



RESEARCH ARTICLE

MORAL VALUES IN THE POETRY OF BABUL ADAB OF KITABUL HAMĀSAH

*Dr. Noor Uddin Ahmed

Associate Professor in Arabic Cotton University, Guwahati-781001

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ABSTRACT

Arabic poetry is the earliest form of Arabic Literature, and the Arabs expressed their greatest mentality in the domain of their poetry in flowery art of language. Generally poetry has the capability to touch the heart of human being, while it bears moral values in its contents. Like many other philosopher poets, AbūTammām (d. 788 A.D.) compiled an anthology entitled Kitabu'l-Hamāsah comprising of 884 Arabic poems; they are accommodated with ten to eleven chapters; of which third chapter finds as *Bābu'l-Adab* i.e. "chapter of the manners". It consists of specific poems that related to ethics and morality of high order.

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INTRODUCTION

Kitāb al-Hamāsah is treasured with Arabic poems compiled by the philosopher poet, Abu Tammām (d.788 A.D). In fact, the work is entitled so after its first chapter that finds as *Bābu'l-Hamāsah* (the term *hamāsah* means "bravery"). The third chapter of this book is designed as *Bābu'l-Adab* (the term 'adab' means 'manners') which includes 55 pieces of specific poems related to ethics and morality. Basically its verses inculcate moral teaching in the line of perceiving humanity in life and reality in social affairs. This chapter is endowed with poems of those poets who flourished during right from pre-Islamic to Abbasid period i.e. down to the time of AbūTammām's life and compilation of this famous anthology. In fact, the work *Kitābu'l-Hamāsah* has been a distinguished genre of Arabic literature.

DESCRIPTION

(A) Kitābu'l-Hamāsah

This important work was compiled by Habīb Ibn AbiAaws al-Ṭā'ī, surnamed AbūTammām, a renowned poet of the Abbasid period. It is imperative to know that the utmost credits of Abu Tammām go with this valuable anthology, which was entitled as *Kitābu'l-Hamāsa*. Here mention may be made that towards the end of his life he visited the powerful governor of Khurāsān, "Abdullāh ibn Ṭāhir, who was virtually an independent sovereign.

While going to Hamadhān, there the winter season started and the excessive cold has fallen in that country and the snow blocked the road on which he was in journey. As such, he was bound to stop his journey and awaited there till becoming the good weather. During his stay he resided at the abode of the most eminent person of that place, Abū al-Wafa bin Salama. In fact, his friend Abu'l-Wafa possessed a nice library which had some collections of poems composed by the Arabs of the desert and books of other authors. Finding an amicable situation of study he selected many poems of those poets who belonged to the periods from the pre-Islamic to Islamic and this compilation was entitled as *kitābu'l- hamāsah*. The collection of poems in this book amounts to 884 within the chapters from *bāb al-hamāsa* to *bāb mudhamma al-nisā'*. In fact, the first chapter contains poems on bravery in the battle field and keeping patience at the moment of calamity, steadfastness in seeking vengeance and mindfulness under reproach and temptation, all of which qualities meant for the attributes regarded by the Arabs as a term of *hamāsa*.⁽¹⁾

It is imperative to know that Abu Ali Ahmad bin Muhammad bin al-Hasan al-Marzuqi (d. 421 A.H.) made a commentary to Diwān al-Hamāsah that shows 11 chapters comprising 882 pieces of poems or fragments of poems as follows:

- *al-Hamāsa* (Bravery) consists of 261 pieces.
- *al-Marāthī* (Elegies) consists of 137 pieces.
- *al-Adab* (Manners) consists of 55 pieces.
- *al-Nasīb*(the Beauty and Love for women) consists of 141 pieces.

*Corresponding author: Dr. Noor Uddin Ahmed,
Associate Professor in Arabic Cotton University, Guwahati-781001

- *al-Hijâ'* (Satires) consists of 80 pieces.
- *al-Adyâf*(Hospitality) consists of 110 pieces.
- *al-Madih*(Panegyric) consists of 32 pieces.
- *al-Sifât* (Miscellaneous Descriptions) consists of 3 pieces only.
- *al-Sairwa'l- Nu'âs* (Journey and Drowsiness) consists of 9 pieces.
- *al-Mulah*(Pleasantries) consists of 35 pieces.
- *Madhamma al-nisa* (Vituperation of Women) consists of 19 pieces.⁽²⁾

Here it is imperative to know that the first chapter of this book entitled al-Hamâsah is the longest one as per its volume and number of poems; secondly the first and the second chapters (i.e. al-Hamâsah & al-Marâthî) together find more than half of this bulk work. The poems are mostly selected from fragments of longer poems, but a considerable number are probably of entire compositions. They are taken from the works of Arab poets of all periods down to the time of AbûTammâm's life (the latest ascertainable date being A.D. 832), but chiefly of the poets belonged to pre-Islamic period and those of the early days of al-Islam (*Mukhadrimûn*) including the poets who flourished during the reigns of the Umayyad caliphs, A.D. 660-749 and not more than sixteen fragments from the Abbasid period.⁽³⁾

A Brief Biography of AbûTammâm:

Habîb Ibn AbîAws, al-Tâ'î, surnamed AbûTammâm (804 – 846 A.D.) was born at a village Jâsim by name, one of the circles of Damascus. His father left for Damascus where he was engaged in the profession of weaving works, and AbûTammâm also helped in the service of his father. At his youthful age he went to Egypt and served in the employment of supplying water for the *'Amar Mosque* and the scholars thereof. Alongside, there he started getting poetry by heart; and followed other poets as well. In fact, he became excellent in the art of poetry with a mastery of high order. It has been observed that no one of his contemporaries could compete with the excellence of his poetic art; furthermore, his poetry was exhibited in the markets of literature around the country. He left Egypt for the houses of nobles and sought gracious patronage. In fact, the persons who loved literature and the poems of eulogy were especially found to accept him; he could earn *dirhems* with poeticism in life at the larger scale in comparison to others. By dint of his commendable character in poeticism, he made connection with Aḥmadîbn al-Mu'taṣim and eulogized him. For which he was awarded the job to run the postal department at Mosul. In fact, he ran it for two years long; again he switched over to his earlier job of service that continued to his age of forty years. Physically AbûTammâm was a tall figure man and body of brown colour. Temperamentally he was eloquent in speech, and intelligent in nature, keeping presence of mind and strong memory. He kept 14000 poems of *razajmetre* in memory except *qasidas* and fragments.⁽⁴⁾

Landmarks of Arabic Poetry

It is aware of the fact that primarily the transmission of Arabic poetry was the only medium to preserve it. As culture thrived with the poetical aspects, it had a great role in the pre-Islamic and following before Abbasids, of which status may be compared in the society similar to today's free press; the poets were not only the leader of the clan but also the writers, journalists and chroniclers. Their poems were the testimonies

of their fine art, culture, traditions and ethos. That was the divine when the Arabs really enjoyed the real freedom of expression. In such a climate of free expression, it was acceptable for poets to discuss the society's current affairs and express their free opinions. In fact, Pre-Islamic period had been above all poetry of the desert, deeply stamped with characteristics imposed on it by the special condition of the Bedouin life.

The Arab poet was not only a narrator alone but a master of brevity, a magician of the rhyme and words. His transmitter (*rawî*) would act as a commentator to supply detail and the necessary background. Often a transmitter would himself be a poet, and in turn also have someone to transmit his own verses. Hence, Pre-Islamic poetry was transmitted and preserved orally until the latter part of the seventh century A.D. When the Arab scholars undertook a large effort to collect and record verses and shorter compositions that had survived in the memories of professional reciters.⁽⁵⁾ It must be admitted that poetry was seriously taken to composition and generally exhibited in the literary assembly of Ukaz market during the season of pilgrimage, for which an arbiter was set up among the poets and a tent of red lather was pitched for him for this purpose. Here attention may be made that al-Nâbighah al-Dhubyanî was one of the last of such arbiters. The poetry which won the favour of the arbiters at 'Ukâz' during the season of pilgrimage was entrusted to Quraysh for safe-keeping. Thus, one poem was recited by 'Alqamah bin Abada of Tamîm to a man of Quraysh in praise of Ghassanid king al-Harith and that they admired it and said to him "This is the necklace (*sini*) of all times."⁽⁶⁾ Some highly celebrated poems were hung on the *Ka'bah* in honour of their merit and were therefore called "*al-mu'allaqat*" that is "suspended".

In fact, these odes are long in volume and seven in number; they are divided into two kinds: (1) *qasîda* (ode) and (2) *qit'ah*(fragment). Here mention may be made that all pre-Islamic 'rajaz' belonged to the class of *qit'ah* consisting of seven to ten lines at most. Some *qit'ah*(s) are written in the non-*rajaz* metres, found in the celebrated anthologies like *Kitâbu'l-Hamâsa*, which are selected from longer poems. According to Ibn Sallam *al-qit'ah* (fragment) may be regarded as the earliest form of *qasîda* composition; because he advocates that long *qasîda* started to be composed only in the time of Hisham bin 'Abd Manaf and 'Abd al-Muttalib bin Hishâm during around the end of the sixth century A.D. As moral values are preserved in Arabic verses, the Prophet of Islam once heard the verses of 'Alâ', and then he exclaimed: "Well done! Some poetry, indeed, contains gems of wisdom and some prose acts like magic."⁽⁷⁾ Likewise the Prophet once asked the elegiac poetess, Al-Khansâ' to recite her poetry. As and when she sang her poetry, the Prophet was so pleased that made him to have utterance spontaneously, "Go on, O Khansâ'! Furthermore, in this connection, JâbirîbnSamura says: "I have been with the Prophet for over a hundred times in the company of his Companions at the mosque. They often exchanged poetic recitations and sometimes conversed on pre-Islamic topics while the Prophet listened and smiled with them."⁽⁸⁾ Alongside, the poet Hassan bin Thâbit (d.674 A.D) used to praise Islam and the Prophet of Islam as well with his precious verses that inculcate moral values in high order. It appears from the history of Arabic literature that all the first four caliphs were poets and among them Hazrat 'Alî (d. January 27, 661 A.D) became champion. In fact, his verses are full of ethics and moral values.

The Umayyad poet al-Farazdaq (d.730 A.D) also reminded the value of ethics to the caliph al-Hasham bin Abd al-Malik; while he was found to use sarcastic tone to Imam JaynulAbedin (d. 712 A.D) saying in his verses as follows:

“It is he who is the son of the best of all men of God
And it is he, who is the most pious and devout,
The purest and most unstained
The chastest and most righteous
A symbol (for Islam)”⁽⁹⁾

It has been observed that Arabic poetry largely thrived in the Abbasid period with moral values and ethics as well in the composition of AbûNuwâs (d. 810 A.D.), AbûTammâm (d. 846 A.D), AbûTayyîb al- Mutanabbî (d. 965 A.D.) and Abû al-‘Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî (d. 1057 A.D.). In fact, their verses bear human spirits covering the common issues, idea, politics and morality to the greater society.⁽¹⁰⁾

Critical Views

It has been observed that AbûTammâm was well acquainted with the highest intellectual literary standards of his time. Some of his contemporaries have reproached him for using his verses in order to display his sophistication, for example, through the frequent use of philosophical terms (mainly borrowed from Greek philosophy), and unusual expressions. His poetry was almost academic poetry. It required an educated readership and demanded of his reader to be well informed and familiar with the intellectual climate of his days. In fact, some scholars are of the opinion that the book *kitâbu’l-ḥamâsah* is one of the treasuries of early Arabic poetry and the poems thereof are of exceptional beauty. His own poems have been somewhat neglected owing to the success of his compilations, but they enjoyed great repute in his lifetime. His poems reflect a stylistic break from prevailing oral-based concepts of Arab poetry, often describing historical events and people. They were distinguished for the purity of their style, the merit of the verse, and the excellent manner of treating subjects, and have been linked to the prevailing Mu‘tazilite philosophy of the Abbasid period.

According to the poet Adunis, Abu Tammâm “started out from a vision of poetry as a sort of creation of the world through language, comparing the relationship between the poet and the word to the relationship between two lovers, and the act of composing poetry to the sexual act.”⁽¹¹⁾ The editors of Encyclopedia Britannica gave views regarding the book of *al-ḥamâsah* that AbûTammâm displayed higher qualities in his choice of extracts than in his own poetry. It is a storehouse of ancient material, and it became a fundamental work for poets seeking to acquire polish.⁽¹²⁾ In fact, the author of *Kitâb al-Fihrist*, Ibn al-Nadîm (d.995 / 998 A.D.) made a remark on *Kitâb al-Hamâsah*, he says: “Abu Tammam is considered as the first Arab poet who gave attention to compilation of the best odes selected from poetic heritage that treasured in a book called al-Ḥamâsah.”⁽¹³⁾

DISCUSSION

It is imperative to know that AbûTammâm made a due endeavor to establish moral values in the human society; especially with the third chapter of al-Hamâsah entitled *bâb al-adab* (manners) which includes 55 pieces of specific poems related to ethics and morality. To demonstrate the credit of the

poems contained in *bâb al-adab*, we may cite some relevant verses of poets as follows:

The Veiled poet *al-Muqanna’ al-Kindi* (d.960 A.D.), his actual name is Muhammad ibn Zufaribn ‘Umairibn Abi Shammar al-Kindi al-Hadramî, hailed from Southern Arab tribe of Kinda. He used to veil his head with handkerchief; because of either it was a habit for the elite class in society or for his notable beauty fearing that people would harm him by the evil eye.⁽¹⁴⁾ The poet says to people that the matter of bearing hatred and old grudge in mind destroys glory in the society and a true leader cannot do so for the greater interest of a society; in this connection he says as follows:

“If they (step-brothers) eat my flesh, I increase their fleshes,
And if they demolish my glory, I build for them glories.
I do not bear earlier hatred to them, and old grudges
Who bears, he cannot be a true leader.”

In fact, his poetry bears a social commitment and moral tone to it. It was carefully crafted, and its message appealed to his contemporaries, who preserved much of it for posterity.

An Arab poet says about the human intellectualism; he quotes as follows:

“There is no good in the beauty of a body; while the nobility
And wisdom do not weigh with the beauty of human body.”

The poet *Qais bin al-Khatim* bin ‘Adi bin ‘Amar bin Sud bin Zufar al-Awsî (620 A.D.), also known as Abu Zaid as his nickname, was a leader of the pagan Arabs. It is known that his father was killed by a man of ‘AbdQais or Khajraz tribe, while he was small one. As and when he obtained adulthood, he killed that very person for taking the revenge of his father at Medina and also the murderer of his grandfather at Zi al-Majaz. At Medina, he was invited by the Prophet (pbuh) to accept Islam and the Qur’anic verses were also recited before him, but he responded saying that “certainly I would hear amazing word, let me look into my matter this year, hereafter I would come to you. But he died before his return.”⁽¹⁵⁾ In fact, the poet draws attention of people in the context of human faculty linked to the factuality in social life; he says as follows:

“Every misfortune comes down on people;
Very soon the relief comes to them after having been severe.
While a man is desirous of getting his power;
But Allah rejects excepting his divine desire.”

4. The poet *Yajid bin al-Hakam al-Thaqafi* flourished during the period of the Umayyad dynasty. As a poet his reputation may be judged by the remark of al-Farazdaq, while he was passing by a saloon where poetry was being recited by Yazid bin al-HakamThaqafi. Then al-Farazdaq inquired of him: who is he reciting poetry alike us? People said that he is Yajid bin al-Hakam al-Thaqafi. In fact, the poet al-Farazdaq was pleased at him and said: “Yes, by Allah I bear witness that my aunty has given birth to him. It is reported that the poet Yazid was one of the companions of the Prophet of Islam.”⁽¹⁶⁾ The poet gave admonition to his son Badar saying that you should know the reality of your friendship and the right of your neighbor. The credit of his poetry may be adjudicated in the verses as follows:

“You should keep the friendship of your friend;

*No goodness in the friendship that does not last.
And you should know neighbors' right,
It is sure, a noble man knows it."*

The poet *Ma'an bin Aws al-Mujanni* bin Nasr bin Ziyâd bin As'ad (d. 683 A.D.); his lineage reaches to the Mujaina tribe and no information received about his birth date or year, except to his flourishing in the Jahiliya period. In fact, no source could uncover his earlier life and growth as well as his family whereabouts. From the sources of his poetry, researcher could determine that he was married to two wives and they lived together; the first one called Huqba or 'Umm Huqba belonged to his tribe living in the rural area of Basra. There took place disorder between them that caused the poet to divorce her. The second one called Laila who hailed from Basra belonging to the same tribe. The poet happened to divorce her in some cases, but he repented thereupon.⁽¹⁷⁾ As such, the poet experienced about the reality of social life, of which testimony may be perceived in the following verses:

*"If you could not maintain justice with your brother;
You would find him on the blade of separation, if the fellow
bears power.
By your life! I do not know who will die first
And certainly I fear the matter with steadfast."*

In fact, the poet advocates that if someone cannot maintain justice with his wise brother, then he may go up to the blade of swords. The human-being does not know about his last breath; so people should be very sincere in respect of friendship with a promising bond.

The poet *Salim bin Wabisa* bin Ma'bad al-Asadî (743 A.D.) belonged to a family of sahaba of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). His father Wabisa took narration of hadith from the Prophet of Islam; lived at Kufa and his son Salim took birth in the tenure of either 'Umar (R.A.) or 'Uthman (R.A.). It is reported that he obtained his adulthood age during the administration of the Caliph Uthman (R.A.). He composed a good number of poems; thereby he established himself as a poet. He became governor for the city entitled Raqa (located at the northern Syria) under Muhammad bin Marwan. The poet Salim died at the ending period of Hisham's khilafat (724 – 6 February 743).⁽¹⁸⁾

In the domain of poetry literature, the poet is counted as one of the Tâbi'in; his poetry leads to the suggestion for people that a man should apply prudence to the case of hatred done by the wicked persons. In this connection, the poet says as follows:

*"I applied medicine to his heart for a long time,
It was full of hatred, but I chipped the nails from him without
the nail-chipper.
I carried out with prudence and goodness having placed the
warp and wearing the woof
On account of the fear of God, he did not show any regard to
my relationship."*

It appears from the foregoing study that AbūTammâm made a due endeavor to establish moral values in the human society;

so that upcoming generation can lead their life in conformity with the moral sensibility and comprehension of reality of social life. It is fact that the poems held in the *bâbu'l-adab* are extraordinary in comparison to other poems with different characteristics.

Conclusion

In fine, it has been observed that *bâb al-adab* of *diwân al-hamâsah* is endowed with excellent poems, which are comprised of enormous philosophy; certainly their importance goes to the fact of human day to day life in a society. Indeed this chapter inculcates knowledge at par excellence and the poems thereof are deemed practical in social life. Undoubtedly the poems of this chapter are beyond vituperation, although Aristotle remarked (d. 384 B.C): "The best poetry is that which contained the more and more false". In fact, the contents of *bâb al-adab* may be applied to the remark made by the Prophet of Islam (632 A.D.): "There is philosophy in the contents of poetry." It is excellent and extraordinary in comparison to other poems, while their excellence remains only with simile and parables.

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