainty between introversion and extroversion and finally arriving at an artistic mixture of the East and the West as well as the inner and outer world, and
presenting a global image of humanity at the climax of his poetic period are among the outstanding themes in Sepehri’s poetry.

1.1 Literature review

Andre Gide was introduced in Iran in 1921, and since then, his translated books have gained favor with the Persian readers. Hasan Honarmandi, Parviz Daryuš, Jalāl Āl-e Ahmad, Sirus Zakā’, and Mahasti Bahreyni have translated different editions of Fruits of the Earth. A remarkable characteristic in the works of Gide is having a bond with eastern especially Persian literature. Hasan Honarmandi has dealt with this issue in his book that was his Ph.D. dissertation thesis entitled “Andre Gide and Persian Literature” in which he has discussed the influence of Ḵayyām, Ḥāfez, Hezār-o-Yek šab (One Thousand Nights and One Night), Sa’di, Molanā, Attār, Mānī, Manučehri, and Ferdowsi on Gide as well as Persian contemporary poets’ and authors’ regard for Gide’s works. Honarmandi has also introduced research studies on the relationship between Gide and Persian literature in page 23 of his book; however, he has not mentioned anything about Sohrāb’s regard for Gide and Fruits of the Earth. In addition to the current translations, Honarmandi’s book, and the references he introduced, there is another article entitled “The Reflection of the Ruba’iyāt of Omar Ḵayyām in Fruits of the Earth by Andre Gide” written by Hasan Emāmi, Ebrāhim Mohammadi, and Maliheh Zārei published in the Journal of Research in Contemporary World Literature (Issue 63) in 2001 that discusses the common motifs between the works of Ḵayyām and Gide. Moreover, another article entitled “A Study of the Mystical Concepts in The Terrestrial Nutrients of André Gide and Ḥāfez’s Ġazaliyāt” was published by Ma’sumeh Zandi in Erfāniyāt dar Adab-e Farsi Persian Quarterly (Issue 27) in 2016 that dealt with the comparative analysis of common mystical themes between the two above books. However, no research study has yet been published on the commonalities between Gide’s works and Persian contemporary literature, apart from the 10th chapter of the book by Hasan Honarmandi. Although Honarmandi has introduced Sohrāb as a person who encouraged him to research about Gide’s works, he has not mentioned anything about the relationship between their works. Therefore, as far as the author of this article has searched in the current literature and even the monographs about Sohrāb and his poetry, no research study has yet been published on the intellectual affinity between Gide and Sepehri.

1.2 Methodology and research questions

Using descriptive, analytical, and comparative method, the present article makes a comparison between Ḵašt Ketāb (Eight Books) by Sohrāb Sepehri and Fruits of the Earth by Andre Gide. In this regard, it is attempted to answer the following research questions: 1. What are the common ideas between Gide and Sepehri? 2. What factors are the cause of commonality between their ideas?
2 Discussion

Many literary critics have indicated that Sohrāb’s ideas and views trace back to the books and thoughts of the Great men in the world culture and literature. The Poems of Sohrāb Sepehri are associated with the ideas of Buddha (480–400 BC), Lao Tzu (4th-6th BC), Emerson (1803–1882), Walt Whitman (1819–1892), Krishna (1896–1986) and many other thinkers in the world such that the symbols in his poetry account for the integration of the world culture and literature (Nur Baḵš 1997: 42). Intermingling between eastern and western culture and literature is a point highlighted in Fruits of the Earth too so it is considered as a common concern for both Sepehri and Gide.

French literature has a substantial portion in the studies of Sepehri. He has referred to several French books in the foot note of his book Otāq-e Ābi (The Blue Room) (pp. 48, 49, 50, 54, & 60) and has mentioned the name of some important figures in French literature such as Arthur Rimbaud (1854–1891) and Gerard de Nerval in that book. Some circumstances such as his enrolment in a lithography course at the School of Fine Arts in Paris and staying there for some months, deep acquaintance with French language (Ābedi 2000: 39), attempting to translate some of his poems into French (Ābedi 2000: 35), paying attention to French art and literature during his study years in the School of Fine Arts (after 1948), and the noble place of art and literature in France, all in all, made him interested in French art and literature. There is some evidence in the poetry of Sepehri and also contemporary research indicating his regard for the works of Gide that were introduced to Iran after 1921. At the end of his book “Andre Gide and Persian Literature”, Hasan Honarmandi presents a list of poets and authors who made him interested in Gide’s books and encouraged him to introduce and translate the works of this French author. In that list there is the name of Sohrāb Seperi as an “eminent poet and painter” (Honarmandi 1970: 336). Translation of Fruits of the Earth and Later Fruits of the Earth into Persian in 1956, awarding the Nobel Prize in Literature to Gide in 1947 which was coincidental with the publication of the first book of Sepehri in Iran, Gide’s international reputation, and more importantly the intellectual affinity between Gide and Sepehri are the circumstances that have made the comparative analysis of their works inevitable. The cosmopolitan dimensions of their books pave the ground for their intellectual affinity, some evidences of which are discussed in the following.

2.1 Common tastes and interests between Gide and Sepehri

Undoubtedly, common and similar tastes and interests can connect thoughts and ideas of the individuals despite time, place, and religious discrepancies and it can give a parallel manifestation and brilliance to their intellectual and artistic and literary works. Purity, naturalism, and love for travel are some points that pave the way for intellectual commonality between Gide and Sepehri attracting the attention of the audience.

The purity that is noticed in the life and works of Sepehri and Gide signifies avoidance of formality and artificiality in order to communicate with people without ceremony, regardless of their social class or any other feature that builds walls between people and differentiates them. Yet the increasing wealth and social gap today has cast boundary between people and brought numerous challenges about. Purity means this statement by Gide: “I wrote this book at a time when our literature was terribly imbued with a close
and artificial atmosphere, and it seemed to me urgent that it should be brought down to
two once more and step again with bare feet simply on the common ground.” (Gide
1897: 9) Hence he writes: “I left off my town clothes; they forced me to be too
respectable.” (Gide 1897: 95) He expresses his worry: “I was afraid my book could only
find a welcome from the strong.” (Gide 1897: 225) What is in the present world a pretext
for enmity is recognized by him as a driving force behind love: “It is because you differ
from me that I love you.” (Gide 1897: 166) In another statement that might be under
the influence of communist beliefs he says: “How I wish I could raze all walls; bring down
before you all barriers on which a jealous ownership has written: No admittance! Private
property!” (Gide 1897: 254) He knows happiness the result of the fervor and enthusiasm
of love so with honor, he says: “My happiness is made of fervor. Through the medium of
all things without distinction, I have passionately worshiped.” (Gide 1897: 74) Thus,
purity from the perspective of Gide corresponds to the perception of Persian mystics:
“Our master said that Sufism is two things: looking at one direction and living one way.”
(Mihani 1997: 285)

The description of Mošeq Kāšāni who was a close friend of Sepehri and his colleague
at Kāšān’s office of education will suffice to show the purity and genuineness in the
character of Sohrāb. He narrates that in their visits to rural schools, Sepehri was visibly
affected by the very pitiful state of the villagers such that he would start to weep
involuntarily (Ābedi 2000: 25). Sepehri’s purity was his main source of inspiration in
hunting poetic themes. His description of village and keen interest in the sincere life of
villagers throughout his poems get inspiration from his purity; and how passionately he
has depicted their life:

“What clarity and purity people upstream must enjoy!/May their springs always be in
full flow, their cows full of milk!/I have not seen their village; God’s footsteps must be by
their mud walls.” (Sepehri 2013: 117) Sepehri’s purity openly invites the reader to the
privacy of his personal and family life. Sādeh Rang (Simple Color) and
Nedāy-e Āḡāz (Primeval Call) are examples of this type of poetry in his works. It is his
purity, honesty, and humanitarianism that does not like muddying the water: “Let’s not
muddy the water/Maybe it flows by a foot of a silver poplar, to wash away the sadness of
heart/ Maybe the hand of a dervish is dipping his dry bread in it.” (Sepehri 2013: 117)
What a close affinity exists between this perspective and the ideas of Gide: “Truly, I do
not want a happiness that springs from wretchedness. Riches that leave another poor I do
not want. If my clothes are stripped from others, I will go naked. Oh! Lord Christ! Your
table is open to all, and what makes the beauty of your banquet is that all are invited to it.”
(Gide 1897, pp. 196–197) By representing a world replete with love and free from
violence, Sepehri and Gide answer to the need of world society and hence they both
are popular. Promulgating purity and reviving the innate and natural qualities of human
being are the slogans of both of them: “Nathaniel! You should only speak of God
naturally.” (Gide 1897: 38) “Raise the curtains/Let feelings have an airing/Let maturity
spend a night under whatever bush it chooses/Let instinct go out and play/ Take off its
shoes and following the season, fly from flower to flower/Allow loneliness to sing a song/
Write something/Go to street/Let us be plain and simple/Plain and simple, whether at the
till of a bank or under a tree.” (Sepehri 2013: 92).

Naturalism and an accurate description of nature are common interests between
Sepehri and Gide. They both can see God everywhere in nature. Therefore, naturalism
in the perspective of Sohrāb and Gide is a straightforward way to know God. Such a perspective associates their views to the ideas in pantheism as a comprehensible belief for every human, not just as a philosophical and complicated theory related to Ibn Arabi! On the other hand, this approach seeks to revive a time period in which there was no distance between God and nature: “In the age of faith, there was the manifestation of truth everywhere. Renaissance cast distance between God and nature and rational beauty gained favor.” (Sepehri, 2004:63) Burrowing into God through nature called earthy mysticism is a favorite ideology for human today and it is advocated by Sepehri and Gide as well. Nature in their view is a temple in which you can find God: “Do not try, Nathaniel, to find God here or there but everywhere. Every creature points to God, none reveals Him.” (Gide 1897: 17) “And a God who is close by/Among scented stocks, at the foot of that tall pine tree, in the awareness of water, in the laws of the plant world.” (Sepehri 2013: 78) These poems of Sepehri truly recall the following sentences by Gide in *Fruits of the Earth*: “So the smallest bud, as it developed, explains me to myself better than all the ratiocinations of theologian.” (Gide 1897: 208) Gide hence recognizes natural history more profitable than the history of mankind (Gide and Guillaume 1897: 147). For Gide and Sepehri, nature not only unlocks the threshold to God but also facilitates the way of living, prosperity, happiness, pleasure, love, and whatever makes life more pleasant for human: “I have not seen enmity between two pine trees/I haven’t seen a willow tree sell its shade to the ground/An elm tree offers its branches to ravens free of charge/Wherever there is a leaf, my fervor unfolds (Sepehri 2013: 87). It is through the illumination of such a relationship in natural elements that the meaning of pleasure is perceived: “It is towards pleasure that all nature’s efforts tend. It is pleasure that makes the blades of grass grow, the bud develop, and the flower bloom. It is pleasure that opens the corolla to the sunbeams’ kisses, invites every living thing to espousals, sends the obtuse larva to its nymphosis and from the prison of its chrysalis makes the butterfly escape. With pleasure for a guide all things aspire to greater thriving, to increased consciousness, to progress.” (Gide 1897: 221) Nature is considered as a guideline for human felicity and happiness: “That man is born for happiness, is what all nature teaches.” (Gide 1897: 171); and it calls human for joy and cheerfulness: “Each animal is nothing but a parcel of joy.” (Gide and Guillaume 1897: 171) Therefore, nature and world lead us to the true path and teach us the way of better life as Sohrāb says: “Yes/As long as poppies bloom, life must be lived.” (Sepehri 2013: 20). Or he says: “Rise to the heights of affection on the wet feet of rain/Open the doors toward people, light, greenery and insects/Our work, maybe, is this:/That between the lotus flower and the century/pursue the song of Truth.” (Sepehri 2013: 93) Although nature with its colorful paintings is depicted in the works of Gide and Sepehri and this quality connotes their common tastes, their commonality in highlighting some elements in nature makes the proximity of their tastes more noticeable. For instance, dawn and daybreak, pomegranate, apple, lotus flower, and the sand receiving footprints of visiting creatures have more attraction to Gide and Sepehri than other things in nature. Reflection on nature and contemplation on the relationship between natural creatures is a way for a virtuous existence sought by Gide and Sepehri.

Love for travel is another common characteristic between Gide and Sepehri. Their meticulous look and detailed information about their travel destinations and scenery are noteworthy. Gide’s *Fruits of the Earth* is the result of his travel to North Africa, and his
lively descriptions of various places out there make his book much more attractive. Likewise, Sepehri’s poetry collection *Mosāfer* (Traveler) is the result of his travel to the north of Iran. During their narrations of the travel, Gide and Sepehri are not content with the mere description of what they see in their journey, but rather share their abundant previous readings with the reader too. Therefore, the mention of allusions, myths, superstitions, and historical points by the authors challenge the readers and stimulate them for further reading. This quality is more evident in *Fruits of the Earth* as it is prose and similar to the genre of travel literature.

In addition to the above-mentioned points, some other features in their works such as bitter and sharp satire, scriptural tone, paying attention to the different aspects in life and offering varied definitions for that, reflection on death, and paying regard for human suffering and happiness indicate to the common tastes between the two authors.

### 2.2 Common ideas between Gide and Sepehri

Intellectual commonalities between Gide and Sepehri are not limited to few subjects; however, some of the most notable ones are stated here. The attractiveness and popularity of their works among the audience is substantially attributed to their ideas as they can reflect human concerns in the world today with a spectacular manifestation and brilliance through the attractive prose of Gide and sincere poetry of Sohrāb. The significance of observation, rejection of preference, abnegation and detachment, and living in the present moment are among their most significant ideas.

#### 2.2.1 The significance of observation

The significance of observation in *Fruits of the Earth* and *Hašt Ketāb* is the inheritance of the world culture and literature. Gide and Sepehri have not been innovative in introducing this idea but have had a major role in highlighting that. Gide not only has made use of the background of this thought in western and French literature but also has discerned the significance of “observation” through his studies about eastern and Persian literature. Descartes who openly regarded observation as an incentive to break out of habitual perception of things might be the source of inspiration for Gide. He held observation as a motivation to criticize traditions and an introduction to innovation and novelty (Descartes 2016, 188, 192, 193, 200 & 227). Gide’s attention to Descartes can be perceived from his criticism to Descartes’ famous quote in his treatise “Discourse on the Method” (je pense donc je suis: I think, therefore I am) (Descartes 2016: 203): “I think that I am. I believe that I am. I feel that I am. Now of these three prepositions, the last seems to me the truest.” (Gide 1897: 203) However, the difference between Gide and Descartes lies in their different way of expressing ideas. Descartes says: “I do not know whether I ought to tell you about the first meditations I engaged in there for they are so metaphysical and so out of the ordinary that perhaps they will not be to everyone’s liking.” (Descartes 2016: 18) Many ideas of Gide are organized in association with the importance of “observation”. His most important views involve observation and how we observe things, the role of sensation in observation, the invalidity of dream, observation as an introduction to thinking, observation as a motivation to break out of habitual perceptions and criticize traditions, and finally observation as a source for novelty and invention. Gide begins Book VI with a quotation from Goethe’s *Faust (II)*: “Zum sehen geboren/Zum schauen
bestellt (Born to see, meant to look).” (Gide 1897: 110) It seems that Gide highlights this thought by making a reference to the world literature. In his intellectual system, deep observation is of importance. Thus he writes: “Don’t be satisfied with gazing; observe.” (Gide 1897: 251) Seeing everything, not staying, and giving importance to the way we observe things are among the points emphasized by Gide when talking about how we should see: “Nathaniel, look at everything as you pass on your way, but stay nowhere. Remember that it is only God who is not transitory. Let the importance lie in your look, not in the thing you look at.” (Gide 1897: 18) In his view, emphasis on observation is as important as emphasis on the sensation: “It is not enough for me to read that the sand on the seashore is soft. My bare feet must feel it. I have no use for knowledge that has not been preceded by a sensation.” (Gide 1897: 30) “And I only care for a dream in so far as I believe it a reality. For the best sleep is not worth the moment of awakening.” (Gide 1897: 120)

What makes observation important for Gide is that it is an introduction to thinking and of course he means observation by one’s own eyes and not the others’. Hence he says: “Thinking is a heavy burden.” (Gide 1897: 41) This kind of observation and thinking is creative. Gide believes that human should always look forward to novelty: “I held that every new thing should always find the whole of us wholly available.” (Gide 1897: 65) it is truly by highlighting the importance of observation that we can see all aspects of the world and human being and therefore enjoy all those variations. Novelty hence has an important place in Gide’s perspective: “I can hardly explain to you, Nathaniel, this exasperated desire I had for novelty.” (Gide 1897: 121)

It is in honor of novelty that he even does not favor adherence to his own writings and warns human against any repetition (Gide and Guillaume 1897: 163). Seeing in a good way, in Gide’s view, paves the way for future inventions demanding an accurate look at things taken for granted in daily life: “The most important inventions still remain to be discovered. They will come by the simple shedding of a fresh light, the simplest recognition of plain facts; for all the secrets of nature lie open to us and strike our eyes every day without our noticing them . . . To learn to use our eyes, that is what is wanted. But we live without looking.” (Gide 1897: 189) Breaking out of daily routines and noticing things taken for granted as a result of repetition are the concerns highlighted by Sohrāb in his definition of life: “Life may not vanish from our mind, like something on the habit self/ . . . Life is washing a plate/Life is finding a ten-shâhi coin in the street gutter.” (Sepehri 1999: 38).

After showing the significance of observation, Gide advises his readers: “Do not let yourself be imposed on.” (Gide 1897: 248) This way of thinking escapes habit and is also critical of traditions: “Look at the winged seeds of the plane or the sycamore flying off as if they understood that the paternal shade can offer them nothing but a dwindling and atrophied existence.” (Gide and Guillaume 1897: 252)

The significance of observation and washing away the color of habits is a point that is recognized by Šamisâ as a component in Sohrâb’s intellectual system throughout his notable works (Šamisâ 1993: 13). Though uncertain, he thinks this sort of observation that traces back to Islamic-Persian mysticism has an affinity with the philosophy of Krishnamurti (Šamisâ 1993: 14). Of course with respect to what Sohrâb says about Chinese and Indian myths and beliefs in the first part of his book Otāq-e Ābi (Blue Room) and his mention of Krishnamurti in the marginal notes of that book, it is likely that he has been under the influence of Krishnamurti. However, the genealogy of ideas is not the focus of this study; but rather this article aims to discuss the similarity of ideas across
different nations, and the importance of observation can be an evidence for that. To be honest, some of the most notable poems of Sohrāb are those that focus on the importance of observation: “I opened the doors to your reflections/I threw every piece of my gaze somewhere/Filled the existence with gaze.” (Sepehri 1995: 256) Wisdom, feeling, and gaze are the companions and partners in Sepehri’s intellectual system: “Our garden was on the shadow side of wisdom/Our garden was where feelings and green grass intertwined/Our garden was where a look, a cage, and a mirror met.” (Sepehri 2013: 80) Seizing from every moment its unique novelty, breaking out of habitual perception of things, and giving importance to sensation are among the themes arising from the importance of observation in Sepehri’s poetry. Relying on observation, he says: “My soul flows in the fresh direction of things.” (Sepehri 1995: 287) Invitation to see otherwise and unification with what is seen rather than accepting the mediators are the gist of Sepehri’s words: “Eyes must be washed, to see things otherwise/Words must be washed/A word must be the wind itself, must be the rain itself” (Sepehri 1995: 292) In his intellectual system, there is no distance between a name and a named one: “Inside the word morning/Morning will break (Sepehri 2013: 21) Sohrāb who emphasizes on the importance of observation, like Gide, does not favor retrospection and dwelling on the history: “In the past is the fatigue of history/In the past, memories of waves cast cold shells of silence upon the shore” (Sepehri 2013: 91) And lastly, it should be said that Sepehri’s observation is not cold and lifeless, but rather he is in favor of sentimental observation: “The best thing is to come upon a gaze that is still moist with love’s advent.” (Sepehri 1995: 372) We have not exaggerated if we say that the origin of a major part of novelty by Gide and Sepehri is attributed to the importance of “observation”. Therefore, in introducing the rest of their common thoughts, the significance of “observation” cannot be ignored. Thus, after common tastes and interests, what paves the way for their intellectual affinity at the most, is their regard for “observation”. This perception of observation in the view of Sohrāb has depicted such an image in his poems: “In the hand of every 10-year-old child in the city a bough of knowledge lies/The townsfolk look at a mud wall/As if they look at a flame, a tender dream.” (Sepehri 1995: 364)

2.2.2 Rejection of preference
Another idea that associates Gide and Sepehri together is that they both avoid preference and would rather enjoy everything and everyone. This thought has a long history in Persian especially mystical literature. “The world is as curl, mole, down, and brow/For everything in its own place is beautiful” (Šabestari 1880: 71)

Gide’s romantic look at the world makes preference burdensome and terrifying for him (Gide 1897: 17). He thinks happiness is made of fervor and passionate love to all things without distinction (Gide 1897: 74). Thus, he represents such an image of himself: “I welcomed whatever came. My soul was the inn standing open at the cross-road.” (Gide 1897: 66) He does not favor preference because it entails rejecting other things and choosing only one thing and that there is preference and injustice in every choice (Gide and Guillaume 1897: 70). He writes about the injustice in preference: “A preference seemed to me an injustice; wishing to belong to all men, I would not give myself to anyone.” (Gide 1897: 70)

In his book Oṭāq-e Ābi (The Blue Room), Sepehri indicates to the origin of this thought in the West, China, and Japan. In his conversation with the teacher, he makes
a comparison between the East and West: “Teacher says: In our canvas, for everything there is not a uniform place and equal status. And Sohrāb answers: In our canvas, there is. In the canvas of us, the Orientals. A Westerner assesses; chooses. In preferential look, there is sacrificing and overlooking. Western perspective is not beneficent. It is reserved and conceited. It demands a special place.” (Sepehri, 2004, 56) Then in introducing the origin of this thought in the eastern and western philosophy, he continues: “Dante also composes in Convivo (The Banquet): Everything in itself merits love and nothing hatred”. Eckhart also denotes: “One who assumes God is more respectable in one thing than another is a wild one.” A Japanese sees the same thing behind the temporariness of a lotus flower and the permanence of a pine tree: The blossoms of a lotus flower stay open for an hour but they are not inherently different from a pine tree which lasts 1000 years”. A Chinese sees the whole world alike as Chuang Tzu has taught him that the essence uniformly exists in the being of an ant, a blade of grass, and a piece of pottery as well. Lao Tzu has taught him to see the tiny and the huge and the more and the less alike.” (Sepehri, 2004, 57) He admires this quality in the “portrait miniature painter” too: “In the view of our portrait painter, there is no “commonplace reality”. In his perception, the statement that “every artistic expression entails a basic and authoritarian preference of one element to the detriment of other elements” is obscure. He has nothing to do with written discrimination.” (Sepehri, 2004, 59) Then, he tells about Durer who was a German painter and printmaker (1427–1528): “Among the Westerners, Durer also looks at everything alike. He paints a butterfly with as much delicacy as he paints a piece of stone or the bark of a tree or a bird.” (Sepehri, 2004, 59). Due to the nature of poetry, Sohrāb cannot openly speak about his rejection of preference; however, there are different evidences in his poetry that imply he looks at the events alike and attempts to bring closeness among issues by neglecting the differences: “The freshness of faces wilted in the air of dichotomy/Let us come leave the shadow lights.” (Sepehri 1995: 172) It is with such a broad perspective that preference and preferential look at religions and denominations fade away in the poems of Sohrāb, like Islamic-Iranian mystics, so he respectfully speaks about living amid all religions and divine books, regardless of any differentiation: “The Qur’an above my head, my pillow the New Testament, my bed the Hebrew Bible, my undergarment the Avesta, I dream: A Buddha in the water lotus.” (Sepehri 1995: 238) He abhors the boundaries formed by preference: “Everywhere boundary, everywhere name/Put pearls of time and place together onto a shapeless thread/May everything be joined together, may no boundary be remained, no name.” (Sepehri 1995: 260) He wishes to remove boundaries and eradicate the concept of nostalgia (Ḡorbat) to create a homeland as extensive as the whole world: “Wherever I am, let me be/The sky is mine/Window, thought, air, love, the earth, are all mine/What matters/If sometimes appear/The mushrooms of nostalgia?” (Sepehri 1995: 291) Especially following the second World War that was human amnesia in the land of differences, what peculiar tranquility this thought bestows to human being! For Gide, it brings the Nobel Prize, and for Sohrāb, penetration into the heart and mentality of the audience. Undoubtedly, rejection of preference that is a recurrent theme in the works of Gide and Sohrāb is the result of washing the eyes (seeing otherwise) and observing at the world and its inhabitants lovingly: “I wonder/Why they say: The horse is a noble animal, the dove is beautiful/But why is there no vulture in anyone’s cage?/Why a clover is inferior to a red tulip?/Eyes must be washed, to see things otherwise.” (Sepehri 1995: 291)
Rejection of preference denotes ignoring limitations and differences, that is to say a sense of liberty that can certainly be a refuge for human being today in the struggle of discriminations.

2.2.3 Detachment and abnegation

There is a close affinity between Gide and Sepehri in that they both accept the principles of abnegation and detachment; however, there are differences between them regarding evidences, philosophy, and driving forces behind this tendency. Gide innately and free from any certain theological doctrine admires the principle of detachment, for the purpose of honoring human and getting more enjoyment from world pleasures, and of course with the spice of communism toward which he was inclined when writing Fruits of the Earth. However, detachment is as an inheritance from Persian-Islamic philosophy and mysticism for Sohrāb. In another words, his esteem for spiritual detachment through his poems reflects the continuum of this thought in Persian-Islamic culture and literature, although by intermingling the past detachment with present tastes, he accomplished to attract the audiences who seek novelty too. In addition to their adherence to the principle of detachment that interrelates Gide with Sepehri, they also have commonality in binding this virtue and human life as well as the argument of detachment within the context of life.

Gide's preoccupation with detachment is such that he calls his book an admiration for this very virtue as a boundless opportunity for happiness, self-denial, and freedom: “As for me, when I reopen it, what strikes me even more is the apology I find in it of a life stripped to bareness. (Gide and Guillaume 1897: 10) With a perspective that conveys an impression of communism, he has aversion for whatever that is “your” tie and possession: “When your surroundings have taken on your likeliness, or you yourself have grown like your surroundings, they have ceased to profit you. You must leave them. There is no greater danger for you than your own family, your own room, your own past.” (Gide and Guillaume 1897: 42) He acknowledges giving up ownership and self-denial as the initiation of virtue: “It is abnegation that brings all virtues to perfection... The thought of self is a hindrance to self.” (Gide and Guillaume 1897: 185) His outlook on possession is not restricted to the narrow circle of communist ideology, but rather with a perspective that is not alien to the mystical view, he interprets possessiveness as giving up pursuit. Thus, between possession that brings serenity and pursuit that motivates endeavor, he chooses the latter: “Possession seemed to me less precious than pursuit and more and more I came to prefer thirst itself to the quenching of it, the promise to the reality of pleasures, and to satisfaction the infinite enlargement of love.” (Gide 1897: 223) Gide's conception of this thought truly and spontaneously revives the memory of Jalâluddin Rumi and his ideas, hence it relates Gide to Sohrâb who has learned detachment from mysticism and Jalâluddin Rumi: “Do not seek the water, (but) get thirst/So that the water may gush forth from above and below” (Rumi 1982, 3/3212)

In the ideas of Gide, there is a significant relationship between detachment and rejection of preference. He assumes attachment, like preference, may deprive us from many other things to which we did not feel attached and it also entails ignoring newness and novelty (Gide 1897: 63). Therefore, detachment in the perspective of Gide is an opportunity to make use of everything, yet this outlook is not so noticeable in Sohrâb. Gide recognizes attachment as rejecting newness and novelty and a hindrance to them,
while they are more precious to him than any other spiritual concept (Gide, 1945, 65). He thinks novelty accompanies fervor, passion, and zeal that not only ensures human motion and saves him from the fatigue of immobility but also liberates him from dwelling on the past: “I sold absolutely everything, being determined to have no personal possession on this earth, not the smallest relic of the past.” (Gide 1897: 71) Abnegation and detachment have evident and irrefutable representations in the life of Sepehri. He is definitely notable in his personal life by this virtue. Contrary to Gide who is worried about intermingling with worldly attachments, Sohrab perceives himself alone: “I must also remember that I am alone/Above loneliness hangs the moon.” (Sepehri 2013: 120) He seeks for the genesis of this loneliness in religious mythology and regards it as a result of original sin: “And she did not think at all/That in the midst of the affliction of enunciation of the doors/For eating an apple/How lonely we would be.” (Sepehri 1995: 401) A sin that leads to the descent of mankind and his separation from God: “We were separated from the summit/I descended and became a servant/You ascended, and became God.” (Sepehri 1995: 193) This outlook, tranquil and carefree, with a suitcase filled with loneliness continually flees from the plights of life to join the infinite breadth of liberation: “Tonight I must take a suitcase/The size of my shirt of solitude/And travel in a direction/Where epic trees can be seen/Towards that wordless space that continually calls me.” (Sepehri 2013: 139) Detachment in the view of Sohrab, contrary to Gide, is not a worry about deprivation, but rather he regards this world as an illusion, deception, and dream with nothing to offer: “The world is drowsy/What hidden colors the deception of living has!” (Sepehri 1995: 68) Sepehri’s perspective here is somehow under the influence of Bidel’s poetry and the Indian style. He smells annihilation throughout the world so it is no wonder if he has no attachment to the ephemeral world (Sepehri 1995: 49) Thus, one should take refuge in contentment and affection: “As far as the cool air of contentment/As far as the wet night of affection, I went.” (Sepehri 1999: 24) And one should reach tranquility by himself/herself: “Pitch a tent over our heads, for we are the shady bower of our tranquility.” (Sepehri 2013: 59) And one should reflect on immigration, like a migrating bird: “Life is that strange sense possessed by a migrating bird.” (Sepehri, 2004, 57) This sort of contemplation merely seeks the truth (Sepehri 1995: 298), and wishes for becoming similar to the sun: “I told them: A sun is on your doorstep/If you open the door, it will shine on your behavior” (Sepehri 1995: 374) He aims for the unification of separated pairs: “I will tie a knot, linking eyes to the sun, hearts to love, reflections to water, tree branches to wind.” (Sepehri, 2004, p. 131) Sohrab’s sense of detachment is to the extent that he does not represent any image of materiality in the world; in his novel and (semantically) devotional perspective, there is not anything in the world but spiritual asset: “Life is not empty/Kindness exists, Apples exist, faith exists/Yes/As long as the poppies bloom, life must be lived.” (Sepehri 2013: 20) Sohrab, hand in hand with Gide, finds peace in a sort of love that has the flavor of today and today’s thinking, although it does not conform to the conventional love in Classical literature (Sepehri 1995: 363) This outlook can represent an absolutely new definition of poetry: “Poets are beneficiaries of water and wisdom and light.” (Sepehri 2013: 124) He seeks life not in materiality, but in the elements overlooked under the heavy burden of daily habits: “Life means: A starling flew away/What made you gloomy?/Consolations are not few: for instance, this sun/Tomorrow’s babes/Next weeks’ pigeon.” (Sepehri 1999: 102) Sohrab thinks that the way to be released from worldly attachments is through self-annihilation.
and rapture so in this regard, he is associated with mystical instructions and of course the ideas of Gide: “One must run until the end of being/Follow the scent of the soil of annihilation/Arrive at the encounter of tree and God/One must sit/Close to gaiety/Some place between rapture and illumination.” (Sepehri 2013: 151) The “gentle nothingness” sought by Sohrāb is in fact this soothing annihilation that bestows renunciation of the world and egoism upon him: “To the quiet retreat of the distant dimensions of life take me/The presence of a gentle “nothingness”/Show me.” (Sepehri 2013: 109) He longs for taking refuge in the sources of life that seem to be peculiar and originate from a nostalgic sense common in romantic works: “O the primitive presence of the day before yesterday!/O you who by a leap from a branch of tree to soil/Fulfill/The dignity of life/After your departure to the riverside/I was hearing/the reflection of the fast steps of thirst.” (Sepehri 1995: 432) The enunciation of renunciation and detachment is also reflected in Sepehri’s Otāq-e Ābi (The Blue Room). He discerns abnegation even when describing the miniature portrait painter: “The miniature portrait painter has a sense of subtlety in every step. He does not give his heart to one mistress more than another: He has custody of the eyes. He does not place delicacy in a flower more than another: He has justice of pen.” (Sepehri, 2004, 58) This justice of pen that reflects detachment and abnegation is a relic of mystical renunciation evident throughout all the poems of Sepehri.

2.2.4 Living in the present moment (Carpe Diem)

Living in the present moment, living in the here and now, seizing the moment, and similar expressions are especially outstanding in Persian literature and it is not limited to a certain literary genre or ideology. The differences in this regard are attributed to the viewpoint of literary authors about this subject. Living in the present moment from the perspective of Gide and Sepehri is not thoroughly compatible with this perception in Classical literature as their notion of the present moment has a tone of contemporary life, and particularly Gide has dealt with this issue from the viewpoint of present audience. Passion for life and the idea of getting pleasure from every moment have led Gide and Sepehri to live in the here and now. This point is inferred from various definitions of life given by these authors. Present moment awareness for these two authors is an attempt to alleviate the suffering of thinking about death. Hence reflection about life in their works is more prominent than that about death. Epicureanism, giving importance to happiness and bliss, not believing in sin, giving importance to love, fervor, and enthusiasm, rejection of reasoning and outdated principles of ethics, and futility of theological arguments all derive from Gide’s and Sepehri’s contemplations about time. The difference lies in that, Fruits of the Earth does not have religious tone, whereas Hašt Ketāb (the Eight Books) is not devoid of religious connotations.

In the dictionary of mystical terms, time is defined in a way that involves a broad range of aspects: Time in its generic meaning (contraction and expansion) that is in common between a Sālek (wayfarer) and a typical person; time as an occult mood that is assigned only to a Sālek (wayfarer); and time in the meaning of present moment as “the mediator between past and future” (Kāšāni 2010: 287). The title of this part, that is to say living in the moment, is more compatible with third perception of time, although in Sepehri’s poetry there is a degree of overlap with two other perceptions of time as well.

Gide wants to forget about time: “Sometimes I would open a book and sitting beside a lighted lamp, though it was daytime, happily forgot the passing hour.” (Gide and
Guillaume 1897: 69), yet contemplation about time is internalized in his unconsciousness, inasmuch that he cannot let go of it for a single moment. Irreplaceability and limitation of time, fear of mortality and nothingness, and belief in pursuing happiness do not let him free from thinking about time for a single moment. He regards time as irrecoverable, hence in reaction to the idea of time irrereplaceability, the present moment becomes invaluable in his ideology and along with some other poets and thinkers such as Ka'yām, Sa'di, and Ḥāfeẓ, he chants the slogan of seizing the moment. (Gide and Guillaume 1897: 234) He has profoundly realized the limitation of time so he regards it as another incentive to think about time: “I should make no further attempt to do anything at all, if I were told, if it were proved to me that I had unlimited time to do it in.” (Gide and Guillaume 1897: 43) The concept of time becomes Gide’s main preoccupation when he is faced with the image of mortality and nothingness (Gide and Guillaume 1897: 180). Hence he desperately implores God not to make him suffer waiting for death: “Oh Lord! Grant me not to wait for death in order to die.” (Gide and Guillaume 1897: 185) He believes that as long as a happiness has not ended, another happiness does not begin so one ought to get pleasure form today’s happiness regardless of time constraint (Gide and Guillaume 1897: 235). In Gide’s contemplation about time, first there is future, then present and finally past time (Gide and Guillaume 1897: 256). However, he intermingles future and present time and in this intermingling he zooms on the present time, inasmuch that in Fruits of the Earth, even the future is relatively less significant compared to the present. Therefore, emphasis on the present moment and its justifications constitute a major part of Gide’s contemplation about time. His reliance on the here and now becomes associated with the concept of today’s perception of insouciance: “My soul in joyous ease/Swinging sublime/Floats upon rhythmic seas/Careless of time.” (Gide 1897: 193) Seizing from every moment its unique novelty, getting the most out of every single moment in life, perfect realization of the present joy by not thinking about future joy, and the importance of living at the moment are among the most significant justifications for Gide to contemplate about the here and now (Gide 1897, 30, 37, & 76). In Gide’s perspective, contemplation about future paves the way for human progress and hopefulness: “But you will not believe in progress. What has been, you say, is what will be. I choose to believe that what has been is what can never be again. Man will gradually free himself from what formerly protected him, from what henceforth enslaves him.” (Gide 1897: 243) Hence he prefers a sort of future that is not mere repetition of the past (Gide and Guillaume 1897: 235). When thinking about future becomes associated with moral and religious thoughts, it is not valuable for Gide any more. He does not want to be obsessed with the consequences of an act because this view is not compatible with getting pleasure from the present moment that at the epicenter of his contemplation about time. Furthermore, Gide’s ideology basically does not show religious implications (Gide 1897: 205). His major criticism is to retrospection. He thinks the only outcome of this preoccupation is that it gives unity to life: “Remembrance of the past had only just enough power over me to give the necessary unity to my life.” (Gide, 1957, 66) Thus, leaving the past behind is an alternative that he offers to his audience: “Understand this rightly and put the longest possible distance between you and the past.” (Gide 1897: 252) He thinks that retrospection is for the old people: “Regret for the “temporis acti” is the vainest occupation of the old men. I tell myself so.” (Gide 1897: 233)
Preoccupation with the passage of time is evident from the first poetry collections of Sepehri: “Moist wind of time passes/Color is pouring from our bodies/House has an image of decay on the ceiling/It will collapse on our head.” (Sepehri 1995: 39) And sadly, the passage of time has disposed him toward disappointment and nihilism in his initial poetry collections: “Yet, since this moment must pass/If I cry/My tears serve no purpose/And if I laugh/My laughter will be of no avail.” (Sepehri 2013: 36) Like Gide, Sepehri too thinks that obsession with the past would dissipate the present (Sepehri 1995: 46). Perhaps this outlook leads him to the following conclusion at the initial stages of his poetry: “And reflect, that I wish for death, and close to you, I am a watered Iris flower/My friend, existence is terrifying.” (Sepehri 1995: 195) And of course at the climax of Sepehri’s poetry, the Gide-like present moment awareness begins to emerge: “Living is constantly becoming wet/Living is bathing in the pool of “now”.” (Sepehri, 2003, p. 89) Contrary to Gide who is careless of the past, there is a sort of mystical retrospection in Sepehri that seems to be the impact of the Far East: “Before, that is/Once man was a member of a bough’s relatives . . . /Man’s blood was steeped in golden bars of illumination/O the primitive presence of the day before yesterday!” (Sepehri 1995: 432)

The sorrow of separation from the source that somehow recalls nostalgic past is conspicuous in Sepehri’s poetry: “Our miniature portrait painter has the sorrow of being left far from the source.” (Sepehri, 2004, 67) Sepehri knows that tranquility paves the way for happiness, and what spoils happiness is preoccupation with time (Sepehri 1995, p. 55 & 65). In short, contemplation about the present moment and time interrelates Gide and Sepehri, the difference lies in that in an internal conflict between the present, past, and future, Gide chooses the here and now, and his present moment awareness intrigues him to get the most out of life’s opportunities, while Sohrâb, in this ongoing internal conflict, in addition to the present moment, takes refuge to the sources of creation and the world of myths. This is the point that indicates to the difference between eastern and western outlook.

The affinity between Gide and Sepehri is conspicuous, insomuch that we can notice an irrefutable relationship between their intellectual genealogy; however, this affinity sometimes seems to be less visible because they have been raised in two different geographical places. The most obvious discrepancy between Gide and Sepehri, despite their close resemblance, is apparent in their attitude to happiness and sorrow that needs another research opportunity. Gide perceives happiness in the heart of sorrow: “You shall not get the better of me, sadness! Throughout lamentations and sobs, I can hear the sweet sounds of singing.” (Gide and Guillaume 1897: 253) However, Sohrâb perceives sorrow in the heart of happiness: “How green I am today!/And how alert my body!/What if sorrow creeps down the mountain!” (Sepehri 1999: 20)

3 Conclusion

Although Fruits of the Earth and Hašt Ketāb (Eight Books) come from two different cultural and geographical boundaries, they could traverse distinguishing territories and reach a climax beyond place, time, geography, race, belief, and other disuniting elements and dealt with true and eternal needs and concerns of mankind. Therefore, their difference compared to their fundamental affinity is trivial as it has reached a genuine unity relying on the principle of observation and common tastes between Gide and
Sepehri. In their intellectual system, an outlook in favor of abnegation and detachment and against unjust preferences is very central and invites humanity to get the most out of the world’s pleasures and seize the moment, regardless of the past and future. Why they sometimes appear different is related to Sohrāb’s mystical retrospection that has no manifestation in Gide, and also Gide’s ecstasy that does not get to emerge in Sohrāb’s melancholic reflections. Apart from these differences, they both are the eloquent voice of humans living yesterday, today, tomorrow, and in distant tomorrows.

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