

Imru'ulqays's Mu'allaqah and Simile

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Abstract: 25 odes and some odd literary pieces are all that have survived of Imrû'ul-Qays's poetry, but still he is unanimously acclaimed to be one of the foremost bards of pre-Islamic Arabia. The most famous of his poems is his *Mu'allqah* ('suspended poem') which has been explained and commented upon by several classical scholars. He was the first poet who began his odes with crying over the relics of his beloved's tent. Strong expression of passionate love, use of beautiful images, in addition to skillfully woven short and meaningful descriptions of women, hunting scenes, animals like horse and camel and phenomena of nature such as night and thunderstorm is other salient features of his poetry which left an indelible impression on his contemporary and subsequent generations of poets. His numerous travels, varied companionships, together with his incisive power of observation, tremendously contributed towards the strengthening of his poetic talent and appeal. Generally drawn from nature, wine drinking parties and pleasure bouts, similes are the most favorite of his devices which he employs to such a great effect that he has come to be looked upon as the father of simile in pre-Islamic times.

Key words: Imru'ulqays's Mu'allaqah • Simile • Pre-Islamic Poetry

INTRODUCTION

Imru'ul-Qays, Abû'l-Hârith Hunduj, son of Hijr al-Kindî, one of the foremost poets of the 6th century pre-Islamic Arabia whose unparalleled poetic talent and its injurious impact on society were epitomized in the following saying of the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon him) that "he was the most poetic of all poets and their leader to Hell-fire" was the scion of the precarious north Arabian kingdom of Kindah and on his mother's side he was descended from the famous tribe of Taghlib. His father who ruled over the tribe of Banû Asad was treacherously killed by one of his subjects. Having failed to muster enough support despite his relentless efforts to avenge this dastardly act, Imru'ul-Qays finally took refuge at the court of the Roman emperor, Justinian I. After a long stay at Constantinople, he was named the phylarch of Palestine and received a body of troops from Justin II. Strengthened by this newly acquired military contingent, Imru'ul-Qays once again set out for Arabia to settle score with the assassin of his father, but, in the meanwhile, one of his inveterate enemies from the same tribe of Banû Asad, who had been following him from place to place, charged him before the emperor with the seduction of a princess. Consequently, the emperor sent him a poisoned cloak, which caused his death at Ancyra.

Most of Imru'ul-Qays's poems have been lost and what is left is a small book of poems including about 25 odes together with some literary pieces. It was first published by MacGuckin de Slane at Paris, in 1837. However, his most famous contribution is his *Mu'allaqah*, or the "suspended poem" which comprises 82 verses and starts with the following couplet:

Oh, co-travellers let us stop and, for the sake of the beloved's memory,

Cry in the sandy place between Dakhûl and Haumal [1]

The poem has been extensively written about and commented upon, over the centuries, by numerous renowned authorities, such as Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Nahhas (d. 949 A.D.), Abu 'Abd Allah Husayn bin Ahmad Zuzani (d. 1091 A.D.) and Khatib Tabrizi (d. 1108 A.D.). It has also been translated, from time to time, into German, English and Persian languages.

Imru'ul-Qays who led a dissolute life and was known for his overindulgence in winebibbing and carefree manners, passionately loved his cousin, 'Unayzah and as the legend goes, once he followed her to the pool Dârati Juljul where she had gone picnicking with her friends. While the maidens were bathing in the pool, Imru'ul-Qays captured their clothes and would not surrender these until each one of them came out of the water and asked for

hers. They held back as long as possible before they yielded to this demand of his. Afterwards, when the damsels complained of hunger, Imru'ul-Qays forthwith slew his camel to feed them. Having eaten their food, lest he should be left stranded in the desert, the girls divided the trappings of his camel, each carrying home a part upon her beast, while the carrying of the poet himself fell to the lot of 'Unayzah, who jestingly protested that the howdah on her camel's back was too small to accommodate them both.

The *Mu'allaqah* of Imru'ul-Qays mainly revolves around three main themes, namely, the elegiac reminiscence of love and poet's mourning at the erstwhile encampment of his beloved (verses 1-9), the frank restatement of his amatory adventures, especially at the Dâratî Juljul (verses 10-43) and the glimpse of whatever he had encountered in the course of his wanderings during his homelessness. This last includes beautiful portrayal of phenomena of nature such as night (44-49), animals like wolves (50-52) and horse and his hunting exploits (53-70) thunderstorm (verses 71-73) and flood (verses 74-82.) [2].

Not only first in point of time, but in poetic talent also, according to most of the critics, Imru'ul-Qays's *Mu'allaqah* stands unrivalled and Arabs, in general, looked upon it as an example par excellence of beauty and creativity. According to [3], this "poem is entirely self-centred and noted for its natural descriptions, including a fine picture of a thunderstorm, as well as for the frankness of his amatory passages." [3].

Imru'ul-Qays is credited with the innovation of starting his odes with crying over the relics of the deserted encampment of the beloved, of speaking of love so passionately, of weaving beautiful images into his poems and of skillfully employing short and meaningful descriptions (of women, hunting scenes, horses, camels and nights). These themes not only possessed an enduring appeal for the poet and his audience, but they also left an indelible imprint on the poetry of succeeding generations of poets as well. Summarizing this aspect of the pre-Islamic poetry, in which Imru'ul-Qays, no doubt, excelled all his contemporaries, [3] rightly observes:

After depicting the final separation from his beloved as her tribe moves off to seek fresh pastures, the poet pursues his journey and seizes the occasion to describe, some time briefly but often with all an expert's enthusiasm, the fine points of his camel or horse. Its swiftness and endurance of fatigue on his long and dangerous journeys leads him to compare it to a wild ass, ostrich, or oryx, but the comparison often seems to become submerged as the theme is developed into a lively

picture of animal life or of a hunting scene, which to western taste is often the most attractive section of the poem.

Characterized by peculiar aesthetic sensibilities, apt use of words, irresistible emotive power, one of the most important hallmarks of Imru'ul-Qays's poetry is his exquisite employment of similes, a trait which has deservedly earned him the epithet of the 'creator of images'. The chief characteristic of his similes is that they are sensory, a feature which is amply illustrated by the following verses of his *Mu'allaqah*. The chief characteristic of his similes is that they are sensory such as his similes on woman:

"Many a veiled and white - bodied woman like eggs, whom has not been misused by anybody I, hurriedly enjoyed playing with her." [4]

Here, through simile, the purity, delicacy and virginity of the beloved are emphasized. In another couplet:

"She is slim, white- bodied and not too fat. Her heart is quite like a soft, bright and shining mirror." [4]

Here, the woman's heart is the tenor and mirror is the vehicle. Her softness and brightness is portrayed through this simile.

"Her soft, thin and flexible waist is like a leather bridle. She is of soft, white and delicate feet like a cane under leafy branches of a palm tree." [4]

Here the simile is sensory and both the tenor and vehicle consist of single words. The softness, whiteness, delicacy and slenderness of the beloved are portrayed through simile.

In Another Couplet He Says: "She takes the things with her quite soft and not coarse fingers. It seems her fingers are as soft as Zabi worms or as soft as Eshal brushes." [4]

Here the simile is sensory and extended. In another couplet he says:

"We faced a group of wild cows whose female ones were like mistresses with long skirts going round some idols" (It means that when the cattle saw us they came together and turned round each other). [4]

Poets usually compare woman to she cows and they have learned it from Emraolghais

Now Let's See the Similes on Horse: "a fast horse is like a toy in the hands of a child turned round by a strong long string" [4]

Here we have sensory simile and the speed and fast - footedness of the horse is shown.

“The waist of that horse was like that of a deer in slenderness and its shank was like that of an ostrich in height and its running was wolf-like and jumping fox-like.” [4]

Here again the similes are sensory and both the tenor and vehicle are of single words. The slenderness, height, running and jumping of the horse is portrayed.

“My horse is a horse that we can use for invading and escaping .It goes for word and backward well .In fastness, it is like a soft level rock washed down by the flood” [4]

Here by using sensory similes, the speed and fastness of the horse is shown.

“Its soft level back is like the bride’s sweet smelling stone or like colocynth.” [4]

Now we come to the description of rain and flood which is used beautifully in similes by Emraolghais.

“At the start of the rain Thabir Mountain was like the head of the tribe wrapped in striped clothes” (running down the mountain. the flood’s direction is of different color compared to the other parts of the mountain and it looks like a striped clothes from afar) [4]

“In the morning the top of Mojaymer hill was like a spinning wheel because of flood and its remnants.” (Mojaymer was surrounded in water and its top was surrounded with flood and the remnants turning round it like a spinning wheel.) [4]

Now Let Us Discuss Similes on Thunder: “oh,my friend, can you see the thunder whose brightness is like the movement of two hands among thick clouds and whose top is like a crown over the others? “(Only he who has been in deserts at dark, cloudy nights and has seen this thunder with his own eyes can understand this simile) [4]

“It shines, or it is like a nun’s lantern whose wick is bent by pouring oil.” [4]

Whoever reads Emraolghais’s Moallaga faces various nice and ordered words and expressions which show his mastery .There are almost no mistakes in them. That Ebn Sallam has considered Emraolghais as the best creator of simile is quite true.

His Moallaga is so replete with nice and new similes that have made him the master of simile in Pre-Islamic Time.

Ebn Sallam, in his book, Tabaghat, allocates a chapter to him. It seems in Emraolghais’s view a poem without simile is not a poem. That is the reason why he has decorated every subject of his Moallaga with beautiful similes [5].

CONCLUSION

The above discussions show Emraolghais is highly interested in simile. He takes his simile from his environment, nature, wine drinking and pleasure making. The main feature of his similes is that they are sensory. He is the most prominent creator of simile and his Moallaga is full of nice and new similes imitated by Arab and Non-Arab poets’ .So, he is considered as the master of simile in Pre-Islamic time.

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