Hakim Rokn-Al-Din Mashī Kashanī and His Poetic Innovations

1Shiva Qased Rezaee and 2Mahdi Mahouzi

1PhD candidate in Persian Language and Literature, Roudehen Branch, Islamic Azad University, Roudehen, Iran
2Associate professor, Persian Language and Literature, Roudehen Branch, Islamic Azad University, Roudehen, Iran

ABSTRACT

One of the poets of the 11th century AH, who despite their creativity and poetic innovations are still obscure, is Rokn al-Din Masoud, the son of Hakim Nezamodin Ali Kashani, who used the pen name Masih and was known as Hakim Rokn (born in 985 AH, died in 66 AH). A qualified physician in the court of Shah Abbas Safavid, he was also one of the eminent calligraphers of his time. Aside from anthology manuscripts, there are still a few extant manuscripts of his second poetry book including sonnets, odes, ballades, quatrains, and combinations (Tarkib). The main themes of Masih’s second poetry book are complaints about nostalgia, pain and suffering of the world, praising Indian kings, sonnets and glorifications (Fakhriat). Drawing on three extant manuscripts of poems attributed to Masih Kashani, the author of this paper attempts to both introduce Masih Kashani and his works and analyze the content of his second poetry book with the aim of examining the artistic innovations of Masih in this book.

INTRODUCTION

Persian poetry in Safavid era:

After the collapse of Ilkhanids and during the Timurid era, Persian poetry went beyond the realm of erudite and knowledgeable poets and reached the common people. This was an auspicious event as it took poetry to the masses and introduced new themes and domains to poetry. However, this could work to the detriment of literature in future as it exposed poetry to unprofessional and illiterate people who undermined the previous glory and solidity of poetry. On the other hand, Persian language had gained its position in the Indian subcontinent as Iranians and Indians had a long history of close relationship and shared common cultures, customs and beliefs. This could be due to the following reasons:

1. Islam and Persian Language found their way in India after the conquests of Muslim and migrations of Persians to India in the early centuries. During the ruling of Ghaznavids and Ghurids, Persian language first spread in the north of India and since the early 8th century, the Persian gathered in that part of India. With the establishment of Bahmani Dynasty in 748 AH by Ala-ud-Din Bahman Shah, Persian Literature gained popularity in that region.
2. In the ruling system of India, Persian was the official language and with the support of rulers of this region, numerous books on history and biography were written in Persian language.

Journey of Iranian poets to India:

Several factors were involved in the migration of Iranian poets to India, which in general can be classified into two categories:

1. External factors such as abundance, vast trade market in India, exploration, accumulation of wealth through trade and in some cases, prestige which was associated with the journey to India as a luxurious trip.
2. Internal factors such as poverty and poor life quality, socioeconomic and political plights in Iran, Safavid kings negligence of poets and their panegyrics.

These factors provoked a host of Iranian poets to leave their homeland for India.
Importance of the research:
Given the fact that the second poetry book of Masih Kashani is in form of manuscripts and thus inaccessible to researchers and literary scholars, the emendation and print of these poems and the introduction of Masih Kashani, his manuscripts and poetic peculiarities are among the reasons for undertaking this research.

Methodology:
This article uses a descriptive-analytical research method. First, after the critical emendation of the second poetry book, the poetic peculiarities of Masih’s work, which are distinguishing features of his style, are identified and discussed.

Review of literature:
To the knowledge of the authors, this is the first study on the second poetry book and poetic style of Masih Kashani with the exception of some biographies that only provide a brief description of his life and fail to answer the questions of researchers about the poems and poetic status of Masih in Persian Literature.
Masih’s first poetry book was emended by Dr. Mohamed Ali Sharifian and a few articles have been published in this regard including:

The main goal of this study is to identify manuscripts of the poetry book of Masih Kashani and explore the linguistic and stylistic features of his poetry.

Introducing manuscripts of the poetry book of Masih Kashani:
1. The first version of Malek library (Tehran):
This version, recorded with 5230 register number, was written in Ramadan 1023 AH in Ajmir and its parts were gathered in Rabi al-Thani 1024 AH. It includes odes, ballads, sonnets, combinations (Tarkib-bands) and Tarji-bands, which adds up to nearly nine thousand verses. In fact, it is the first poetry book of Masih. This version is composed of 289 pages (32.6×14.2 cm) each containing 17 verses, which have been written in the Hindi Naskh script on colorful Samarkandi cashmere. In this version, odes and other forms of poems have been arranged by epigram (This version, lacking the second poetry book, was not the basis of the author’s study).

2. Manuscripts kept in Tabriz National Library:
This version was written in 11 Jumada II 1026 AH in Mendo by Sham al-Din Muhammad and recorded with the register number 2655 in the National Library of Tabriz. This version includes odes, Tarji-bands, combinations (Tarkib-bands), ballads, sonnets, and quatrains. It begins with this line: “My soul was called upon at the existence door” (there are some missing parts and interruption in the first line) and these poems are the outcome of my life, Thanks to God I presented them to the Shah
This version is composed of 339 pages, each containing 25 lines. This version, given its historical precedence and its accuracy in recoding poems, was the basis of authors’ study. In the poetry book, it has been referred to by the symbol “d”.

3. Two-volume version kept in Malek library in Tehran:
This version, which was recoded with the register number 5070, is the most complete version in terms of the number of verses, but the author used it only as the copy version because of several missing parts and a plethora of spelling mistakes. The date of writing of the book, as noted in the page 352 of the book, is 1054 AH. It is composed of 569 pages (29.6×16.8) each containing 17 verses which are written on cashmere paper in Nasta’liq script. This version has been referred to with the symbol “M” in the poetry book.

4. Tehran University version:
This version begins with the following verse:
- My soul would sacrifice himself as an offering in Your way, I should sacrifice myself for the mere breath of that Tactful One.
And ends with this verse
- Be not like water who runs everywhere,
And do not visit others as a guest just for eating.

The version of Tehran University has 174 pages (22×13 cm) each containing 21 lines. It was written in 1120 AH and has 180 quatrains. The microfilm of this manuscript (No: 9186) is kept in the Central Library and Center of Documents in Tehran University. This version was also used as the copy version in the emendation, referred to with the symbol “D”.

5. The version of National Library of Paris:

This version is a collection of selected excerpts written by Masih in 227 pages each with 12 lines. This version was excluded from study as it contained only a selection of Masih’s books.

6. London Version:

It is in 174 pages each with 14 lines, which was written in Rajab 1155 AH in Shahjahan Abad. It is the third poetry book written by Masih.

7. The version of Istanbul University Library:

It is in 189 pages (165×83 mm) each containing 11 lines. This version dates back to 12th century.

In the rest of this paper, a brief introduction of other versions has been presented. For detailed information about the specifications and dates of these versions, refer to the preface of the second poetry book by the author.

8. The Version of Maulana Library in Islamic Azad University, Branch of Aligar, India

9. The Version of Khodabakhsh Library, India

10. The Version available in Ayatollah Marashi Najafi Library, Qom

11. The Version belonging to Professor Wahid Dastgerdi

12. The Version available in the Institute of Manuscripts in Academy of Azerbaijan, Baku

13. Manuscript anthology of “A collection of prose and verse”, the Library of Astan Quds Razavi

14. Manuscript anthology of “A miscellany of selected works”, the Library of Astan Quds Razavi

15. Manuscript anthology available in the Library of Iran Parliament

16. Manuscript anthology of Tehran University

17. Manuscript anthology Shahid Motahari School

Introduction to Masih Kashani:

Rokn al-Din Masoud, the son of Hakim Nezamodin Ali Kashani, who used the pen name Masih and was known as Hakim Rokna, was one of the eminent poets, qualified physicians and notable calligraphers of the 10th and 11th century. He was born and bred in the middle of the second half of the 10th century (985 AD.) in Kashan.

Medical practice was a family tradition in the household of Rokna Hakim. Masih’s father, besides being the physician of Shah Tahmasb court for three years, was fascinated with poetry and literature and used to write poems.

The two brothers of Masih, Nasira and Hakim Qotba, as well as his son Muhammad Hussain, who died young, were also interested in poetry and occasionally wrote poems. It is noteworthy that Taleb Amoli, a prominent poet of the 11th century, was a cousin of Masih.

Masih found his way to the court of Shah Abbas I as the court physician. He then managed to become one of the eulogists and companions of the court of Shah Abbas. Fakhral-Zaman Qazwini describes Masih in his Biography of Tavern:

“A frequent companion in the court, he was always at service of the Shah as if Shah Abbas I was the guest of Masih in Kashan” (Biography of Tavern, p 497)

Later, when Shah sided with one of court elites against Masih in a discussion, Hakim became deeply resented and determined to leave the court for India. There, he was in the company of Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar Shah Ghazi in Agra for a while and then for no specific reason left his court and went to Allahabada and served in the court of Prince Salim. From there, he moved to Cutchta, Bijuap and Deccan, but as his poem suggests, he was not happy with India at all and always longed to return to his homeland.

- In India, I was belittled to a great degree that,
- *was like being targeted by the arrow of time.
- - Having no foul intention, I migrated to the Deccan's Khan,
- *Whom I had laid my hopes in every aspect in.
- - I had numerous fancies of his mercy with myself but,
- As I opened my eyes, they seemed to be merely dreams.
- - If my current griefs [tears] take me back to my homeland,
I would never leave it, like grief [tears] that does not leave its [their] owner.

32 years away from his country, Hakim finally returned to Iran and stayed in the cities of Shiraz and Isfahan until he breathed his last in 1066 AD at the age of eighty in his hometown, Kashan.

(1) B: Ballad; O: Ode, S: Sonnet; C: Combination (Tarkib-band); Q: Quatrains
(2) For further information about the life of Hakim see the preamble of the second poetry book of Hakim by the author.

Works of Masih Kashani:
1. Books of Poetry: Hakim has five poetry books which contain over one hundred thousand verses.
2. Zabet al-Alaj (Principle of Medicine). It is a medical book in Arabic language in which Masih describes treatments and experiences of physicians. This book makes Hakim even more renowned that the great physicians of his time” (Biography of Tavern, p 504).
3. Fantasy Collection, "Hakim has written an independent Masnavi similar to “Khosrow and Shirin” of Nezmi about Shah Abbas that contains a host of stories out of which the story of “Destiny” is widely known (History of Iranian literature, Safa: summarized quotation, p 491).

Introducing the second poetry book of Masih Kashani:
Unlike his other poetry books, the second poetry book of Hakim Rokna does not begin with the praise, glorification and exultation of Imams and only the first few lines of the first ode are in praise of God. It is one of the characteristics of the second poetry book of Masih. Literary speaking, the most common forms of poetry in this period were ode and sonnet and Masih has composed poems in most traditional poetic forms but the number of sonnets in his second poetry book is greater than other poetic forms. As to the frequency of poetic forms, this book contains 389 sonnets, 183 quatrains, 31 ballades, 13 odes and 2 combinations (Tarkib-band). The longest sonnet of the book is Sonnet 352 with 15 couplets and the shortest is Sonnet 133 with 3 couplets. It is noteworthy that some of Hakim’s sonnets do not take a pseudonym. All sonnets are in famous forms of Persian poetry and virtually no attempt has been made by the poet to try new and difficult forms. Sonnets, which a great part of the book is dedicated to them, are subtle and pleasing, characterized with features of Hindi style, which occasionally resemble the strength and solidity of the classic sonnets. A notable feature of Hakim’s sonnets is three-couplet sonnets, which are commonly known as unfinished sonnet by rhetoric scholars. Here, a brief description of the contents and themes of Hakim’s sonnets is presented.

Self-glorification:
It is a poem that expresses the most natural emotions of the poet. It is originated from innate sense of self-preservation and is characterized with private conversations and self-expression of the poet that is a manifestation of the poet’s narcissism. It is because every poet loves the product of his talent and this natural compassion finds its way in form of praise and compliment in the poems (Literary Studies, Samiee, 164). Much like other poets, Masih takes this path and considers himself worthy of such titles:
- Undoubtedly I am the Messiah of my time by merit,
Fume of my laments could wane the full moon.
- No one could ever reach my status in this world,
If hundreds of stars gather in a lucky time, a rival of me cannot be brought.
- O’ Masih, each line composed by you is a long life,
After your departure, hundreds of immortal lives should remain.
- Masih is worthy of a complete harvest, his rival, just a grain,
Be heedful, as every merchandise has a value of its own.

Relationship with the beloved:
In terms of the frequency of words and phrases, literary themes and semantic load of the poems, Hakim’s poems are characterized with diction organomy (descriptions of limbs) that constitute the main theme of beauty descriptions. Given the breadth and variety of these descriptions, they improve the proportions of the image elements, which is noteworthy with respect to the consistency of image with the thematic and emotional context of the poem:
- Salt would turn sweet if tastes your lips,
And sugar would turn salty upon seeing your ruby lips.
- Your eyebrow challenges the new moon in beauty,
*When your fingernails manifest as well, a war starts.
- When you appeared swaggering among beauties,
It was as if Joseph was walking among caravan travelers.
- Every time Masih reminds himself of your apple chin,
My heart rips all apart like a ripe pomegranate.
In these sonnets, "empirical harmony" of love is the basis of the sonnet in which a complete experience of love is portrayed.

**Complaint:**
The desertion of the home country and the journey to the Indian subcontinent had filled Masih’s life with boredom and nostalgia. Naturally, a common theme running his poems is complaint about the adverse fortunes, the grief and pain that life had brought upon him and the omen that was in war with him. It should be noted that the semantic context of these poems are not limited to the complaints and grievances, and the poet intends to arouse feeling and emotions of this audience and win their sympathy.

- Masih’s bones are rotting out of grief,
  O this is the brightest of my dark destiny.

- Fifty two years by grief and agony,
  I have passed in this world of temporary.

- This world is an old Zal, his aide, Rostam who,
  Acts dishonestly against everyone, like Sohrab.

- The pious forget their obligatory prayer on the day of Eid,
  *But the world forgets not agonizing us for one day.

**1.4. Belief in fate and eternal destiny:**
- One cannot understand the reunion and separation of you,
  One cannot appoint the lifetime and death of himself.

- We are the choices made by good and evil of the world,
  That is why we long not to choose between good and evil.

**1.5. Self-sufficiency:**
Although Hakim Rokna Kashani struggled with predicaments and agony of life, but his rich soul is manifested throughout his poems:

- We seeks not to obviate our poverty at the cost of indebtedness,
  We have got used to eating hard bread as a delicious stew.

- How long shall we lower ourselves for a half-loaf of bread?
  We shall eat the bread of our heart, without humiliation.

**1.6. Sermon and exhortations:**
Another subject set forth in Masih’s second poetry book deals with ethical issues:

- Until your heart is indulged in much or less,
  You would be like asses and bulls under labor.

How long shall you wait to be foddered?
Are you eating like livestock to be butchered?

- *How long do you wish to go everywhere like water?
  Is it not better to be in one place like a mirror?

- The Helper should exalt you on the Day of Judgment,
  If you help those in need of help in this world.

- Strongly enter the clime of calamity,
  In freewill deliver yourself to calamity.

Ride on a lion while holding a serpent in hand,
Climb the calamity, and let not it climbs you.

**1.7. Eulogy:**
Amid his lyric poems, Masih has also praised Shah Jahangir and in the final couplets of sonnets, much similar to odes, there are several praises and prayers:
- O king I hope that God would enunciate you
Victory over victory in every second of your life.

- The head of all the world's kings, the just king, the light of religion,
As he is light, I assign his name as the light of this gathering.

If Alexander appears again with the intention of conquering the world,
I would overthrow his name by the name of our king, like the name of God.

- The dark body of Masih would shed light like a candle,
When the light of the king's eulogy shines on his tongue.

8.1. Odes:
Twelve odes in the second poetry book of Masih describes the chivalry, gallantry, strength, justice and abundance during the rule of the praised one (Mamdouh), degrading and humiliating his adversaries with the exception of one ode that addresses ethical issues. Masih’s odes often evoke the style and rhythm of his predecessors. That is, the language of Masih deviates from the conventional style, demonstrating a return to the traditional styles. Of these, eight odes are written in Mojtas measure, two odes in Hazaj measure, one ode in Khafif measure and two odes in Mozareh measure.

In these odes, Hakim has also used hyperbole as an element of description. The praised ones in his odes are both Iranian and Indian Princes. The Iranian praised person is Shah Abbas I Safavid, but since Masih’s poetry book was composed outside of Iran in the court of Shah Jahangir, his name has not been mentioned. The Indian praised people (Mamdouh) are Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar Shah (1) and Jahangir Shah (2) whose names abound the second poetry book.

- *As long as our pen dictates the eulogies of Jahangir, the light of religion,
The high star of Venus should be a sacrifice for each dot it writes.

- King Jahangir, the light of religion, that prosperous whom
His footprints convert into gold which people collect.

Additionally, there is a combination (Tarkib-band) in the praise of Mahabat Khan in the second poetry book:

- The sky and stars takes light from the presence of the just Khan,
*He is the pupil for the eye, and an eye for the people.

- O kingdom, rejoice, the just Khan is coming,
If you have lamented before, now rise up.

1) One of the most famous kings of Timurid dynasty that Masih settled in his court in his journey to India
(2) The son of Akbar Shahwho was the main patronage of poets and occasionally wrote some poems.
(3) The third son of Jahangir Shah who, like his father, was interested in literature.
(4) The eminent Iranian politician who was an asset in the court of Akbar Shah and Jahangir Shah
(5) One of the key figures in the court of Akbar Shah and Jahangir Shah

Artistic innovation of Masih:
I. Innovative subjects:
Meticulous attention to the subject and discovery of new and fresh meanings coupled with painstaking thoroughness and imagination are the most conspicuous stylistic features of Haim Rokna. Interwoven metaphorical images are also another characteristic of Masih’s poems:

- As wax is melted in hot summers,
The heat of my thoughts melts the world.

- The world sneezes to my cold bloodedness,
And I bring out the full sun and moon together when hiccup.

- The drops of my eyelashes are all Farhads,
*Who give their heads to find a way to your court.

- Each vein in my wandering body is a wandering route,
Such a wandering route which wanders Khidr as well.
- The sun should hide itself like a turtle,
  *If you put the sun on the sign of Cancer.*

2. **Roguish conceptualization:**
   It refers to the concept and themes that are apparently in contradiction with religious and moral teachings and encourage atheistic and promiscuous practices. In other words, religious symbols like mosques, repentance, piety, etc. are juxtaposed with unreligious symbols like wine, cup and tavern.
   - What we reckoned to find in the mosque, was in a tavern, Kaaba was the goal but it was reached through a different way.

   - No one can repent of wine,
     As it is water, and repenting, a mirage.

   - No one asks the religion of Hakim, so pour wine,
     Fifty two years have passed, so pour a two-year old wine.

   - Being conscious, my head deals only with wine and cup,
     I am lovelorn, although I can only live with calm heart.

   - If you are not a slave to this world, do nothing except drinking,
     *Namely, write the book of life by the ink of wine.

   - If the fascination of love gives you ecstasy,
     Drink your cup completely and attend not that it is inverse in your cup.

   - O you who are in search of Noah's age and Khidr's water,
     Come and renew your vows by drinking each cup.

3 - **Imagery:**
   "Imagery refers to a set of verbal and figurative devices such as simile, metaphor, metonymy, satire, etc. (Imagery in Persian Poetry, Shafi'i Kadkani: p. 9)"
   There were outstanding and remarkable illustration in the poetry of 10th and 11th centuries, and Masih, with his subtle and delicate imaginations, created pristine and beautiful images, which could be divided into the following categories. In what follows, we discuss some cases in brief.

3-1 **Imagery of medical terminology:**
   Given that Masih used to be the physician of Shah Abbas Safavid Court and his father also served as the physician of Shah Tahmasb Safavid, the terminologies of this profession as well as the name of some diseases are commonly seen in this poetry book:
   - My veins are warming up of her delight, O lancet
     Be ready for death, and then enter this Qifal.

   - *Comparing with Soddeh, his wrath is the least jest,
     Which blocks the nutrition channel of the bone marrow.

   - Each newly-stitched wound of us would
     Tear apart again out of the stress for medication.

   - Since the flame of your fervor filled our soul,
     Skin smallpox appeared, but on our bones.

   - My heart was in ecstasy, all chest stitches ruptured,
     Needle of Jesus, broken, thread of Mary, ruptured.

(1) Qifal: It is a blood vein in the arm which was used for phlebotomizing, and is assumed to be associated with the face and head.
(2) Soddeh: One of the main liver disease, which is referred to something that is stuck in the intestines and prevents the evacuation of one’s bowels

3-2 **Imageries influenced by the environment and culture of India:**
Indian, given the diversity of its customs and traditions, which are distinct from other lands of the Orient, is a land of wonders. Masih, having spent a part of his life in India, tended to use concepts and terminology of the Indian subcontinent in the illustrations of his poems:

Perhaps, the first major illustration mentioned in his poems is the ritual of cremation in India

- When I am burnt in the love's fire temple,
  Hell and paradise of me are all burnt then.

- The Saba wind is waiting for my ashes,
  There is no joy greater than being burnt in the fire.

- Fire considers burning me a disgrace, but kids
  Out of mercy, set a fire on me like brushwood and straw.

- Fire will not burn me; water will not fulfill my needs,
  When I died, Messiah should bathe me with wine.

Or in the following verses, Indian words, uncommon in Persian language, have been used masterfully in a variety of images:

- For the shortage of Chooneh [lime] and the coldhearted beloved,
  Building of garden and heart both remained incomplete.

- Barashkals [Indian seasonal rains] are a hundred types, O Masih,
  You should gush up a spring from your heart.

- Unlikely is not if India becomes darker out of my dark destiny,
  No woad darker than my destiny could be found at Bayanah.

- They would defeat your cavalry by tears like Alcor even if
  You have Lak [thousands] of horsemen with ready swords like Mars.

Bayaneh (the name of a city in India where indigo is derived and used in dyeing industry)
Lak (one hundred thousand, an Indian term used in numeration system)

3-3 Martial imagery:

Martial words and terms such as dagger, sword, bow, arrow, army, etc. are the subject of many images in Masih’s poems:

- Each glance which is rooted in the dagger of her eyelashes,
  Has killed people and bind them to the croup of coquetry.

- I had a wound of her arrow-like eyelashes in my heart,
  It took a part of my heart, left no place for solutions.

- The arrow of your eyelashes is targeted for the sky,
  That is why since then stars have worn their armors.

Allusions and references in the poetry of Masih:

Allusion is a broad concept that ranges from Quranic verses, traditions and historical events to the popular culture, beliefs and customs. Arguably, it demonstrates various aspects of the life of ancestors.

The widespread use of allusion in the poems of Masih Kashani indicates his command of religious concepts, Quranic verses, traditions and historical events. In Masih’s poetry, what most drew the attention of the author were abundant references to "Khidr the prophet," and concepts associated with him. This is so obvious that almost in one in every three sonnets, references to "Khidr, water of life and Khidr’s life" can be found.

The high frequency of Khidr in Masih’s second poetry book is one of his stylistic features:

- My heart is never satisfied with the water of Khidr,
  Khidr of my lips wishes to drink water from the cup.

- At every footstep of her, there is a living spring,
  But hundreds of Khidrs are wandering in this wilderness.

- Whoever is a martyr of your sword, lives as long as Khidr,
You arise the dead to live in another way.

He also alludes to hundreds of other names that are out of scope of this paper. In particular, Masih points to religious figures such as Moses, Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Noah, Solomon, and historical figures such as Alexander the Great, his marvelous conquests and his astonishing crown. Among epic figures, he points to Afrasiab, Rostam, Sohrab, Saivash, Bijan and Fereydoun as well as epic feats such as Conquest of Kaavian, Jame Jam, Farhad’s rock carving and Mount Behistun. Also, there are three references to Mansoor Hallaj and his execution story along with several allusions to Adam and Eve, Gog and Magog, Harut and Marut, Layla and Majnun, Mahmoud Ghaznavi and his iconoclasm.

**Conclusion:**

According to the aforementioned points, it is reasonable to assume that Hakim Rokna Masih Kashani was one of the eminent poets in Hindi style, who wrote sonnets in the style of Ghazal Baba Faghani. The language of his poetry, far from literal and semantic complexities, is eloquent and masterfully synthesizes subtle and deep concepts with meticulous and delicate illustrations. In other words, Hindi style is moderately manifested in the poems of Masih and he widely uses customs and expressions of the Indian subcontinent as well as medical terminology in his poems. Nonetheless, his language is lucid and pleasant and his poems are clear and delightful.

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