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Symbolism in Kashmiri Sufi Poetry: Interpreting Shamas Faqir's Similes and Wahab Khar's Metaphors

Abstract:

Symbolism is the technique of describing objects and imbuing them with new meanings. Symbolism in poetry adds to the effect of the universal language and provides multiple levels of meaning for interpretation by readers. The present paper deals with the symbolic techniques used in Kashmiri Sufi poetry by the prominent Sufi poets such as Shamas Faqir and Wahab Khar. The paper aims at analyzing and interpreting the similes and the metaphors put to use by the aforementioned poets that would bring forth the intense appeal of Kashmiri Sufi poetry on the surface for further analysis.

Key-words: Symbolism, simile, metaphor, seeker, beloved, moth, candle.

Symbolism may be defined as the technique of expressing ideas and emotions not by describing them directly, but, by using suggestive language to create impressions in the mind of the reader. Balakian states:

Symbolism was largely a reaction against naturalism and realism, anti-idealistic styles which were attempts to represent reality in its gritty particularity, and to elevate the humble and the ordinary over the ideal. Symbolism was a reaction in favour of spirituality, the imagination, and dreams. (2)

Symbolists believed that art should represent absolute truths that could only be described indirectly. Thus, they wrote in a very metaphorical and suggestive manner, endowing particular images or objects with symbolic meaning. This technique has been used by poets in general and mystic poets in particular throughout the ages. Mystic poets associated with almost all world religions express their innermost feelings and spiritual experiences through various similes, metaphors and symbols.

Kashmiri Sufi poetry too, is full of symbolic expressions, where most of the prominent Sufi poets have put to use such similes and metaphors that add loads of intensity to their Sufi verses. Shamas Faqir and Wahab Khar, renowned Kashmiri Sufi poets, are known for their elite symbolic poetry that once read, captures the very heart of a reader. Their use of similes and metaphors is

immense and the way they have put these to use to describe their thoughts is intense.

For Shamas Faqir, his beloved's beauty is immense and hence he finds an optimum expression for his feelings in using similes that in one way or the other help in describing his beloved's beauty better. The eyes speak a thousand words. They are the windows of the heart. It is usually through the eyes that one enters into the heart of the beloved. Shamas says:

*Chasm Aaho Yumberzalo
Maar chasmye chaye mouj daar
Hirne chashme chaye Kaemlo
Walo mat i maashouke deedaar hao*

(qtd. in Aziz 257)

Bewitching are your eyes as *Yumberzal*
Your eyes carry the grace of waves.
More beautiful eyes than those of deer's,
O Crazy beloved! I yearn for thy glimpse.

In the above verses, the poet compares the eyes of his beloved to three things namely *Yumberzal*, waves and those of the eyes of a deer. All these similes used are in themselves paragons of beauty and comparing the eyes of his beloved to these, the poet says that his beloved's eyes are fresh and beautiful as *Yumberzal* flower, as elegant and graceful as the dancing waves of sea and as deep and wide as the eyes of deer. In yet another poem he says:

*Soan duur chum alraawaan
Doanwaen chus nor haraan
Hur zan tim Swarge Khatiye
Meon wan tas latiye*

(qtd. in Aziz 191)

When he (God as beloved) swings his golden earrings
Like gems, they dazzle a lot.
As if the fairies emerged out of heaven
O friend! Convey my concerns to him.

While describing the beautiful attire of his beloved, the poet says that the golden earrings of his beloved dazzle like those of gems. And the two dazzling earrings seem to the poet as fairies of heaven. Comparing the beloved's earrings to that of gems and fairies of heaven, the poet paints before us their gorgeous and sparkling look that is irresistible to the lover's eye. Here Shamas describes God in the frame of a woman's beauty. He uses a woman's image for describing his beloved. Elsewhere he says:

*Roye khursheed chus taabaan
Tshaaye rous shah e khobaan
Maah i taabaan nor phatiye
Meon wan tas latiye*

(qtd. in Aziz 191)

My beloved's face shines a Sun,
 The shadow- less Shah is all glorious,
 Thou radiate light like a Sun, Oh beloved!
 O friend! Convey my concerns to him.

These verses show that the face of his beloved glitters like the Sun. The face spreads its magic beams that radiate like the sharp rays of the Sun scattering light all around. Here Shamas says that his beloved's essence is as illuminating as a sparkling sun and a centre of attraction as the Sun usually stands to be.

Kashmiri Sufi poetry is also rich in metaphors. Metaphors have time and again been used in it to heighten the intensity of the meaning of Sufi poetry. Wahab Khar is known for employing metaphors in his poetry. In one of his poems he says:

Mas deutham baal i yaaro
Kas wane soander soander
Kaame doha meyane yaaro
Paame chane barsar barsar
Naaman karye shomaro
Kas wane soander soander

(qtd. in Ramzan 85)

You fed me liquor, O dear beloved,
 To whom should I 'lovely lass' say?
 O God of beauty, dear beloved
 Your taunts, I would bear with utter patience.
 Countless though, I would keep mugging up your names
 To whom should I 'lovely lass' say?

In these verses the poet says that his beloved has fed him liquor and now unmindful of the world around, he feels restless as to whom would he convey his ordeal. Here 'liquor' is used for 'love's nectar.' By using 'liquor,' as a metaphor, the poet expresses his ecstatic state. In his rapturous state he yearns for God's glimpse. Yet again the word 'taunts' refers to God's indifference, Wahab has appropriately used the word 'taunts' here. 'Taunts' are unbearable and pierce one's heart and so does God's indifference to Wahab. But still he is hopeful enough and keeps himself occupied by the very act of invoking the names of God. Further he says:

Shuniya hiki janaawaro
Kathe chaani shakar shakar
Yeti beh karo kathe taro
Kas wane soander soander

(qtd. in Ramzan 85)

O the bird of open skies!
 Your talks are coated of sugar.
 Sit here and we would talk,

To whom should I 'lovely lass' say?

In the above verses the poet uses the phrase "bird of open skies." It is a metaphor that describes free and exalted nature of God who knows no boundaries. The one, who is above all, sees all. Wahab while referring to God as his beloved says that sweetness oozes out of His entire persona and even His silent words feel like dipped in candies. Further in the same poem he says:

Bai-aar tabardaaro
Laeytham tabar tabar
Tabar e korum paar e paaro
Kas waene soander soander

(qtd. in Ramzan 85)

O unkind woodcutter
 You axed me again and again,
 This axe tore me down into pieces
 To whom should I 'lovely lass' say?

In the above verses, the poet through the metaphor "woodcutter" brings forth God's image as the one who reduces a seeker's self to dust. Here "axe" refers to "love for God" that continuously befalls a seeker and its strength turns a seeker's might into rubble. For Wahab, God is a woodcutter who batters the material centric soul of a seeker, breaking it piece by piece and then reshaping it again into a useful commodity--an abode of God.

Wahab Khar in almost all his major works has exploited metaphors to bring on the surface such Sufi feelings that would have been otherwise difficult to describe. The following verses are relevant in this connection:

Shamahan gah trowe war i warye
Paaye buz pompueer aaw laarye
Pompueer sund gath metch kya zaanay
Az roz saanay haa madno

(qtd. in Saqi 18)

The candle dazzled at a slow pace
 Heard of the address and the moth came running,
 How could a fly come to know the moth's rotation?
 Stay at our home today, O beloved!

In the above- verses the "moth" as a metaphor describes the restless state of a seeker who every now and then wants to merge with the candle flames. A seeker's yearning for God and his continuous pursuits for merging himself in the "Absolute" through self-sacrifice has been amply made clear. It is only a true seeker who like a moth yearning for his beloved's glimpse annihilates himself so that he dies to remain alive forever as a true lover. The ultimate union with God that a seeker wants to attain is beautifully described by using the metaphors of the candle and the moth.

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