In the view of men of true vision Solomon's realm is the wind;
No, rather he is a true Solomon who is free of all realms.
Those who say that the world is laid to rest upon water-
Do not heed them, good sir; it rests on the wind.(1)

The elements and their image and influence in man's life and mind has been extensively dealt with by a wide range of human sciences such as mythology, history, philosophy, and religion.

This paper is only a preliminary treatment of the image of the elements in Japanese and Persian literature from a comparative point of view, with brief references to images in philosophy and religion. Examples are given from the most representative literary works in the two languages, in the case of Japanese from the Man'yoshu and Kokinshu mainly.

The Elements in Mythology and Genesis

In Japanese mythology, Izanagi and Izanami 'descended from heaven and the eight Japanese islands were born from them. They next produced the sea, then the rivers, and then the mountains. Then they produced the ancestors of trees and herbs.

This is similar to an account given in Bundahishn of the descent of divine beings to the earth, when Ohrmazd asked the Farohars to migrate to the material world. "The first words spoken by them were 'Ohrmazd has created the waters and earth and the trees and the animals and the stars and the moon and the sun and all prosperity whose cause and effect are due to the manifestation of righteousness'." B. 15, 6–7(2)

The notion of macro-microcosm was not limited to Persia, Greece and
Japan. It is found elsewhere in the rudimentary form of a myth in which a primal giant is vanished and the parts of his/her body give birth to the parts of universe. In Scandinavian mythology, Ymir was slain by Odin, Vili, and Ve. From his flesh, they built the earth; from his blood, the water; from his bones, the mountains; from his hair, the trees, etc. This recalls the cutting up of Purusha in Rigveda (X90), and the murder of Gayomart by Ahriman in the Bundahishn.(3)

According to a Chinese legend, when the giant P'an-ku dies, from his breath is born the wind; from his voice, the thunder; from his left eye, the sun; from his right one, the moon; from his hair, the plants, etc.

When being born, Kagu Tsuchi (God of Fire) consumed his mother, Izanami.

A creature born out of fire, or consuming its mother in the process, reminds us of the legendary bird, Qoqnos, of whose story Attar (the mystic poet of the 13th century Iran) gives a very beautiful and detailed account. A fire-emitting horse is also a rather universal image in mythology.

Nihon-shoki tells us of a chaotic mass, out of which first Heaven and then the Earth were formed. Thereafter divine beings were formed between them.(4) According to the Kojiki,(5) many deities (kami) were born first on the plain of High Heaven, and then, as the earth drifted about, more deities were created, of whom Izanagi and Izanami were the last two. They gave birth to the eight islands of Japan and then to another six islands. Then, they gave birth to the Deity of Wind, the Deity of Trees, the Deity of Mountains, and the Deity of Moors.

In the history of Greek thought the universe is traversed upwards, in seven stages of firmament, stars, sun, moon, air, water, and earth(6)

A picture of the cosmogony can be reconstructed from Zoroastrian writings. The gods created the world in seven stages. First they made the sky of stone, in the bottom half of which they put water. Next they created earth, resting on the water like a great dish (hence the ancients' belief that earth is laid on water), and then, at the center of the earth, they fashioned the three living creatures in the form of a single plant, a single animal (the Bull), and a single man (Gayomaretan (Mortal Life)). In the seventh and last stage, they created fire, both the visible fire and also as an unseen, vital force pervading the animate creations. When creation of the seven skies was completed and the elements of this world of water, wind, fire, earth, plant, animal and man came
into being, Ohormazd handed the affairs of this world to his six assistants, the Amesha-Sepantas or beneficient divinities.

Persians divided world history into four periods of three thousand years. The first thousand years of the last period are divided into ages of gold, silver, steel, and iron. This shows the importance they attached to the metals, similar to the Japanese idea of considering them to be a separate element.

The Koran teaches that God has created all elements and they are executing His command. He looses winds that stir up clouds, and therewith revives the earth (35: 9), “He sent down iron (metal) wherein is great might, and many uses for men” (57: 25), He “sends down out of heaven water” (14: 32, 15: 22), and of water fashions every living thing (27: 36). “And of His signs is that he created man of dust” (30-20), to which creation the Koran contains many references; “Out of the earth We created you, and We shall restore you into it, and bring you forth from it a second time.” (20: 55) He created man of clay of mud, and the jinn He created of fire. (15: 27)(7)

The Elements in the Struggle between Good and Evil

The role of the elements in the universal struggle is also an important aspect of their mythical image. Plutarch expounds the dualistic theory of Parthians as follows: Ohrmazd (Ahura-mazda) dwells in the domain of eternal light, Ahriman reigns in the realm of darkness, and Mithra occupies an intermediary place between them. The beginning of Bundahishn (West, Pahlvi Text, 1.) expounds a quite similar theory, save that in place of Mithra it is the air (Vayu) that is placed between Ohrmazd and Ahriman.(8)

The elements are involved, as victims or heros, in the battles between good and evil. After their first encounter, and knowing that Ahriman would never change his destructive character, Ohrmazd began to create. Out of his very essence of light, he produced the spiritual, or “menog,” form of the creatures. First he created the “Immortals,” then the Yazatas, and finally he began the creation of the universe; first the sky, then water, earth, the tree, the animal, and, last of all, man.(9)

In Bundahishn, we read; “The Evil Spirit came on to the water which was spread below the earth .... Then he came to the trees and then to the Gayomart and then to the fire.” Bd. 3, 1–3, 10–17(10) The elements united their force to crush him. Just as the sky, the water, the bull and man waged battle
with the destructive spirit, so, too, did the plants, the earth, the fire and other components of creation.

According to the Manichaean texts, Zurvan, the Greatest Lord of the Land of Light, when confronted with the Demon of the Land of Darkness, created two gods to help him fight the demon. He sent Ohrmazd, one of the two, to drive the confederate demons away. Ohrmazd prepared for the battle by taking the five elements: water, wind (Vata), fire, breath (Vayu) and light as his weapons.

Zurvan can best be understood in relation to Vayu. Vayu, a god of Indo-Iranian origin, must have been known to Zoroaster.\(^\text{(11)}\)

In a hymn dedicated to Tishtrya, the battle between the god and the Demon of Drought is retold.\(^\text{(12)}\)

According to the Koran, God sends elements to punish infidels and oppressors. The wind and the water are specially assigned to this mission in this world, whereas the fire is saved for doing justice to wrong doers after resurrection. A strong wind was loosed against the people of ’Ad, and the Thamood were struck by thunderbolt (41: 14–17). God assigns the elements to the command of His Messengers as their assistants; He gave David bounty from Him, “O you mountains, echo God’s praises with him,” and He softened for him iron; “And to Solomon (He assigned) the wind; its morning course was a month’s journey, and its evening course was a month’s journey ...” (34: 10–12).

Persian classics bear frequent references to the image of the elements created by the Koran;

The rose with Solomon rides, born aloft on wings of the wind
The nightingale’s anthem at dawn like the voice of David is shed.\(^\text{(13)}\)

Sa’di (Iranian poet of the 13th century) warns;

From earth did the God the Untainted created you;
So, servant, earthlike prostrate fall.\(^\text{(14)}\)

**Man and the Elements**

The worship of the elements by the ancient people was linked with their myth of creation on the one hand and the worship of nature on the other hand. To them, the whole universe was divided into heaven and earth, and the elements were sometimes sent from or missioned by the heaven, thereby attaining a heavenly place in their mind. Aryans regarded fire a sacred thing, placing
it at the same level as light.

Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher, who seems to have stressed the role of struggle in the world, believes nevertheless in a Logos or Nomos. The essence of this intelligible law was the fire. This reminds us of the connection of fire with Rta, "the true order," in the Indo-Iranians' belief.\(^\text{18}\)

The ancient Iranians worshipped two gods of wind; Vata and Vayu. Vata was simply god of all winds that blow, bringing the rain-clouds. Vayu is called in the Rigveda "the soul of gods" and regarded as god of the breath of life itself.\(^\text{16}\)

According to the Kojiki and Nihon-shoki, elements and life were born of the Kami, who were also the ancestors of the man. Here we find the concept of the unity of man and the universe created from one source.

The divine nature of man's soul, in contrast to the earthy nature of his body, is a similar image to the literature of both Iran and Japan.

In the verse of Nizami, the great lyric poet of the 12th century, Emperor Dara (Darius the Third), when defeated by Alexander and in his last moments, complains; "The earth is consuming my watery elements and the heaven is taking my fiery element away."

From ancient times, fire, symbolizing light, has been regarded as heavenly, whereas the other elements were generally considered earthy. The centrality of fire in Zoroastrianism is one of the best known aspects of the faith. Fire is the visible sign of Ahura-mazda, who himself is the Eternal Light.

The sacredness of a man's given word, and the importance of enforcing respect for it, were essential matters for lawmakers and priests. As M. Boyce puts it: "a power was felt to be latent in the spoken pledge, and this power came to be recognized as a divinity who would support and further the upright man who keep his word, but smite down with terrible vengeance the liar who betrayed it."\(^\text{17}\) This vengeance was made visible through the ordeal; either by water or fire. The accused man had to submerge himself or run along a narrow gap between two blazing piles of wood to test his veracity. As a result, Mithra and Varuna became closely linked with the elements by which they slew or spared. Varuna received the by-name "Son of the Waters"; Mithra correspondingly became lord of fire.

The image of fire as an element to test one's veracity is similarly found in Japanese literature. On his visit to the post town of Soka, Basho says, "We visited the Shrine of the Burning Bower at Yashima. Said my travelling..."
companion Sora; “The deity enshrined here is Konohana Sakuya Hime, the
goddess of Flowering trees, who is also enshrined in Mount Fuji. This holy
place is called the Shrine of the Burning Bower because when the deity’s god
husband refused to believe that the child she conceived on their single night
together was his, the goddess walled herself up in a lying-in bower of wattle
and daub and set fire to herself, declaring that if her infant were born un-
harmed, it would prove her innocence.”(18)

The Elements, Time and Life

The Japanese held the elements to be five in number: earth, water, fire,
wood, and metal. But these five are traditionally doubled by characterizing
each element in a natural state (“e”) and as adapted to the use of man (“to”).

We find in Japanese astrology what are termed as the “Jik-kan”, or “ten
celestial stems,” a series obtained by dividing each of the five elements into two
parts, termed respectively the “elder” and the “younger” brother (“e” and
“to”).

The Japanese also have a computation of sixty years duration founded on
their signs of the Zodiac and their five elements of wood, fire, earth, metal, and
water. The signs are called “Ziguni-no-shi,” that is, “the twelve branches.”
They are the Rat, the Cow, the Tiger, the Hare, the Dragon, the Snake, the
Monkey, the Cock, the Dog, the Boar; in Japanese Ne, Ushi, Tora, Ou, Tatsu,
Mi, Uma, Hitsuji, Sarou, Tori, Inu, and I.

As both the twelve animal symbols and the five elements are used together
for symbolizing years, a common multiple of sixty is obtained.

According to an ancient Chinese theory, the seasons were controlled by
“gogyo” or the five elements: Fire controlled summer, wood controlled spring,
metal controlled autumn, and water controlled winter. The last element, soil,
controlled the eighteen days at the end of each season. The days controlled by
the soil were called “Doyo”, the end of which marked the beginning of the next
season.(19)

The image of the elements and their characteristics are evident in the way
the ancient Iranians were computing the time. Twelve months of a year
and each day of a month were named after one of the guardian gods (“Am-
shaspandan”), some of whom had been assigned to guard the elements:

— The 5th day of a month: “Sepandar-mat Ruz”. Sepandar-mat was
the guardian god of earth and metals.

— The 6th day of a month: “Khordad-ruz.” Khordad was the guardian god of waters. The guardian goddess of all waters was called “Aredvisur Anahita”, meaning “the Proud Strong Clean River”. Anahita or Nahid was imagined as a woman of beautiful appearance and stature riding on a vehicle. The four horses drawing her vehicle are wind, cloud, rain, and dew.

— The 7th day of a month: “Amordad-ruz”. Amordad was the guardian god of trees.

— The 9th day of a month: “Azar-ruz”. Azar was the guardian god of all divine fires.

— The 10th day of a month: “Aban-ruz” (the day of water).

— The 13th day of a month: “Tir-ruz” or “Tishtar-ruz”. Tishtar, who was god of rain, engaged in dreadful battles with Aposhe, the demon of drought who was assisted by the god of fire, but finally defeated them with the help of the guardian gods of water and wind.

— The 28th day of a month: “Zamiad-ruz”. Zamiad or Zamin (earth) was one of the four elements revered by Aryans.

The twenty eight letters in Persian originally borrowed from Arabic are divided into four groups, each comprised seven letters, characterized as watery, fiery, earthy, and windy respectively;

- (j, z, k, s, q, ð, dh) are of a watery nature;
- (a, h, t, m, f, s, c) are of a fiery nature;
- (d, h, l, ʃ, r, x, ɡ) are of an earthy nature; and,
- (b, v, y, n, s, t, d) are of a windy or airy nature.

The importance the Japanese traditionally attach to their five elements is evident in naming the weekdays after them. In adopting, in 1872, the Christian calendar, and thereby dividing a month to weeks of seven days each, the Japanese rendered the names of Sunday and Monday into Japanese, and named each of the remaining five days after one of the five elements; Tuesday (Kayobi) is the day of fire; Wednesday (Suiyobi) the day of water; Thursday (Mokuyobi) the day of trees; Friday (Kinyobi) the day of gold, the precious symbol of metal, and Saturday (Doyobi) the day of earth.

According to the Chinese calendar which, with some modifications, was in use in Japan since the 7th century, the 10th, 20th, and 30th of each month were days of rest. The first ten days of a month was the “Jo-jun” (superior decade), the following ten, the “chu-jun” (middle decade), and the last 10,
the “ge-jun” (inferior decade).

In Iran, the ancients allocated to each weekday one of the seven colours that they believed to be original, namely, yellow, blue, orange, red, violet, green and azure. By allocating each of these colours and one of the seven stars to each weekday, the ancients drafted an astronomical chart as follows:

- Sunday: Sun — Yellow
- Monday: Moon — Blue
- Tuesday: Mars — Orange
- Wednesday: Mercury — Red
- Thursday: Jupiter — Violet
- Friday: Venus — Green
- Saturday: Saturn — Azure

Many Japanese names originate from the elements. This shows their love for nature and the importance they attach to the elements of creation.

Iranian names are mainly taken from those of Moslem saints or ancestors, but those related to natural elements are also common.

A considerable number of Japanese proverbs employ the image of the elements to make a point. Persian literature, similarly rich in proverbs, also makes extensive use of the elements. It is interesting that both in Japanese and in Persian proverbs, the image of water is employed most frequently. Although the wind is not included among the Japanese five elements, it frequently appears in Japanese proverbs.

The Elements as Portrayed in Persian and Japanese Literature

Fire

The Shah-Name reports that Hushang, the son of Gayomart — the first man of the Zoroastrian myth of creation — was riding out to the mountains one day, when he was confronted by a terrible elongated creature. Hushang threw a stone at the creature. The stone hit another stone and produced a spark, and fire was born.

In Japan, as to the origin of Nihon, the name of the country, it is generally said that in writing to the court of the Sui dynasty of China, Emperor Suiko (592–628) used the title “the Emperor of the land where the sun rises.” Emperor Kotoku (645–654) formally adopted Nihon as the name of the country. According to another theory, to ancient primitive people, the discovery of fire
was a great event, and its use marked the beginning of human civilization. It was difficult and troublesome to start a fire, and so the Imperial family as the head of the people kept a constant fire, from which people obtained fire for their use.\(^{(24)}\)

One reason for venerating fire in Japan could well be the belief from the oldest time that fire has the power of purifying everything.

Fire has a mixed image in Persian literature. It is a manifestation of light, the eternal truth of Ahura-mazda; and yet it is a destructive element, consuming everything. Historians have identified the horrible invasion of the Mongols with a blazing fire raging through the whole country.

In *Sindbad-nameh*, or the story of Sindbad compiled in the 11th century, it says:

> Injustice is a fire, disperse it when it is small;  
> for many a billet of fire has consumed the whole world.\(^{(25)}\)

Sa’di relates of an oppressor whose house was one night consumed by fire, and a devout person passing by said: “This fire broke out from the smoke (that is from the sighs) of the hearts of the poor.”\(^{(26)}\)

The candlelight, together with rose, butterfly, and nightingale are among the most prevalent images of classical Persian lyrics.

Fire of love is consuming, but yet desirable. The great mystic poet Mawlana (Rumi; 1230–1273) speaks for a reed:

> Tis the flame of love that fired me,  
> Tis the wine of love inspired me.\(^{(27)}\)

To daqiqi, the lyric poet of the 10th century, the wine,

> Shines as shines the light,  
> yet fire consuming is its soul and spirit ....\(^{(28)}\)

In a beautiful verse in the *Man’yoshu*, the poet pledges his word to keep the fire of ardent desire burning alive in his heart;

> Do they not say  
> one can pluck a burning fire  
> and hold it in a sack?  
> So O summon the day  
> when I may meet my lord. \((\text{Man’yoshu} : 160)^{(29)}\)

Similarly, Ferdausi, Iranian poet of the 10th century, refers to the sun as identical with fire. He also mentions the four elements to describe the passage of time;
Neither sun, nor water, wind or soil
Can ever vanish a good name or a good word.

**Water**

Persian literature contains frequent references to water as the source of life. The features of a relief in Nagsh-e Rostam of the 3rd or 4th century showing the goddess Anahita are said to have been intended to recall her character as goddess of water.

Alexander, having conquered the known lands of his time, ventured a long journey to the dark region of the world where “the water of life” was believed to exist; and Iranian poets long for a reunion with a sweetheart as delightful as the water of life.

Sa’di has this to say on the merit of honour: “The wise have said, ‘were they, for example, to sell the water of life at the price of honour (āb-e rū’), a wise man would not buy it, since to die honourably is better than to live disgracefully’.” (Sa’di) (There is a play of words here which can not be preserved in translation. ‘Āb-e rū’, literary, “water of the face” signifies “honour” and is here made to answer to ‘āb-e hayā’, “water of life”)

The water of life is not a queer thing for Japanese poets. Basho, in mentioning of Yamanaka’s hot spring, says:

> Yamanaka’s waters be
> Better than chrysanthemums
> For longevity. (Basho)

In Japanese literature, the water is mainly portrayed in nature: in mountains, rivers, ponds, and seas, not in the abstract.

> Upon the death of Princess To’ochi, Crown Prince Takechi mourns;
> I would go
> Draw the crystal waters
> On the mountain ... (Man’yoshu: 158)

The spring winds play with water and waves. (Man’yoshu: 260)

Japanese poetry appreciates the water in the flow of a river (Kokinshu: 238), a dewdrop on a green leaf (Kokinshu: 27), or rapids forming a deep pool (Kokinshu: 736).

The running water whispers to the poet:

The gurgling waters
Of the Yoshino River
Cut deep through the rocks —
In silence I will love you
Although I may die yearning
(Kokinshu: 492)
As long as the water flows, there is life and hope (K. 793).
There also flows a river of tears:
May these tears fall like
Rain to flood that river we
All must cross over
For should it overflow my
Love would come to life again
(Kokinshu: 829)

"The tears falling like rain" is a poetic image quite familiar to Persian literature, where poets speak of river, flood or sea of tears shed in mourning over separation, whereas "the river we all must cross over" is an evident reference to the Buddhist belief in a future life.

Japanese elegance and imagination creates a river of heaven ("Ama-nokawa") to be viewed in this life, on current of which the moon rides (Kokinshu: 882); And the poet has his meeting place by the great river of heaven (Kokinshu: 173).

Wind

Though the wind is not included among the five elements, its image, in one way or another, is prevalent in Japanese lyric literature. The image of wind is sometimes employed in a most fantastic way;

Such are the ways of
this world  my heart swells with love
for her and yet she
is invisible as the winds
which whisper of her charms
(Kokinshu: 475)

Allusions to cold wind, quick wind, wind of late autumn, and night wind are frequent; petals of every bloom go to the wind (K. 464, 124).

Man’yoshu contains frequent references to the autumn wind;
Soon the autumn winds
will be blowing coldly;
how can I sleep
through the long nights alone?
(Man’yoshu: 462)

Just as the blossoms are scattered by the morning breeze, the autumn wind
plays with the rice leaves; but it can not drift my heart away. (Kokinshu: 172, 783)

The early autumn wind is mild and gentle, and arrives with migrant birds. (Kokinshu; 208)

The ravaging and blowing winds remind us of this transient life;

Oh mountain thrush
address your reproaches to
the ravaging winds —
for I would not dare even
brush these blossoms with my hand (Kokinshu: 106)

In solitude, winds blow in vain (Man'yoshu: 52); and, in grief of separation, the autumn winds are shivering (Man'yoshu: 462). the chill winter storms sweep down from the high mountain (Kokinshu: 446).

The Kokinshu even tells of heavenly winds that remind us of Vayu, the strong heavenly wind, or the God of Wind in Iranian mythology;

Oh heavenly winds
close the gates across the path
they traverse through
the clouds keep the fair maiden here
for just a short time longer (Kokinshu: 872)

And, in the Man'yoshu, Ise is identified with the land of divine wind (M. 162, 163).

In Persian literature, too, the image of wind is most frequent, though poets speak more of the pleasant whispering breeze of early morning;

Not all the musk of China, the scents of Tartary, Excel those subtle odours the dawn breeze wafts to me (Hafez)

The zephyr is messenger of love. The eminent Sufi, Shahab _el-Din Suhravardi, begins a parable about a peacock in the King’s garden in this way;

One day he was enjoying these (peacocks’) sounds and
The zephyr wafted o’er me as if to say
“I bring you news of your love, so far away.”

This poem in the Kokinshu inspires the same feeling;

Now far now near there
in the mountains a songbird
warbles his tune
tentatively will she ever hear these love notes on the wind? (Kokinshu: 29)

Hafez asks the morning breeze to deliver his message;
Breeze of the morning, at the hour thou knowest,
The way thou knowest, and to her thou knowest, ...(36)

He whispers his secrets to the morning breeze, while a Japanese poet regrets the spread of his reputation on the wind (K. 674).

In the Kokinshu, “the first cool delicious breeze” brings message to the man of good sense “to tell us autumn has come.” (K. 171) The lightsome breeze flies like the time; a departure that has no coming back.

Amir Khusrau (b. 1235) sees his sweet-heart’s departure as a breeze.(37)

Bosnii, now a part of Yugoslavia, has produced 15 poets who composed in Persian. This is a verse from one of them;
It's no wonder that you move your face away from my sigh,
How can one expose a candle-light to the wind? (38)

A sweeping wind twisting and taking everything away is a prevalent image in Persian literature, while in Japanese classics we find only a faint reference to it.

Time is the wind of fate that consumes man. Nizami (d. 1217) feels grief for his young age that is gone;
My palm-tree offers no longer shade or fruit for anyone,
since the swift wind of vicissitude stripped bare my branches. (39)

Even Solomon, who once commanded the winds, has gone with the wind. (40)

Earth

To the naturalists, man’s death is his end. So, one should enjoy this life before Heaven converts him to Earth. Khayyam even borrows the Koranic concept of man’s origin as a bit of clay and a drop of worthless water to say that; “our departure from this world is like a drop of water returning to the sea, and a bit of dust reuniting with the earth.” In Persian literature, earth is a symbol of worthlessness. The highly celebrated mystic poet, Hafez, also, considers man’s fate as being “like dust that the wind bears from place to place.” (41) Man who is of earthy origin should be humble like dust, since he’ll finally drop down in the dusty way.

In ancient Iranian literature, the element of earth seems to be identical
with the lands created by Ahura-mazda. According to the Yasna, one of the main Avestan texts, the first land created by Ahura-mazda was “Iran-Wij” (the nucleus of Aryans).

The earth is represented in the Man’yoshu, and seemingly in Japanese literature in general, by mountains, stones, and other concrete natural settings, and, like the water, it does not appear in the abstract;

I too shall go back and forth
to your house in Nara,
beautiful in blue earth ... (Man’yoshu: 80)

**Combined and Contrasting Images of the Elements**

A reference to the elements for many Iranian poets is to manifest their literary talent. Azraqi, a well versed poet of the 12th century, describes a garden in Tughan-shah’s palace in this way;

“...The trees are of frankincense, the leaves of emerald ... the earth of ambergris ... its nature is neither of the sun, nor of celestial Kausar, deep it is as the sea ... pure even as the soul, beautiful even as learning, serene even as air, refined even as fire ...”(42)

Mu’izzi (d. 1124) bore the title of “prince of poets” in Malikshah’s court. the King was once so pleased by his poem that he gave him a horse. Mo’izzi at once recited;

When the King saw the fire within my heart,
He raised me from the earth to above the moon;
When he heard me speak a verse like water,
He bestowed me a noble horse like wind.(43)

The poet had contrived the highly appreciated trick of mentioning the four elements in a single quatrain.

In Persian, a combination of the elements sometimes makes a new concept or a poetic expression; “Āb-o-havā” (water and air) means the climate; “Āb-o-khāk” (water and soil) means the homeland or country; the right of “Water and soil” or “Water and clay” means the right of citizenship, or priority in something, or seniority in a neighbourhood. Similarly, in Japanese “Do-jin”, a component word made of “do” (soil) and “jin” (man), means “native.”

In Persian literature a combination of all elements is referred to as the universe. Sa’di says;
Cloud and wind, and sun and sky, labour all harmoniously,
That while they thee with food supply ...(44)

Nasir-el-Din Ruzbehan composed the following verses on the death of Ibn-e-Esfandiar, author of the Tarikh-e-Tabarestan (early 13th c.);

O you whose coming and going was like a torrent,
Like fire you consumed precipitately a whole world;
Like the wind there was never rest in you or slumber;
Now you are sunk into the earth like quicksilver.(45)

The artful poet had been inspired by his grief to perform in his quatrain the much appreciated trick of referring to the four elements.

Kokinshu contains beautiful examples of using a mixed image of two or more elements in a single verse; like the wind and dust in this poem;

I have become a speck of the dust carried in helpless flurries by the dancing wind I who know no destination, no home (Kokinshu: 989)

Water and wind play together in this poem;

When the wind blows the fallen leaves embroider the limpid water ...

(Kokinshu: 304)

Persian poets sometimes employ the contrasting images of two or more of the elements to decorate their language or express themselves more impressively. A combination of water and fire is specially appealing;

Lust is fire; ...from it thyself keep well;
With patience as with water quench it now.(46)

Sa’di tells a story of Bayzid, the celebrated mystic, that when a pan of ashes was poured onto his head, he showed his gratitude by saying;

My soul, I’m fit for fire;
Shall I, then, look askance at ashes?(47)

To Iranians, fire is in contrast with water; and Daqiqi (10th c.) in praise of his own poetry says;

Fire aflamed from water in praising you;
Since, in poetry, word is water and image is fire.

And Basho says of Sakata;

The River Mogami
Has drowned the hot summer sun
And sunk it with sea.(48)

Employing the contrast between dust and water, Hafez says;
In hope her threshold’s dust to spy,
How streamed down my longing eye; O ask not how ...(49)

In his journey through a thick forest, Basho thinks of Tu Fu’s poem;
From scraps of cloud the wind blow,
Darkening the sun with dust.(50)

The poet Sanaii (d. 1150), like many other mystics, describes love as a sea;
What is love? A mighty ocean,
And of flame its waters are,
Waters that are very mountains,
Black as night, and swarming far.(51)

Notes

(2) Cama, M. F. Athorman Institute; Ancient Iranian Literature, p. 135.
(5) Cf. The Kojiki; Records of Ancient Matters; Chamberlain, Basil Hall (tr.), Tokyo: Tuttle, 1981, pp. 1–33.
(6) Duchesne-Guillemin, id., p. 74.
(7) For this and other quotations from the Koran see; Arberry, A. J.; The Koran Interpreted, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955.
(10) Cama, M. F., id., p. 133.
(11) Duchesne-Guillemin, id., p. 59.
(12) Hinnels, John R., id., p. 32.
(14) The Bustan of Sa’di; Wicknes, G. M. (tr.), Tehran: Iranian National Commission for Unesco, 1984, p. 120.
(15) Cf. Duchesne-Guillemin, id., p. 79.
(17) Boyce, M., id., p. 7.
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(23) Mo'in, id., p. 5154.
(26) Sa'di; The Rose Garden, id., pp. 60–61.
(29) For this and other references to the Man'yoshu Cf. Man'yoshu; Levy, Ian Hideo (tr.), Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, Vol. 1.
(30) Sa'di; The Rose Garden, London, Octagon Press, ... p. 123.
(31) A Haiku Journey, id., p. 77.
(32) For this and other references to the Kokinshu Cf.; Kokinshu, A Collection of poems ancient and modern; Road, I. R. & Henkenius, M. C.; University of Tokyo press, 1984.
(33) Nihongi, id., p. 15.
(36) Le Galliene, R. (tr.); Fifty Poems of Hafez, id., p. 128.
(37) Arberry, A. J.; Classical Persian Literature, id., p. 280.
(39) Arberry, A. J.; Classical Persian Literature, p. 129.
(40) The Bustan of Sa'di, id., p. 46.
(41) Arberry, A. J.; Fifty poems of Hafez, id., p. 91.
(42) Cf. Arberry, A. J.; Classical Persian Literature, id., p. 84.
(43) Id., pp. 110–111.
(44) Sa'di; the Rose Garden, id., p. 20.
(46) Sa'di; The Rose Garden, id., p. 215.
(47) The Bustan of Sa'di, id., p. 121.
(48) A Haiku Journey, id., p. 68.
(49) Arberry, A. J.; Fifty Poems of Hafez, id., p. 109.
(50) A Haiku Journey, id., p. 60.
(51) Arberry, A. J.; Classical Persian Literature, id., p. 91.