

Qasida And Masnavi: The History and Artistic Features of Arabic Poetry and Prose Genres

Maxamadxodjayev Baxromxo'ja

Lecturer at the 'Arabic Language and Literature al-Azhar' Department, International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan

Abstract: This article analyzes the origins, structure, artistic features, and socio-spiritual significance of qasida and masnavi, two of the oldest and most prominent genres of Arabic literature. Qasida is examined as a classic example of Arabic poetry, detailing its three main parts: nasib, rahil, and madih. The content, poetic characteristics, and influence of these sections on the development of Arabic poetry are explained.

Masnavi is analyzed as a narrative-didactic genre, highlighting its rhyme scheme, role in depicting epic events, and artistic expression capabilities. Additionally, the importance of the masnavi genre in creating Sufi, didactic, and educational works is emphasized.

The article provides examples from the qasidas of poets such as Al-Mutanabbī, Imru' al-Qays, and Abu Tammam, as well as masnavis by authors like Jalaluddin Rumi, Nizami Ganjavi, and Alisher Navoi. The content and artistic features of these works are elucidated. The influence of qasida and masnavi genres on Arabic, Persian, and Turkic literatures and their place in contemporary poetry are analyzed.

Keywords: Arabic literature, qasida, masnavi, poetry, prose, Jahiliyyah period, socio-political themes, artistic devices, exaggeration (mubalagha), metaphor (tashbeh), allegory (istiora), irony (kinoya).



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INTRODUCTION

Arabic literature is one of the oldest and richest sources of world cultural heritage, with its foundations rooted in ancient poetry and prose. In this literature, the genres of qasida and masnavi hold a special place. Qasida is a classic example of Arabic poetry, distinguished by its strict structure, effective use of artistic devices, and inclusion of traditional themes. The primary purpose of this genre is to express the poet's emotions, socio-political relations, and aesthetic visions. In turn, masnavi is mainly narrative-didactic in nature, serving as a convenient form for describing epic events, moral advice, and Sufi reflections.

The qasida and masnavi genres are of great importance not only as literary genres but also as significant representations of Arab culture and social life. Through qasidas, poets praised their

patrons, criticized their enemies, or highlighted social issues. Through this genre, Arab poets expressed personal experiences, social changes, and political events. In doing so, poets often used artistic devices such as metaphor, allegory, and irony to create impactful poetic works.

Masnavi, with its epic nature, holds great significance in Arabic, Persian, and Turkic literature. Works written in this genre narrate large-scale events in a coherent storytelling system, aiming to provide moral lessons to the reader and listener. Famous thinkers and poets like Jalaluddin Rumi, Nizami Ganjavi, and Alisher Navoi created many masterpieces in the masnavi genre. These works, in their time, served not only as examples of artistic skill but also contributed to the widespread dissemination of religious and Sufi ideas.

Qasida is one of the oldest and most renowned genres of Arabic poetry, characterized by traditional themes, strict structure, and the skillful use of artistic devices. Qasidas are primarily written to praise, criticize, or depict life events, and their length can range from 15 to 100 couplets.

Initially created by poets of the Jahiliyyah period, this genre also flourished during the Islamic era. Examples include the qasidas of poets such as Imru' al-Qays, Al-Mutanabbī, and Abu Tammam.

Qasida traditionally consists of three main parts:

1. **Nasib** (Lyrical Introduction). In the nasib section, the poet often reminisces about lost love, the beauty of the beloved, or memories of the past. This part is dedicated to expressing poetic emotions and sentiments in the most vivid manner. Devices such as metaphor (tashbeh) and allegory (istiḥṣā) are widely used.

Example: A famous couplet by Imru' al-Qays:

قفَا نَبِكْ مِنْ ذِكْرِي حَبِيبٍ وَمَنْزَلٍ، بِسَقَطِ اللَّوَى بَيْنَ الدُّخُولِ فَحَوْلٍ.

(*Qifa nabki min zikra habibin va manzili, bisiqti al-luva bayna ad-dukhuli va Humali.*) “Stop, let us weep, remembering my lost beloved and my old abode, between Dukhol and Humal, at Siqti al-Luva.”¹

This famous couplet by Imru' al-Qays in the nasib section vividly portrays the lost love and memories of youth with rich imagery. It is full of metaphors and emotional imagery.

2. **Rahil** (Journey Description). The poet describes their journeys, natural landscapes, or battle scenes. This part reflects the poet's life experiences and struggles against hardships. Vivid depictions (tableau), nature imagery, and an epic spirit are used.

وَمَرَّ الثَّوْرُ يَحْكُ قُرُونَهُ، بِفَضَاءٍ كَأَنَّهُ وَجْهٌ الْأَرْضِ.

(*Va marra as-savru yahikku qirunahu, bifadain ka'annah wajhu al-ardi.*) “Indeed, the bull dragging its horns along the ground appeared like a scene where it was difficult to lift its face from the earth.”²

In this couplet, the rahil section vividly describes desert and nature scenes during the journey. The metaphor ('comparing the bull's face to the earth') creates a vivid image.

3. **Madih** (Praise or Critique Section) The poet reveals the main purpose of the qasida. In this section, the poet either praises (e.g., a sultan or warrior) or criticizes someone. The madih section is often rich in hyperbole (istiḥṣā), praise (madh), and wordplay.

إِذَا غَامَرْتُ فِي شَرْفٍ مَرُومٍ، فَلَا تَقْنَعُ بِمَا دُونَ النُّجُومِ.

¹ Ibn Qays, Imroul. *Devan Imroul Qays*. Bayrut: Dor al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1999. – P. 12–15.

² Mutanabbī. *Devan al-Mutanabbī*. Qohira: Dor al-Ma'arif, 1998. – P. 45–47.

(Iza g'amarta fi sharafin marumin, fala taqna' bima duna an-nujumi.) "If you face danger in pursuit of a noble goal, do not settle for anything less than the stars."³

This couplet by Al-Mutanabbi is from the madih section, expressing the necessity of bravery and achieving lofty goals through hyperbole.

Qasida is one of the most prominent genres of Arabic poetry, with its structure and artistic elements forming a unique aesthetic system. Through qasidas, poets expressed their emotions, social and cultural views. Qasidas have significantly influenced not only historical but also contemporary poetry as classic examples of Arabic literature.

Qasida played a social and political role in Arab society, not merely as a literary work. Poets used them to praise their patrons, criticize their enemies, or express national pride. Thus, qasida served as a vital representation of Arab culture and national identity.

Definition and literary style of the masnavi genre:

Masnavi is a widely-used genre in Arabic and Persian literature, often employed for epic, didactic, and narrative works. A distinctive feature of masnavi is the rhyming of each couplet and the extensive and multifaceted nature of its themes. This genre is a convenient form for expressing lyrical-philosophical, didactic, and educational content, covering themes like love, religion, morality, politics, and philosophy.

In masnavi, narrative and didactic elements define the genre's primary characteristics:

1. Narrative Elements: Masnavi is often written in an epic form, depicting a chain of events. Each couplet plays a crucial role in the narrative development. Narrative elements captivate the reader, making the text lively and comprehensible. Masnavi often expresses dramatic situations, the actions of heroes, and the progression of events in a lyrical spirit. For example, Jalaluddin Rumi's "Masnavi" integrates worldly and spiritual events in a narrative form.

يا قلبي لا تحزن على ما فات، فإن في الدهر أفرحاً ومحطات

(*Ya qalbi la tahzan 'ala ma fata, fa inna fi-d-dahri afrahan va mahattat.*) "Oh my heart, do not grieve over what has passed, for there are still many joys and destinations in this world."⁴ In this couplet, through narrative elements, the poet tells about the transient periods in a person's life and new opportunities. The symbols of the heart and life depict the spiritual experiences of a person. The poet aims to evoke an optimistic mood here.

1. Didactic Elements. Masnavi serves to draw moral conclusions, understand the truth, and enrich life experiences for the reader. Didactic elements often take the form of advice, instructive events, or philosophical reflections. Through masnavi, the writer teaches religious, educational, and moral principles. For example, these aspects are evident in Alisher Navoi's work 'Hayrat ul-Abror'.

وإن الناس أبناء الدين فقد تفرقوا، والعلم نورٌ ويدفعُ العقوق

(*Va inna an-nasa abna'u-d-dini faqad tafarraqu, va-l-'ilmu nurun va yadfa'u-l-'uquq.*) "People are the children of religion; they are distinguished through religion, and knowledge is light that purifies the heart."⁵

In this example, moral and didactic content takes the lead. The poet compares knowledge to light, emphasizing its spiritual and social significance. The unifying role of religion in society is also revealed.

³ Ibn Qutayba. *Ash-Shi'r va ash-Shu'aro*. Bayrut: Dor as-Saqafa, 1977. – P. 89–92.

⁴ Jaloliddin Rumi, *Masnavi Ma'navi*. Qohira: Dor al-Ma'arif, 1994. – P. 112–115.

⁵ Sa'di Sheroziy. *Bustan*. Bayrut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1983. – P. 45–48.

The masnavi genre stands out from other genres with its rhythmic and rhyming characteristics, ability to cover broad topics, epic volume, and level of artistic imagery. Masnavi adheres to strict meter rules, usually written in meters like ramal or hazaj, ensuring the coherence and musicality of the narrative, making the work memorable for listeners or readers. The main feature of the genre's rhyme scheme is that each couplet's two lines rhyme with each other (aa, bb, cc, ...), creating a smooth and natural flow in the text. Though the couplets express independent meanings, they are connected by a common theme or chain of events, enhancing musicality and aesthetic impact.

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