

**Persian Merat-ol-Jamal: The Typology and Codicology of
One of the Subgenres of Saraapaa**

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Introduction

As is generally known, Saraapaa is a Persian literary genre in which the poet or the author strives mainly and primarily to describe the beauties of the beloved from head to toe, generally according to the literary traditions and in a creative and imaginary manner. The main subject of Saraapaa is only the description of the beloved in all her existential dimensions; it is the sole purpose of its creator to write such a description; and it is written completely in a literary language, in the framework of traditional rhetoric, adorned with imagery and poetic exaggerations. These three are necessary and intertwined characteristics of original Saraapaas. This classification is emphasized upon in order to differentiate between Saraapaa and those collections of poems and scattered writings which contain such a subject, but their authors have not had prior intentions and have not envisioned independent forms for them.

One of the most significant subgenres of Persian Saraapaa is compiled Saraapaanameh, commonly known as Merat-ol-Jamal (literary, mirror to beauty), which is itself divided into several types. Compiled Saraapaanamehs are extracted from among verse or prose works which

are not originally Saraapaa but contain subjects of Saraapaa; therefore, as the name implies, they are not written but collected and the collector is usually someone other than the poet or the author. However, *Merat-ol-Jamal* by Saeb Tabrizi is one of the most famous examples of compiled Saraapaas, the author and the collector of which is Tabrizi himself, a remarkable poet who has a distinguished place in Persian literature for creating novel subject matters and anthologies.

Methodology, Review of Literature and Purpose

It is generally known that, even in Saeb Tabrizi's lifetime, his *Divan* (collection of poetry) has been subject to many selections. A lot of these selections are undertaken either by himself or under his own supervision and then sent around. These selections are sometimes based on form and sometimes on content; i.e., a number of lines or ghazals are selected based on their forms or on their subject matters. Saeb is reported to have selected his poems in several collections based on their subjects, such as *Merat-ol-Jamal* and *Meikhaneh*. The former book is the only one we could find among the existing manuscripts.

These thematically compiled collections of poetry can be the basis of a type of Persian literary thematic dictionary, especially for Hindi style, by the use of which the readers can have a better understanding of the poetry of these delicate and difficult poets and enjoy them more. Especially in the case of Saeb's *Merat-ol-Jamal*, one can readily perceive his remarkable power in creating novel subjects, using correct vocabulary and colloquial expressions, as well as alluding to social and professional culture of the time.

Accordingly, first we gathered the manuscripts of *Merat-ol-Jamal* from the libraries of Iran, Arabia and Turkey and tried to revise them; second, for understanding the status of the work among other books of its kind, we were obliged to register and study them thoroughly which practically led us toward a better understanding and analysis of this subgenre of Saraapaa.

Discussion

Saeb's *Merat-ol-Jamal* is a collection of 20 subjects around the description of the beloved. Based on our estimation, the book contains around 40 thousand lines of verse about the internal and physical beauties of the beloved, such as her eyebrow, eye and height, as well as poems about her behavioral virtues such her obedience, coyness and kisses, and also poems for describing her belongings, such as her gloves, hat and sitting place and mirror. Nevertheless, sometimes the title of the poem is favored over the subject matter in the mind of the selector; therefore, there are the poems about other subject matters beside the description of the beloved, too.

The selection of these lines is based on *matale'*, ghazals and scattered lines, respectively, which contain the same subject matter, although the thematic order is not entirely based on the conventions of Saraapaa, as after the description of the height of the beloved, we see poems about the hair and the beauty mole of the beloved. Another delicate distinction is that there are no descriptions of parts such as the nose and the backside. This is somehow natural, since these subjects do not appear in the ghazals of Saeb at all. Nevertheless, a subject such as sitting place is practically similar to backside in Saraapaas. Some of the subjects

such as the teeth and the vein of the neck may be deceptive in the first look and can be categorized among lines of Saraapaa, but a closer look at them revealed that the poet does not have any romantic look toward them. Scattered lines which are called “motafarrebat”, are usually two or more lines from a ghazal written about the same subject and sometimes categorized alphabetically according to their rhyming words.

Except for two thematic selections taken from the University of Tehran, the other manuscripts used in this study were all independently and specially in the form of Merat-ol-Jamal. In fact, in using the high-quality and useful manuscript of the University of Tehran for the enrichment of the work by selecting related lines about the description of the beloved and adding them to other manuscripts of Saeb’s *Merat-ol-Jamal*, the editor has played the role of selector, too. These are the manuscripts used in this study: 1) Asten-e Qods manuscript, anthology 4493; 2) Aref Hekmah manuscript no. 179; 3) Malek manuscript, handwritten anthology, no. 6456; 4) Golestan Castle manuscript, no. 419; 5) Lala Ismaeil manuscript, no. 585; 6) Great Islamic Encyclopedia manuscript, handwritten anthology, no. 1419; 7) Sepahsalar manuscript, handwritten anthology 143; 8) Motanasebat Divan, Central Library of University of Tehran, no. 2420; 9) *Merat-ol-Jamal*, no. 2932, Central Library of University of Tehran.

Conclusion

Merat-ol-Jamal is a type of compiled Saraapaa in Persian literature which contains verse or prose descriptions of the beloved and her belonging. This collection may contain the works of one or more poets,

selected by the poet him/herself or his/her fans. In Persian literature, one can find numerous works in this genre. Some of them, such as Saeb's *Merat-ol-Jamal*, are very famous yet unknown to the public. This work is one of the most useful poetry collections by Saeb in understanding his imagery and language and poetic expression. It also contains some lines with ambiguous and complicated meanings as a result of proximity with poems with the same subjects. Nevertheless, the collection contains some of the most beautiful poetic descriptions using the aesthetic techniques of Hindi style. Furthermore, other verse or prose examples of *Merat-ol-Jamals* in Persian are mentioned in this study in order to properly survey the changes in the literary subject of describing the beloved and the influences of poets on each other. Some of the poems in it belong to Indian poets writing about the culture of the peninsula which make this book linguistically valuable for understanding the true meanings of expressions. Although they are valuable and significant on different dimensions, *Merat-ol-Jamals* are unfortunately forgotten works among manuscripts. This necessitates a thorough codicology and then a proper revision of these works.

Keywords: Azad Bilgrami, Saeb Tabrizi, Moharram Keshmiri, *Merat-ol-Jamal*, Varasteh Siyalkouti

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