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ARTISTIC FEATURES OF NIZAMI GANJAVI'S EPIC "MAKHZAN UL-ASRAR"

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Abstract: In the first epic of the great poet Nizami Ganjavi's "Khamisa" titled "Makhzan ul-Asrar" we can observe the skillful and effective use of spiritual, verbal, and combined literary arts. This initial epic serves as a mirror reflecting the lofty poetic mastery of the great word artist. This article highlights some of the types of poetic artistry found in the epic.

Keywords: Quotation, contrast, metaphor, allusion, eloquent speech, repetition of the opening phrase at the end (tasdir), balance.

In Nizami Ganjavi's epic "Makhzan ul-Asrar," we frequently encounter poetic forms such as eloquent speech (kalomi jomi), contrast (tazod), simile (tashbeh), personification (tashxis), exaggeration (mubolag'a), inscription (kitobot), repetition (takrir), derivation (ishtiqoq), artistic causation (husni ta'lil), paronomasia (tajnis), alliteration (tarse'), ambiguity (iyhom), quotation (iqtibos), allegory (tamsil), and proverbial expression (irsoli masal). Through the effective use of these artistic techniques in his first epic, the poet achieved poetic perfection and created unparalleled artistic imagery. Below, some of these poetic arts are discussed:

Quotation (Iqtibos): In his work "Funun ul-Balagha," Shaykh Ahmad Tarozi defines quotation as follows: "This art is such that within a poem, a verse from the Quran or a hadith is employed." [2.88] A. Hojiahmedov acknowledges that poets from Muslim countries widely used this technique, incorporating verses and hadiths extensively in their lyrical and lyrical-epic works. [3.62]

In the epic "Makhzan ul-Asrar," which reflects religious-ethical and enlightening-mystical ideas, numerous quotations from the Holy Quran and hadiths are included within its maxims and stories. For instance, in the chapter titled "Description of the Night and Explanation of Knowing the Heart," the following couplet contains the phrase "They were among the disbelievers" as a quotation:

Botini rang-la bo'yab zohirin,
Deb qazo: "Qon min-al-kofirin".

(He adorned the exterior with the color of his inner self, As fate declared: 'Blood from the disbelievers') [M.A. – Couplet 41]

Likewise, in the first *maqola* (treatise) concerning the creation of Adam, the phrases "Allah created man" and "Allah created him from clay" are quoted, which enhances the poetic beauty of the verse:

"Allama Adam" – His attribute is pure,
"Khammara teenan" – His honor lies in dust. [M.A. – p.61]

In the tenth *maqola* titled "On the Signs of the End Times," the verse from our holy book stating "Indeed, the earthquake of the Hour is a terrible thing" is cited:



Date: 13th September-2025

The whole earth shall tremble in fright,
“Zilzilāt-us-sa’atī shay’un ‘azīm.” [M.A. – p.108]

Moreover, in the sixth *maqola*, within the parable “*The Hunter, His Dog, and the Fox*,” the sacred phrase “*Provision and sustenance come from Allah*” is quoted in the following couplet:

Whoever draws near to reliance [on God],
Writes: “*Al-karamu wa-r-rizqu ‘ala-Allah.*” [M.A. – p.93]

Through this literary device, the poet expresses his religious and Sufi worldview and uses it as a means to support his ideas.

Antithesis (Tazod). This literary device refers to the use of opposing or contradictory concepts within poetic lines. Literary scholar Y. Is’haqov mentions various historical names for this device found in classical poetic sources. Khalil ibn Ahmad referred to antithesis as “*mutabiqa*,” while in *Tarjuman al-Balagha* it appears as “*mutazad*.” In other works such as *Hada’iq al-Sihr*, *‘Arūz-i Humayun*, *Jamī’-i Mukhtasar*, and *‘Ilm-i Badi’ dar Zabān-i Farsi*, the term is found as “*tazod*.” [4.80]

The art of antithesis is used effectively in “*Makhzan al-Asrar*.” From the beginning to the end of the poem, the interpretation of various themes is marked by the contrast and collision of opposing concepts. The presence of this device is evident throughout the work. In particular, in the story titled “*The Enlightened Temple Keeper*” (*Sohibnazar Mu’bad*), which is appended to the eleventh *maqola*, the poet frequently employs this stylistic element.

He once beheld a nightingale and a blooming garden—
Now all he sees is a crow, a scavenger, a barren land.

What once was Paradise is now like Hell,
A royal palace turned into a ruined cell.

Where once were meadows lush and green,
Now lies dry straw—no flowers to be seen. [M.A. – p.116]

The following couplets from the *hikayats* (anecdotes) are also built upon the principle of **antithesis**:

He said: “Let me forsake my sins outright,
What once was forbidden, I’ll make pure and right.” [M.A. – p.126]

The king beheld the man’s honesty so bright,
Compared to his own deceit and lack of right. [M.A. – p.131]

Abstinence is a stranger in the tavern’s crowd,
Treasure is cherished in ruins, not proud. [M.A. – p.145]

The effective and appropriate use of **tazod** (antithesis) by **Nizami** allows him to express two opposing ideas—whether abstract concepts or contrasting human traits—with clarity and depth. Many *hikayats* and *maqolas* in *Makhzan al-Asrar* are constructed entirely on the foundation of inner conflict and conceptual contradiction, reflecting the poet’s mastery in using artistic contrast to deepen philosophical and moral reflection.

Niqto (Personified Dialogue) as a Literary Device



Date: 13th September-2025

The *niqto* technique is a stylistic device in which animals or plants are granted the power of speech in a poetic or narrative context. Unlike *tashkhis* (personification), where inanimate objects are described with human traits, in *niqto* they are depicted as actually speaking like humans. [4.137]

In *Makhzan al-Asrar*, many of the allegorical stories make extensive use of this device. In particular, the stories “*The Hunter, His Dog, and the Fox*,” “*Faridun and the Deer*,” and “*The Nightingale and the Falcon*” prominently feature *niqto*, adding a vivid artistic dimension to the narrative. For instance, in “*The Hunter, His Dog, and the Fox*,” the fox is given voice and speaks as follows:

One day a fox appeared and said:
“Be not impatient, O impatient soul!
Word has reached me—the fate is sealed—
Destiny has spoken: your dog is killed.

Many a prey he chased to death,
Now death has come for his own breath.” [M.A. – p.91]

In the story “*Faridun and the Deer*,” after missing his target, Faridun reproaches his arrow and horse. The following couplets give voice to the arrow:

The arrow spoke and said: “O King of Kings,
Your glance fell upon the voiceless being.

That deer raced beneath your watchful care,
Yet from your hand, the piercing struck it there.” [M.A. – p.97]

Kalomi Jāmi‘ (Universal Moral Statement)

The *kalomi jāmi‘* (Arabic: جامع – “comprehensive speech”) is a poetic device used to express concise, universal moral, ethical, or philosophical reflections—often involving advice, admonitions, or social commentary. [5.190]

Makhzan al-Asrar is filled with such verses, as the entire work breathes the poet's moral and social concerns. Indeed, the poem would be incomplete without this literary technique. For example, in the story “*Sulaiman and the Peasant*,” the following verses are found:

Sow not the seeds of trickery and deceit—
Wish well, and reap your harvest sweet. [M.A. – p.78]

Look not for others’ faults—close your eyes,
Search your own soul, therein the flaw lies. [M.A. – p.111]

These lines have become proverbial due to their moral weight. Through *kalomi jāmi‘*, the poet expresses ethical and spiritual counsel directed at rulers and members of various social strata. A notable example appears in the story “*The Lonely Old Woman and Sultan Sanjar*” (from the fourth *maqola*):

You came, they say, to conquer and command—
But not to oppress or bleed the land.

Show royal mercy, lessen your wrath,
Be a healing balm to those harmed in your path.

Date: 13th September-2025

Hear the cries of the poor and weak,
Give your gaze to those who silently speak... [M.A. – p.83]

Talmeh (Allusion) *Talmeh* is a frequently used literary device in classical poetry that refers to the use of well-known historical, religious, or mythological references to enrich the text. It is so deeply embedded in the poetic tradition that literature would be unimaginable without it.

Makhzan al-Asrar contains many instances of *talmeh* in both the *maqolas* and the *hikayats*. Here are several examples:

Two swords cannot rest in a single sheath—
Nor two thrones befit Jamshid's seat. [M.A. – p.120]

I am today the ruler of Sulayman's realm—
Why call me a tyrant like the demon overwhelmed? [M.A. – p.120]

These verses reference the famous Iranian king Jamshid and the prophet-king Sulayman (Solomon), figures loaded with symbolic meaning related to power, justice, and wisdom. Such allusions enhance the thematic depth and cultural resonance of the poem.

Repetition of the Initial Word at the End (*Radd as-Sadr ilal- 'Ajuz*)

The poetic device *Radd as-Sadr ilal- 'Ajuz* refers to a structure in which the word that appears at the beginning of a line is repeated at the end of the same line. In Arabic rhetoric, this is also known as *tasdīr* ("repetition"). Below are examples of this device from *Makhzan al-Asrar*:

Strive in love, for it was once your pact,
Will effort now raise your fortune and wealth through act? [M.A. – p.93]

O confidant of the king of the world, you alone!
Smile and flourish, O heart of the king of the world—shine on! [M.A. – p.148]

Balance (*Muvozanat*)

The *muvozanat* technique is based on the balance of words in terms of form, weight, or structure, creating a rhythmic harmony within the verse. In *Makhzan al-Asrar*, we find several examples where this stylistic element is skillfully employed:

Inhale the fragrance and beauty divine,
Heed wise counsel with your ear inclined. [M.A. – p.135]

Not every breath bears the charm of grace,
Not every belly hides a secret place. [M.A. – p.79]

Conclusion. Overall, *Makhzan al-Asrar* showcases a remarkable richness in artistic and poetic devices. Nizami, as a master of the *Khamasa* tradition, makes effective use of nearly all known verbal, semantic, and combined rhetorical techniques (*lafziy*, *ma'naviy*, *mushtarak*), enhancing the poem's literary depth and artistic value.

The fluent, accessible, and folk-inspired style of the poem contributes greatly to its widespread acclaim and international recognition.

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Date: 13th September-2025

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