Origin and Analysis of One Story in “Masnavi”

Hamidov Khusrav Sadulloevich
Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies, Uzbekistan

Abstract: This article deals with the genesis and content of the story “Merchant and Parrot” in the first book of the “Masnaviyi Ma’naviy” (“Spiritual Masnavi”) by Jalaloddin Rumi (1207-1273). Although the origin of this story may be based on Indian folk literature, it appears in written sources such as “TafsiriAbulFatah” and “Asrornoma” of Attor before Rumi. But it is mentioned in the works of Khwaquni “Tuhfatul-Irqayen”, Nizamiy’s “Khusrav and Shirin” and “Bulbulname” by Attor. The author of “Masnavi” has succeeded in describing his Sufism-Iphonic ideas in this story. The explanation of the bytes in the narrative and the supportive story provide a basis for the author’s creative intentions to convey his views on tarigat. This story in “Masnavi” and the story baliq “Three fish” in the fourth edition have common sense in terms of meaning. So, one can say that the interpretation of these stories complement one another.

Keywords: story, merchant, parrot, die before death, cage

1. Introduction

One of the famous and extensive epic poems in the first book of Masnavi is the story of the “Merchant and Parrot”, and the author also reflects many literary meanings. The analysis and interpretation of the story creates the basis for the familiarization of Mavlavi Rumi’s worldview and original educational ideas.

Jalaloddin Rumi interprets the stories in “Masnavi” in a new approach. Irrespective of their topic and content, he provides them with an educational-enlightenmental meaning. The author pays attention to the educational aspects of the description of the character, deeds of every hero and enriches the story with some necessary episodes. In some cases, the storyline is so complicated with some exemplifying facts that it leaves the person unaware of the situation in the “crossroads”.

2. Materials and Methods

In this work meeting the demands of the theme, the comparative–historical classification methods are used. Scientific source materials form is object.

3. Results of the Research and their Discussion

Allegory is defined in the dictionary as examples of emulating, explanation of something, and depicting a story or event.

In literary criticism, according to Sirus Shamiso, “Allegory ... is a reflection of a story that is apparent, but the author’s purpose is more general”. It should be said that both illustrations mean, in essence, that “a small piece of work is a collection of symbolic narratives, exemplary stories, mysterious dialogues and symbolic influences and myths.”

Various allegory stories in Classic Persian literature serve to increase the effect of the speech. Such stories are the most effective means to cover ethical, philosophical, religious, and social content in every respect. A. According to A. Afzalzod, the sermon or literary texts come into force with Persian-Tibetan literature “Kalila and Dimma” and “Marzbomoma”.

Sano and Attor have done considerable work to cover educational and intellectual content through Sufi poems. Attor’s story “MantiqUt-Tayr” consists of allegory for Simurg and seven birds. Therefore it is acknowledged as allegory work.

Jalaloddin Rumi, who accompanied his predecessors, also utilized allegory stories along with the Quranic, irfonic, historical and public narratives in the works of “Masnaviyi Ma’naviy”, “Ulugdevon”, and “Fashi Mo Fishi”. Only in “Masnaviyi Ma’naviy” the total volume of allegory stories reaches 53.

The symbol of the parrot in “Masnavi” is portrayed in different ways. For example, in the story “Shopkeeper and Parrot”, it is expressed as animator, in “Merchant and Parrot” it is described as a perfect person who realizes himself. It is of particular importancethat inthis story Rumi focuses attention on the death of the parrot. Because the parrot that is ready for the death symbolizes intensions and desires of those people who have realized their selves. The death of the parrot is not new symbol in the literature; there were other poets who have written on this issue. For example, Khaqani pointed out to the death of the parrot in his book “Tuhfatul-Iraqayen”:

Like the parrot that freed itself after death,
I have become a dead body to be free myself.

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It should be mentioned that number of scientists including Abdulhusayn Zarrinkub, Karim Zamani, Hashmatullah Riyadhi, Badeuzaman Furuzonfar and others have expressed their opinions concerning the story of “Merchant and Parrot”. But their analyses do not include the issues that we have intended to find. Rumi has a specific technique describing simple things, especially those that appear everyday in life, and giving them new content. To our mind, there is no such poet as the author of “Masnavi” in this point. Together with other animals, Rumi has also used the symbol of birds. Specifically, the author interprets the image of a parrot using different approaches.

Mavlawi uses “peculiar parrots” towards the people of Tariqah (a way in Sufism) and those who gather road taxes and, “simple parrots” are used mockingly towards the people of asceticism and religion and “blind parrots” symbolize embroidered and ignorant people in “Masnavi”.

Therefore, in each case, according to poem’s storyline and interpretation one can find the symbol of a parrot coining new meaning. The people of the Tariqah took measures to die before death, i.e. saved themselves from greedy and abandoned themselves to reach the “vaisy” (joining with beloved – here the “vaisy” with the God).

This story (“Merchant and parrot”) is similar to the stories “Tafsiri Abulfutuh” and Fariduddin Attar’s “Asrornoma”. There are number of similarities between “Tafsiri Abulfutuh” and “Asrornoma”. But the story “Masnavi” is written in a completely different way.

Sheikh Attar, when he met Jalaluddin’s father, presented “Asrornoma” to the poet and told Bakhoudin Valad that the boy would become great person. That was just a tool. Jaloliddin Rumiy has appealed to the works of Attor. This is a simple parrot.” (the first note);

In the story Rumi expresses his ideological views in the symbol of a parrot. He writes his thoughts on the slogan “die before death”. According to the author it was the “need of the parrot” to die, otherwise it wouldn’t have asked the merchants from India to tell his friends about its condition. Rumi points out that this “need“ is a must for every person. The people of Tariqah (a stream in Sufism) cannot save their souls like a parrot unless they “die before death”. For salvation is important to face with the death. But it is voluntary death at the end of which a man abandons his pride and self-esteem and finds a way to the essence of the reality.

The author points out about the story he wanted to narrate when necessary in few bytes. Here the author also wants to draw the attention of the reader to the story. For example, the following byte contains:

If you read the story, the bird of your soul would want to fly from the cage.10

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The meaning of death is the need of the parrot, and you need to behave yourself as dead in the heat and the poverty.11

Aziziddin Nasafi, a prominent scholar in the world of Oriental civilization, describes voluntary death in his book “Komilnson” (A perfect person): “Be aware that the prophets and the saints have a different death apart from natural death. Because they die before their natural death with annihilated death ... and from the level of a person who is at the top of knowledge they reach the level that is close to the God.”12 That is to say, voluntary death is to...
reach this very level. Not everyone can reach this degree, because it is possible to reach this level only after saving oneself from greed.

Nonphysical death is the same as that when a man frees himself from greedy in order to be with the God.

… Voluntary death is to be entirely fanatical in connection with the existence of the world and its affairs. The person experiencing this situation does not even feel the presence of his own body. The natural death is no different from that...

Death is also of a few varieties: Mavtihamar (red death). It is important to resist the wishes and desires of greediness. Mavtiayaz (white death). This is a hunger strike of the person. Mavtiasad (black death). This is to endure what people do to a person. It is also called "fanofillah", that is, to sacrifice one’s all actions for the sake of the beloved (here the God)…

In his book “Nafahatul-uns”, Abdulrahmon Jami quotes HatambinniAsam’s words: “Whoever is in this turriqat should face these four deaths: white death and hunger, the black death and the patience of the people, red death and it is a struggle against the greediness, and the green death and sewing dress with plains”.

In the 4th chapter of the story “The Three Fish and the Hunter” Rumi gives the same episode when he described the second fish’s state and gives a hadith in order to prove it: Let me turn into a dead one and hand myself over to water. “To die before death” is getting rid of torture and move towards the God. O young man, die before death is a martyr’s death, soMustafo (sallallahayalhayvasalam) ordered us: You all are to die before death comes to you. Death with sedition.

Even though the story is about a parrot, in some places of the byte the author refers to it as nightingale. For example: He raised his head and said: “O nightingale, give us a share of our own sole.”

That is, when he says Mawlaviparrot, he seems to refer to birds in general. On the other hand, the author tries to attract attention to the conclusions drawn from the story, and does not pay much attention to such details of the plot. Because

both a nightingale and parrothave wings and can also be regarded as the symbol of a spirit.

Allah the Almighty commands in the Koran: “And whosoever it is Allah’s will to guide, He expandeth his bosom unto the Surrender” (Koran, 6/125). It is written in the book “Ihya’id-ulum”, when that the ayat (a part of the Koran) was revealed, the Companions asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) what was Sharhisad (chest expand). He said, “When the light emits to the heart, the beast will expand”. They said, “Oh, the Messenger of Allah, does it have a sign?” They were told: “Yes, it is to leave the house of pride, to return to the immortal home and to be ready for it before death comes.”

Rumi has also relied on this hadith. There is a great deal of meaning in the expression “prepare for it before death comes”. That is, it is necessary to prepare for all the tragedies that might a person be faced in the future. Rumy’s slogan is also to face the death with no fear. He was able to skillfully use “Merchant and parrot” in order to introduce this idea to the minds of the madrasah murids.

As it was mentioned earlier, the parrot is a symbol of soul here. It is well-known from the historical stories that a parrot is of the Indian origin. Accordingly, Ja’far al-Yaqisaid: “In philosophical stories, the parrot is a poor bird. Coming from the Indian property, the parrot always dwells in his desire to return to his homeland and lives with a desire to see its fellows.”

They considered the contents of the book as a whole, and created an artistic image of a parrot in order to express a case when spirits return to their homeland.

According to Masuddyriyoyat, the Arabs consider a spirit to types of birds... According to several hadiths, the ghosts of the believers are in the form of green birds in the paradise. Along with the plot of the story, Jalaliddin Rumi also presents his interpretation to the audience. Sometimes, he goes to the description of the plot, and sometimes interprets it to reveal the world of meanings within it. This method seems useful in two ways. Firstly, the listener focuses not only on the plot, but also on the conclusions made. Secondly, Rumi summarizes the results of each episode after the end of corresponding episode of the story. This technique was the easiest way to introduce Sufistic ideas in the minds of the murids. This is because the author is able to


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17 “Masnavi”, 1 / 1838.
synthesize conclusions based on other stories within the same story and eventually realizes the overall idea.

Having summarized the meaning of the narration Rumi begins to interpret the plot in order to draw attention to its subliminal meanings:

The story parrot of the soul is in this way; is there a person who is merciful to birds?22

Following the above-mentioned line, Mawlavi clarified these remarks about the perfect man and sought to establish his high status in a society.

The ability to describe Sufistic ideas in this story illustrates the author’s immense and extensive talent in the example of the enlightenent poem. The story is not only about Mavlavi Rumi, but also the status of all Sufists in this religious dimension.

On the example of only one story there were discussed several subjects, and there was provided an opportunity to explore some educational, ethical, and social issues. Of course, matters related to other topics are discussed based on the ideas of Sufism. Rumi considers Sufism not as a religious-philosophical dimension, but as aroces that covers the human feelings. According to Rumi, a representative of Sufism should be able to control his tongue, as well should know where and how express his/her opinion, and be emotionally and morally sensitive.

There are many examples of present-day Uzbek poetry that reproduce the stories and provide the reader with a new interpretation. Commitment of stories in a new style requires expertise and originality of the poet. In particular, the actuality of this story is proven by the fact that Shawkat Rahman, the great representative of modern Uzbek poetry, has given it in a new version. Only the main plot of “Merchant and Parrot” is given in the book “Abadiyatoralab” (Eternal Reckoning)23. The poet did not comment on the story like Jalolidin Rumi, but leaves it for the reader. But there are some changes in the plot which show that the poet made it for some purpose. This poem by ShavkatRahmon, like his other poems, also includes social content. Indeed, such activities serve as a link between our classic literature and modern literature.

But in Masnavi, the death of a parrot carried several meanings: Firstly, a man cannot achieve anything without forsaking himself. Secondly, a person should not be a rock, s/he should be soil, because a humble person will be honored everywhere, as flowers grow out of the soil. Thirdly, the figurative meaning of “death” can inspire people to do things that they are not sure they can do.

According to Rumi, a person who is willing to die voluntarily can become a perfect person. If the merchant did not say the words that he had heard and the circumstances he had experienced, his parrot could not have freed itself and get out of the cage. But there is another aspect of the story, which showed the death of the parrot suggested the merchant how to live his life.

References


22“Masnavi”, 1/1585.