

EMERGENCE OF MAQAMAH GENRE: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Art is influenced by and life itself is reflected in works of art. These sometimes reflect the experiences in social, education, spiritual and other aspect of life. The emergence of Maqamah art in the history of Arabic literature in the 4th century after Hijrah pioneered by Badi'i-z-zaman al-Hamadhani (d.398 A.H.) has marked the great gestures and epoch by the scholars of note in their various literary art. Maqamah as an art denotes different meanings and values with fully rhymed prose with intervals of poetry in which rhetorical extravagance is conscious. And the immerse of the scholars on this genre has contributed immensely in promoting their literary skills, tastes and gestures. An attempt is being made in this paper to showcase the historical aspect of Maqamah genre as a new epoch in Arabic literature. Likewise, the position of Arabic literature in Abbasid age, and emergence of Maqamah writers will be highlighted for historical purpose.

Arabic literature in Abbasid Age

In the history of Arabs, there were different periods for the literary manifestation ranging from Jahiliyyah period known as "Asru-L-Jahilliy" to the modern period known as "Asru-N-Nahdah". Abbasid period is considered as one of the periods started around 132A.D. after the downfall of Umayyad era, and got terminated at the fall of Baghdad in the year 656 A.H.(Ahmad al-imam1996-al-maoriduladhab)¹.This period was considered as golden citadel for Islamic knowledge and literature. This is because, Arabic literature had reached the height quiet unparalleled in the past with he emergence of greater numbers (Zayat .A.H.)².

The rulers and the leaders encouraged Arabic literature which was held in high esteem .they provided a lot of relevant materials for the poets, the power of language thus, extending as far as o the east and west. This brought about vocabulary development to meet the pace of the state's development in terms of civilization and progress. The act of the poets' art led to many linguistic errors that spread to all over the Muslim world. Then, colloquialism become the language of literature and knowledge, but, God(Almighty) protected Arabic language and the language of writing, recording, poetry, and orations.

As early as in the middle of the 4th century of hijrah, the colloquial language reached the centre of the nomadic area and language and language throughout Abbasid period continued to be strong in collaboration with the strength of the government but got weakened when the government was weak until the latter fell in the hands of tatar in the year in 656 A.H.

Literary prose which is another genre of Arabic literature during abbasid period contributed immensely to the development of Arabic literature which led to the emergence of badi'u -z-zamman al-hamadhani. (d.398.A.H.). (Ahmad Muhammad)³.

The Origin of Maqamah

After the full development of Arabic literature, literary artifices and ornate rhymes were used and become a primary consideration in prose writing. The most significant manifestations are found in the "MAQAMAH" a genre originally consisting of witty and dramatic stories presented to an audience in beautiful, elegant rhymed prose. It marked an important standing point in the literary aspect in the literary aspect of Arabic literature of the medieval period. On this, different meanings and perceptions were given to the word "MAQAMAH", based on the changes in the variations of Arabic literature. such variations are inheritable especially when the word is viewed against its historical background and development throughout the age. The word used to signify a place occupied by a particular people. This can be supported by a poetic line of Musayyab bin Alas, when he said:

وكالمسك تـرب مقاماتهم # وتـرب قـبورهم أطـيب

"The sand of their place is like perfume (Al-Misk), while the sand of their graves is sweeter than perfumes."

A further look in to pre-Islamic poetry, will reveal that the word Maqamah carried an entirely different view and connotation. It means a group of people, a sitting session where talks and discussions usually took place. This could be seen in a verse which Zuhayr bin Abu Salma revealed. It goes thus:

وفيهـم مقامات حسان وجوهها # وأنديـة يـناتبـها القول والفعل

“There are groups among them whose faces are beautiful and club houses visited often by speech and action.

Labidi Amriyy, a vibrant poet attested to this point by saying:

ومقامة غلب الرقاب كأنهم # حن لدي باب الحـصير قـيام

“A place many a people with thick neck as if they are spirits at the door of Hasir (the king).

In the Islamic period, the word was used to denote a position or seat as used in the Holy Qur’an chapter 19 vs 72, where Allah says:

أي الفريقين خير مقاما وأحسن نديا.

“Which of the sides is the best in position”.

In the Umayyad period, the meaning of the word “Maqamah” got widened to denote religious speech delivered at the assemblies of men surrounding caliphs. According to Ibn Mudabir in his book titled “Risalatul Adhra volume 11 pg 143, he said that a speaker may be looking for rewards after speech. As we also hear in the words of other orators of this age saying:

“إرحموا مقمي هذا”

“Bless my position or speech”.

Later in the Abbasid period, the word came to mean benevolence, soliciting speech cast in a peculiar language style. it is most significant development that was under this age hat Badi-az-zaman the de-facto precursor of what could be called classical Maqamah tailored his composition within his thematic realm.

Therefore, it should be obvious that the Maqamah reached its perfection stage during the Abbasid period and particularly in the of Hamadhan. There had been some general elements and features running through since the nascent days of its development. These can be enunciated as follow:

1. Maqamah had never leased to be associated with sitting sessions in which talks were given.
2. Maqamah was always identified with a particular theme; be it didactic or literary.
3. Maqamah had always a particular audience which could be members of the same tribe or the aristocrats or the commoners.

In trying to identify the motivation for emergence of Maqamah, two factors readily came to being:

1. **The economic situation:** in the 4th century of Abbasid period, the economic situation was anything but favourable to many people including scholars. There were poverty, disease and hunger pervading the strata of the whole community. Under these circumstances, it was only natural that the type of literary production that would surface should be standard and this Maqamah did by commercializing knowledge
2. **The tide of literary verbal jugglery and contrivance holding the sway:** the tide of literary manipulation and ornamentation had already been in force before the appearance of badi’i-z-zaman. In fact, right from the time of Ibnul-Amid (970 A.D. literary process started to be judged by the ability of the practioners to write in flowerily language and to cast his message in otiose embellishment.

The Primary Aim of Maqamah

Maqamah literature is quite encyclopedic in that, it embodies almost all the branches of Arabic linguistic sciences. It also passes a historical documentation as it touches aspects of Arabic history, adventures and cultures.

The primary aim of Maqamah was the teaching of Arabic language in many of its ramification to the aspiring learners and this is what badi’i-z-zaman successfully did by molding his

pedagogic lessons is an easily comprehensive form adopting a relaxing style punctuated by poetical verses.

Even though, it may not be correct to regard Maqamah as a story book, yet the style adopted and the frame in which the subject matter is a true picture to this form. It can also be dramatic. This doesn't make it a theatrical hand bill. It has only employed these forms as a matter of convenience and most probably to arrest the attention of its audience. This position will be strengthened when we observe that harmonies sequence which is a feature of story telling and perhaps, of drama is not an organic whole characteristics of Maqamah, rather, it is found disjointed depending on the subject matter of each Maqamah piece which could be of the most varied type. It can also be explained that in terms of the fact that the hero of Maqamah is a knowledgeable hero displays his ability in all turn of events to secure pecuniary rewards of social status.

In other words, the construction is stereo typed in that, it often starts with a predictable introduction of the incidents, which is followed by a description of his tour bringing him in contact always with the learned hero.

The classification of this can be seen in al-Hariri's Maqamah which featuring the narrator and the improviser or hero, as named the narrator (*Harith bn Hammam*) and hero Abu Zayd as-Saruji, a vibrant hero who fascinated his audience by his eloquence and clear deeds. As a rule, al-hariri plays the dupe and is often outwitted by the hero, who is always unpredictable and eloquent, at times, he perform the role of satirist collecting alms through his preaching, that a pious man, or that of a rascal using all forms of deceit for personal gains.

Considering the aims of Maqamah, al-Hariri's purpose offers a serious language to combine refinement with dignity of styles, brilliance with jewels of eloquence and the beauties of literatures with its varieties. al-Hadith said, "*Besides, I have adorned them with Arab proverbs, scholarly elegance, grammatical riddles and riddles. Dependent on the meaning of words, original address, oracle, tear moving exhortations and amusing jests*"

The Emergence of Maqamah Writers

The efforts made by Badi'i-az-zaman in laying down the Maqamah genres which was fully immersed and emulated by many scholars of Arabic language and literature, led to the emergence of many writers of Maqamah after Badi'i-az-zaman-al-Hamadhani.

It must be stated that al-Hariri was not the first person to imitate Hamadhan in the art of Maqamah writing. Prior to him was a number of people such as Ibn Nabata - Sa'ady popularly known as Abu Nasr Abdul -Aziz bin Umar (d.405), and Abul-Ashim Abdullahi bn Muhammad bn Naqiyyah (d.485A.H), Abu Muhammad Qasim bn Alli al-Hariri(d.516A.H). it is also necessary to mention Abu Ishari Muhammad bn Yusuff as-Suraqashy (d 538A .H) and Jarullahi, Abu Hassan bn Umar az-Zamakhshari (d.538A.H). An intent look into his Maqamah would show that his concentration on al-Wa'z (i.e. admonition) a topic after which a Maqamah is aimed in the self devour of Maqamah, as Naqidiyyah Maqamah is mainly on kidyah (begging for alms). it must therefore be noted that this is an open withdrawal from the tradition established by Hamadhani and followed by other imitators

Moving to the sixth century, we witness al-Hassan bn Safi whose appellation was Maliki an-Nuhat (the king of grammarian), with his own Maqamah written on the pattern of Hariri. At the end of the sixth century, some other writers emerged and they contributed profusely to the art of Maqamah writing. Among them were: Ibn Jawziyy who wrote his fifty Maqamah on various literary topics; also, Abu 'Ala Ahmad bin Abu-Bakr bin Ahmad ar-Raz al-Hanafi written thirty Maqamah printed in Istanbul together with that of Ibn Naqiyyah in the same volume.

Passing by the sixth century was the multiplication of assemblies of imitators and expansions of topics of discussion in their renditions were the characteristics feature Nahw, Hadith and Fiqh came to be the parts of Maqamah topic as we learnt about that of Ibn Saygal al-Jaziri (d.705A.H), the writing which contained fifty Maqamah. He attributed his own narration to Qasim bin ad-Damashqiyy and his events to Abi Nasr of Cairo.

Also, in "al-Asr-ul-Hadith of Arabic literature (i.e. the modern period), we can point to Nasif al-Yaziji who was ranked third in the writing of Maqamah emerged in the 18th century. According to Haywood, the author of modern Arabic literature reported that Shaykh Nasif al-Yaziji was the most successful imitator of Hariri. He quoted that:

Despite the large number of Maqamah written since Hariri's time including many in the nineteenth century, only al-Yaziji has been considered worthy to be mentioned in the same breadth.

Other modern writers of Maqamah include Abu Muhammad bin Abdullahi as-Suwaridi (1740-1795A.H) whose Maqamah was first published in Istanbul in 1913 in a collection titled Maqamah by Shihab-ud-din bin Mahmudi Alusi, whose best known work was his collection of five Maqamah known as "*Maqamat-al-Alusi*", focuses on autobiographical materials, comment on social life and guidance on right conduct.

It is pertinent to mention that Layali-as-Sati'i of Hafiz Ibrahim (d.1932) and Hadith Isa bn Hisham of Muwaliyyah are nothing but a reflection of Maqamah's style.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is discovered that Maqamah genre is a unique form of a story appended in the fourth century of the hijrah during Abbasid era,. Al-Hamadhani who died in 398 C.E. is credited to have created this form of literature, which is a type of short story containing adventures of beggars and rogues painted in the most brilliant colors. For instance, the Maqamah of Al-Hamadhani and Al-Hariri assume Abu Al-Fatiu al-Iskandari and Abu Zayd As-Saruji to play the roles of the hero as a brilliant beggars and rogues respectively.

This new form of tale was looked upon as a nucleus of the modern Arabic short stories, having been written in an artificial style and in a rhymed prose. Maqamah did not blend itself to the spontaneous expression required by the art of story telling. It became a stereotyped form imitated by philologists and men of letters of different epochs in treating various subjects

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