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THE RHETORICAL ARCHITECTURE OF ETHICAL INSTRUCTION IN SAADI SHIRAZI'S *PAND-NĀMEH*

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Abstract.

Although Saadi Shirazi's *Būstān* and *Gulistān* have long attracted sustained scholarly attention, his didactic poem *Pand-nāmeḥ* (Book of Counsel) remains comparatively less examined from a stylistic standpoint. The present study explores the dominant rhetorical and stylistic strategies that structure the poem, including aphoristic condensation, syntactic parallelism, antithetical construction, metaphorical imagery, allegorical reference, and Qur'anic intertextuality. Drawing upon the theoretical framework of classical Persian rhetoric (*balāghat*), the article argues that Saadi's persuasive force in *Pand-nāmeḥ* derives from the deliberate integration of ethical instruction with refined aesthetic form. The analysis situates the poem within the intellectual and literary milieu of thirteenth-century Persian didactic poetics and underscores its integral place in Saadi's oeuvre.

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Introduction

Saadi Shirazi (c. 1210–1292) occupies a foundational position in the tradition of classical Persian literature. His scholarly formation in Baghdad, particularly at the Al-Nizamiyya of Baghdad, provided him with extensive training in Arabic rhetoric, Islamic jurisprudence, and the literary sciences—disciplines that profoundly influenced his stylistic development. While his literary renown largely rests upon *Būstān* and *Gulistān*, the didactic composition *Pand-nāmeḥ*, preserved within his *Kulliyāt*, reveals a comparable intellectual sophistication articulated through a more concentrated advisory mode.

In contrast to the narrative expansiveness of *Būstān* or the hybrid prose-verse configuration of *Gulistān*, *Pand-nāmeḥ* is structured primarily as direct moral exhortation. Its relative structural simplicity shifts emphasis from storytelling to rhetorical articulation, rendering stylistic devices central to its persuasive strategy. Within the broader Persian ethical tradition, aesthetic refinement is not ornamental but instrumental: beauty of expression strengthens moral authority. A defining feature of the poem is aphoristic concision, corresponding to the rhetorical principle of *ījāz*—brevity enriched with semantic density. Saadi encapsulates intricate ethical insights within metrically balanced distichs, frequently formulating universal maxims in compressed yet resonant language. Such density enhances memorability and reflects the oral pedagogical culture of medieval Persian society. In this context, concision functions as an epistemological tool: the clarity of moral perception is mirrored in the economy of verbal form. Antithesis (*tazād*) constitutes another structural cornerstone of the poem. Through the systematic juxtaposition of opposing ethical categories—justice and oppression, wisdom and ignorance, humility and arrogance—Saadi sharpens moral distinctions and intensifies evaluative clarity. Classical Persian rhetoric regards contrast as a means of conceptual precision; by organizing counsel through binary structures, Saadi constructs ethical reasoning through dialectical opposition. This strategy resonates with broader Islamic intellectual traditions in which truth frequently emerges through contrastive reasoning. Metaphorical imagery (*isti'āra*) further strengthens the didactic effect. Abstract moral concepts are rendered perceptible through images drawn from nature, everyday experience, and Qur'anic symbolism. The transience of worldly life is evoked through the metaphor of a passing caravan; knowledge appears as illuminating light; the purified heart resembles a polished mirror reflecting truth. Such imagery activates both cognitive recognition and emotional engagement. Particularly significant is the symbolism of light, echoing Qur'anic discourse—most notably the imagery associated with the so-called “Light Verse” (Qur'an 24:35)—thereby reinforcing the sacred undertones of ethical instruction.

Intertextual integration represents an additional dimension of stylistic sophistication. While *Pand-nāmeḥ* seldom employs explicit quotation, it incorporates Qur'anic diction and conceptual echoes through the device known as *iqtibās*. This subtle assimilation situates the poem within a sacred ethical framework and enhances its rhetorical gravitas. Saadi's skill lies in the unobtrusive nature of these scriptural resonances, which elevate the register of discourse without interrupting poetic continuity. Parallelism and rhythmic symmetry likewise contribute to the poem's persuasive coherence. Balanced syntactic constructions across hemistichs generate both musical harmony and logical clarity. In classical Persian poetics, structural equilibrium signified aesthetic perfection. Within *Pand-nāmeḥ*, such symmetry not only embellishes expression but also serves a pedagogical function, reinforcing conceptual contrasts and facilitating memorization. Although extended narrative episodes are largely absent, the poem occasionally introduces brief allegorical references that function as exempla. These condensed illustrative gestures connect abstract moral instruction with recognizable human experience. Even in its most aphoristic passages, an implicit narrative logic underlies the advisory discourse, reflecting medieval Islamic pedagogical traditions in which symbolic exemplification was central to moral education. From a stylistic perspective, the unity of *Pand-nāmeḥ* arises from the coordinated interaction of these rhetorical elements. Aphoristic compression intensifies authority; antithesis delineates ethical boundaries; metaphor concretizes abstraction; intertextuality confers legitimacy; parallelism ensures

formal balance; allegorical suggestion anchors counsel in lived experience. Together, these devices construct a cohesive rhetorical architecture emblematic of thirteenth-century Persian literary culture, wherein ethical philosophy, Islamic scholarship, and poetic artistry were deeply interwoven.

In sum, a stylistic reconsideration of *Pand-nāmeḥ* confirms its importance within Saadi's literary corpus. The poem demonstrates that his mastery extended beyond narrative eloquence to highly concentrated advisory expression. Through systematic deployment of rhetorical strategies grounded in the theory of *balāghat*, Saadi achieved a refined synthesis of moral clarity and poetic elegance. Further scholarly engagement with *Pand-nāmeḥ* thus enriches our understanding of both Saadi's legacy and the broader tradition of medieval Persian didactic poetics.

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