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THE ART OF BADĪ‘ IN ARABIC LITERATURE

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Abstract: This article discusses the content, major branches, and historical as well as theoretical significance of the science of Balāghah, which is regarded as an important field of Arabic literature and linguistics. It analyzes the role of Balāghah in making speech semantically fluent, stylistically expressive, and logically perfect. In addition, the article explains in a scientific-popular style the importance of rhetorical principles in interpreting literary texts and in the art of eloquence and oratory. The article also provides information about outstanding works written on Balāghah and their authors.

Keywords: Balāghah, Bayān, Ma‘ānī, Badī‘, verse, commentary, meaning, word, context.

It is well known that unless we deeply master a science, we cannot fully understand its essence. One of the main sources that reveal this essence is language. The broader the possibilities of a language, the more effectively people can benefit from it. Undoubtedly, Arabic is one of the languages with limitless expressive potential. Discovering the peculiarities and unique features of the Arabic language is directly connected with the science of Balāghah. This discipline studies not only prose works but also poetic compositions. Moreover, Balāghah is not a single science; rather, it is a combination of three sciences: Ma‘ānī (semantics), Bayān (figurative expression), and Badī‘ (rhetorical embellishment). The earliest references to this science appeared in the ninth century in Abu Ubaydah’s work Majāz al-Qur’ān.[1.– B. 502.] The first writings in this field were in the form of questions and answers or short essays. The famous Arab writer al-Jāḥiẓ (780–869), in his book Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn, expressed his views regarding this science. Later, scholars such as Abu Bakr ibn Durayd (837–933) and Abu Hilal al-‘Askari (920–1005) also composed works related to this discipline, although their books did not comprehensively cover the field.

The first scholar to write an independent book on this science was Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, who lived in the third century Hijri. In his work Al-Badī‘, he discussed the sciences of rhetoric. However, he did not employ the technical terminology of Balāghah in his work; therefore, he cannot be regarded as the founder of the science. The founder of the principles and terminology of Balāghah is recognized as ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (1009–1078). In his books Dalā’il al-I‘jāz and Asrār al-Balāghah, he separated the sciences of Ma‘ānī and Bayān into independent disciplines and systematically organized their subjects. In brief, the stages of development of this science may be summarized as follows:

1. The emergence of early reflections and observations;
2. Development within other sciences;
3. Separation as an independent science;
4. Transformation into a systematic and comprehensive discipline.

The earliest rhetorical reflections began to appear during the pre-Islamic era (Jāhiliyyah). At that time, poets gathered in the marketplace of ‘Ukāẓ to recite poetry. Those who composed the most elegant and refined poems later served as judges who critiqued the poetry of others. One such judge was al-Nābighah al-Dhubyānī. One day, while conversing with poets, the famous poetess al-Khansā’ arrived and recited poetry about her brother Ṣakhr. Al-Nābighah praised her, saying: “There is no poetess among women like you.” Al-Khansā’ replied proudly:

"Perhaps not even among men." Hearing this, Ḥassān ibn Thābit declared: "By God, I compose poetry better than you, your father, and your grandfathers," and he recited the following verse:

وأسيافنا يقطرن من نجدة دما يلمعن بالضحى لنا الجفنات الغرّ

Meaning:

Our shining bowls glitter in the morning light,

And our swords drip blood in times of bravery.[2.– B. 7.]

After hearing this verse, al-Nābighah analyzed it rhetorically and expressed some of the earliest rhetorical observations. He said: "You are a good poet, but it would have been better if you had used the plural jifān instead of jafnāt, because the form you used indicates a smaller number. Then you said 'they glitter,' whereas saying 'they shine brightly' would have been more eloquent. You also said 'they drip blood,' which suggests only a small amount of blood, whereas for boasting it would have been better to say 'they flow with blood.'"

In this way, he analyzed the shortcomings of the verse. This demonstrates that people at that time already possessed certain rhetorical insights, although the science itself had not yet fully developed.

With the advent of Islam and the Arab conquests of vast territories, the need to develop the Arabic language and establish grammatical and linguistic rules increased significantly. During the first Hijri century, the science of grammar (naḥw) emerged, followed later by morphology (ṣarf). Alongside grammar, the science of Ma'ānī also developed. However, during this period, the sciences of Balāghah had not yet become independent disciplines; rather, they developed within the framework of other sciences.

During the Umayyad era, the concept of Balāghah came to signify "brevity." In other words, concise and succinct speech was considered eloquent. In the Abbasid period, with the flourishing of culture, poetry, and literature, the science of Balāghah also advanced considerably. Scholars of Arabic divided into different specializations: some focused on grammar and morphology, others on literature, and others on linguistics. 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī authored two foundational books on the principles of Balāghah: Dalā'il al-I'jāz and Asrār al-Balāghah. These works became the cornerstone of the science. Later rhetoricians such as al-Zamakhsharī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī largely followed the views established by al-Jurjānī without introducing substantially different theories.

One of the most prominent scholars after al-Jurjānī was undoubtedly Abu Ya'qub Yusuf al-Sakkākī (1160–1229). Originally from Khwarazm, he authored the encyclopedic work Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm, which covered various Arabic sciences. Alongside morphology, grammar, prosody, lexicography, and rhyme, it also included the sciences of Ma'ānī and Bayān.[3.– B. 9.] The work was divided into several sections according to different disciplines, and the science of Balāghah occupied the third section, which became extremely famous. Later, Muhammad al-Qazwīnī (1268–1338) wrote a concise summary of this third section entitled Talkhīṣ al-Miftāḥ. He subsequently composed a commentary on his own summary, naming it Al-Īḍāḥ fī 'Ulūm al-Balāghah. Thus, al-Sakkākī produced a work that laid the foundation for modern Balāghah studies.

Later scholars such as Bahā' al-Dīn al-Subkī (1319–1372) and Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (1322–1390) also wrote commentaries on al-Qazwīnī's summary. In particular, al-Subkī's 'Arūs al-Afrāḥ is highly esteemed among scholars of rhetoric, while al-Taftāzānī's Al-Muṭawwal and Mukhtaṣar al-Ma'ānī became important references in the field. The works written after these scholars largely imitated their contributions. Consequently, the books mentioned above served as standard references for centuries.

Inspired by earlier scholars and continuing their intellectual legacy, modern scholars produced works that made the science easier to understand. Among them are Ahmad al-Hāshimī's Jawāhir al-Balāghah, Mustafa Ṣādiq al-Rāfi'ī's I'jāz al-Qur'ān wa al-Balāghah al-Nabawiyyah, Hārūn 'Abd al-Razzāq's Ḥusn al-Ṣiyāghah fī Funūn al-Balāghah, 'Ali al-Jārim and Mustafa Amīn's Al-Balāghah al-Wāḍiḥah, Dr. 'Abd al-'Azīz 'Atīq's 'Ilm al-Bayān, 'Ilm al-Ma'ānī, and 'Ilm al-Badī', Hifnī Nāṣif and his colleagues' Durūs al-Balāghah, Muhammad Anwar Badakhshānī's Al-Balāghah al-Ṣāfiyah, Ahmad Qallāsh's Taysīr al-Balāghah, and several books by Dr. Fāḍil al-Sāmarrā'ī. In addition to books and articles, poetic treatises on Balāghah also exist, such as Ibn Shiḥnah's Mi'at al-Ma'ānī and 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Akhḍarī's Jawhar al-Maknūn, which remain invaluable scholarly legacies.

Many scholars have written about the significance of this science. Indeed, it is Balāghah that analyzes and studies the subtle meanings and miraculous eloquence of the Holy Qur'an, the noble sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as well as Arabic poetry, odes, and wise sayings. As the intellect delves deeper into this science, the sensitivity and refinement of the heart also increase. The following verse may serve as an example:

طرقت الباب حتى (كلّ متني)
فلما (كلّ متني) كلمتني
فقالت لي أيا (إسماعيل) صبرًا
فقلت أيا (أسما عيل صبري)

Meaning:
I knocked at the door until my shoulders grew weary,
And when my shoulders became tired, she spoke to me.
She said: "O Ismā'īl, be patient,"
I replied: "O Asmā', my patience has vanished."[4.]

As can be seen, the rhetorical device of paronomasia (jinās) creates a beautiful musical harmony in this verse. Countless examples similar to this may be cited. Furthermore, this science helps people speak Arabic eloquently, fluently, confidently, and most importantly, clearly. For this reason, 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī stated: "The mere gathering of words does not produce meaning for us; rather, they must be arranged appropriately according to the intended meaning." Yusuf al-Sakkākī said: "Speaking in accordance with the requirements of the situation is eloquence." Al-Zamakhsharī, in the introduction to his famous Qur'anic commentary Al-Kashshāf, wrote: "Even if a jurist mastered all the legal verdicts of every age, or a theologian surpassed all scholars, or a narrator memorized all stories in the world, or a preacher became the finest orator, or a grammarian became the strongest scholar of grammar, or a linguist became the greatest lexicographer — none of them would be qualified to explain the meanings and truths of the Holy Qur'an except the one who has mastered the science of Balāghah."[5.– B. 96.]

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