A Study of the Characteristics of Nakhjovani’s Description of Golshan-i Raz

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Abstract

Shabestari’s Golshan-i Raz is one of the well-known literary works which have been frequently described and clarified many times. The very fact that this remarkable work has attracted numerous researchers’ attention attests to the significance and popularity of this work. Nematollah Nakhjovani’s description of Golshan-i Raz is one of the clarifications which has been written for this collection of poems. He was a Sufi and Hanafi interpreter who is famous for his description of Shabestari’s complicated and mysterious thoughts and the explanation of different aspects of Islamic mysticism. Two versions of the above-mentioned descriptive manuscript have been found. In this study, the researchers focused on discussing these two manuscripts. In this paper, after introducing Nakhjovani and mentioning his literary works, we discuss the distinctive features and characteristics of his descriptive manuscript of Golshan-i Raz which has made it a significant description.

Keywords: manuscript, Golshan-i Raz, Nakhjovani, manuscript features.
1. Introduction
Baba Nematololah Nakhjovani, known as Sheikh Alawan, was a Sarfi and a Hani interpreter. He was one of the scholars and the elders of the tenth century in Iran. Our information about Nakhjovani’s life is based on short stories which have been recorded in different biographies. Nakhjovani’s expertise in interpreting theological and rhetorical science has been acknowledged by everybody. He had full command of the three languages of Turkish, Persian and Arabic. Nakhjovani’s birthdate has not been mentioned in biographies but his date of death was mentioned to be 902 AH by some authors (Kahaleh, 1993) and 920 AH by some others (Kahaleh, 1993). Nematollah Nakhjovani was from the Caucasus region which was part of Iran’s soil in his interpreter’s era. However, now, it is part of the soil of the republic of Azerbaijan. Shagayeg al-namiyeh is one of the oldest books in which Nakhjovani has been discussed. In this source, he was introduced as a divine scholar who was involved in divine mysteries (Tashkpari, 2011).

Whereas it has been mentioned in some biographies that Nakhjovani was from Aghshahr, it has been argued in the book Poetry and Prose in Iran and in Persian Language that Nemat-Alloh-ibn Mahmoud Nakhjovani known as Baba Nemat-Allah was one of the famous mystics of the late ninth and early tenth century. At the end of his life, he moved to Turkey and passed away there in 920 AH. He has written books in Persian and Tazi (Arabic) languages (Nafisi, 1965). Furthermore, in the book in the Ottoman Empire, it has been discussed that at the end of his life, he moved inside the Ottoman territory and settled in Aghshahr and passed away there. He wrote Sufi poems in different collections and books and compiled other numerous literary works such as A Description on Shabestari’s Golshan i-Raz (Tarbiyat, 1998). It is obvious that he was not originally from Aghshahr but he moved there at the end of his life. Dehkhoda has argued that Nakhjovani is considered to be one of the of the mystics of the Naqshbandi and he has written literary works which manifests his robust mystical motifs.

In his lifetime, Nakhjovani has written a number of mystical interpretive works such as the followings:

1. Alfavateh Al-ahlieh and Almafateh Almozhe Lel-Kalam Algoranieh is a valid interpretation of the entire Quran which included two volumes. The writing of this work was completed in 902 AH. The author of Shagayeg al-namiyeh argues that Nakhjovani wrote this interpretation of Quran without referring to and using other interpretative sources and it includes facts and points which many people might not be able to understand them due to the high eloquence and rhetoric used in its words and interpretations. (Tashkapri, 2011).

2. Hashieh Bar Anvar Al-tanzil va Asrar Tavil Beizav
3. Hashieh Bar Fusus Alhakam Mahia Aldin ibn Arabi
4. Hadieh Alaqkhavan
5. Resaleh Alvujud
6. Description of Shabestari’s Golshan i-Raz in Persian

Mahmoud Shabestari’s Golshan i-Raz is a Masnavi (poem format). Although it is not a voluminous book, it is regarded as one of the precious mystical literary works in which Sufi concepts and issues have been expressed enthusiastically and passionately. It should be
maintained that, in this book, Nakhjovani was inspired by Ibn Arabi’s wisdom and Attar and Movlana’s poetic style (Zarinkoub, 1984).

Shabestari wrote the Masnavi of Golshan i-Raz in response to Amir Hossein Hervi’s questions which were related to issues such as the nature of thought, its justifiability or unjustifiability, perfect human, the rationale of human’s existence, perception of realities, etc. by answering these questions, Shabestari tried to explain and interpret mystical codes. This literary work has been described many times by different scholars. One of the remarkable descriptions written for Golshan i-Raz is Nematollah Nakhjovani’s description. Nakhjovani was himself a theosophist who was well-acquainted with mystical approaches and methods. Two versions of Nakhjovani’s descriptions have been found; one of them is in the national library of Iran and the other one is in the library of Islamic Encyclopedia.

There is no consensus on the exact number of Hervi’s questions. Nevertheless, Nakhjovani noted that the number of Hervi’s questions was 18. In a similar vein, the same number of questions was mentioned in another description of Golshan i-Raz written by Lahiji. The number of verses described and explained by Nakhjovani is 966 verses. At the outset of his description, he mentions that he described from hemistich seven and ten to the hemistich seven and hundred years (Lahiji, 1971). Nakhjovani argued that he did not describe those verses which were easy to understand.

In this paper, the above-mentioned two versions of Nakhjovani’s description of Golshan i-Raz available in National library of Iran and the great Islamic encyclopedia were used as the basis of the study. Hereby, the version in the national library and the one in the great Islamic encyclopedia are denoted by NL and IE, respectively.

2. Characteristics of Nakhjovani’s description of Golshan i-Raz
Nematollah Nakhjovani’s description of the verses of Golshan i-Raz is comprehensive. Indeed, he referred to the lines and verses of Quran, hadiths and elders’ sayings in interpreting Golshan i-Raz. This description is significant and outstanding for the following reasons:

1. It describes Shabestari’s complicated thoughts and verses. In the introduction to his description, Nakhjovani argues that he did his best and put his own tolerance and patience to a severe test to discover and clarify the oracular and occult concepts of Golshan i-Raz (Shafaie, 2012).
2. It expresses different aspects and features of the Islamic mystical approaches.
3. It is textually fluent, tactful, coherent and consistent.

In general, the description style in this work is as follows: at the outset, verse lines were described and clarified by focusing on each individual hemistich at a time and the words and mystical combinations were interpreted using Quranic verses and hadiths. It can be argued that nakhjovani’s description is diverse in terms of writing style. That is, wherever the purpose was to describe the content and express meaning, he used simple prose. However, in other descriptive sections, the reader sees rhythmic, eloquent and sophisticated prose which is replete with hadiths and literary points.

The content and themes of Nakhjovani’s description encompasses sheikh Shabestari’s intellectual principles and he remained faithful in reproducing the original text. He argued that
real wisdom and knowledge cannot be obtained through reasoning; rather, it is the essential requirement for guiding humans which is obtained through the manifestation and illumination of divine lights beams on their hearts. Indeed, human wisdom fail to fully perceive and understand the nature of divine knowledge. Hence, he invites mystics to refine their souls and hearts and fight against their inciting nafs (sensuality). Then, Nakhjovani discusses the nature and different types of approaches and trends. That is, descending trend which is a tendency and inclination from unity towards diversity; the ascending trend which is a tendency and movement from diversity towards unity and thought sequence is the unity of being in Ibn Arabi’s sufi metaphysics. Next, he decodes some of the mystical terms such as visage, hair, handwriting, etc.; and investigates their connection with divine expression and manifestation. In fact, a thorough examination reveals that the Nakhjovani’s description of Golshan i-Raz was an excuse for him so that he can express and manifest his life-long austerity and his Quranic, mystical and philosophical views and observations.

3. Verbal Features of Nakhjovani’s description of Golshan i-Raz
This prose has certain features which make it distinctive and unique when compared with the other descriptions. Some of the particular characteristics of this description are given below:
1. One of the highly frequent verbal features of this text is the use of the participle form of the verbs which has made the text impressive and imposing. This is regarded as one of the specific peculiarities of this description. Nakhjovani’s persistence in using the participle form of verbs has made the text more literary and scholarly.
2. In addition to the use of participle form of verbs, nakhjovani has used another figure of speech which is called Saj in Arabic. Indeed, it refers to rhymed prose and the meticulous choice of words which has given a particular intonation and music to Nakhjovani’s prose. In the descriptive parts, this feature has made his words more eloquent and powerful.
3. One of the significant differences of Nakhjovani’s description from other descriptions is that he has used taste, enthusiasm and literary dynamism for describing and discussing Shabestari’s complex and mysterious verses. This feature has made this description highly distinctive.
4. It should be noted that, sometimes, Nakhjovani’s prose is more literary than the original verse (Golshan i-Raz). As a case in point,
5. Another distinctive feature which makes Nakhjovani’s description superior to other descriptions is that he has mixed and amalgamated his description with the verses of Golshan i-Raz in such a way that the verses look as though they are part of the description and are closely attached to the descriptions. This feature indicates the close relationship between Golshan i-Raz verses and Nakhjovani’s description.
6. One more unique characteristic of this description is the cohesion and continuity. Based on the content of hemistiches and verses, Nakhjovani has used particular words and phrases in each description which has produced enjambment (the meanings run over from one line to the next). This condition helps readers to establish a close link and connection with the verses of Golshan i-Raz.
7. Another verbal characteristic of Nakhjovani’s text is that he has described some of the hemistiches of the verse through abstraction and condensation. That is to say, He has
assumed that the readers and addressees of his text are already somewhat familiar with mystical issues and subjects. Hence, He has discussed more profound and less superficial concepts by using highly succinct and epigrammatic words and phrases. In general, it can be maintained that the describer has never beaten around the bush by arguing unnecessary and unrelated issues. Rather, he has provided concise description of the content so that the readers are not troubled. By using a fluent prose and selecting words meticulously, he has tried to describe and discuss the verses of Golshan i-Raz in such a way that he can easily maintain a communication with his readers. Hence, the reader can easily notice that the describer is a mystic and a literary scholar.

4. Content features of Nakhjovani’s description of Golshan i-Raz

Nakhjovani was well-acquainted with Ibn Arabi’s ideas and shabestari’s thoughts. Hence, in describing and discussing the verses of Golshan i-Raz, he has made use of them. Dezfulian maintains that by studying forty different descriptions written for Golshan i-Raz, we can draw the conclusions that, except for five descriptions of it, the other descriptions do not have new and interesting ideas and concepts. One of the five valuable descriptions of Golshan i-Raz is Nakhjovani’s description (Dezfulian, 2003). Some of the verses of Golshan i-Raz described by Nakhjovani are given in this section and the differences between his description and another description (Lahiji, 1971) of Golshan i-Raz are argued briefly.

1. Materiality and corporeality of God:

Contents of Nakhjovani’s description indicate that he believed in the materiality and the corporeality of God. Regarding the prophet, nakhjovani argued that: it was due to God’s sublimity and deference that the prophet talked about perceiving the god (IE, p.8). This refers to a hadith from the prophet who mentioned that he had seen the God as a teenager with curly hair. However, in other parts of his description of Golshan i-Raz, Nakhjovani has considered people who make analogies as ignorant and misguided people: “those who perceive and adorn and acclaim the god in the form of garb and face and draw an analogy for god, their perception and understanding are so poor and they are trapped in the darkness of ignorance (Shafaie, 2012).

With respect to the above-mentioned argument, it can be mentioned that, regarding the issue of analogy, Nakhjovani agrees with and conforms to Ibn Arabi’s views. He contends that an analogy for the supreme being can be drawn in his creations. That is, when we say that he can see, hear and speak, it means that he can be manifested as different viewer and listener (Jahangiri, 1982). Indeed, from Nakhjovani’s point of view, God’ corporeality and materiality is not similar to the position held by the school of thought in which people draw analogies. That is, Nakhjovani does not describe the supreme being by comparing it with the qualities of objects. Rather, he argues that God can be reflected and manifested in the qualities of possible creations and beings.

2. The superiority and perfection of the prophet (Mohammad) to other prophets:

Another significant issue and matter argued in Nakhjovani’s description is his belief in Mohammad prophet’s realities, perfection and his superiority to other prophets. He mentioned that: “it was through the prophet’s benefaction and magnificence that we can perceive the infinite and endless quality and essence of the supreme being” (Kahaleh, 1993). In fact, it should be pointed that Nakhjovani’s admiration and acclamation of the Mohammad prophet in comparison with the other prophets can be noticed in the following verse of Golshan i-Raz: “the time they
became aware of their position and standing, they talked about the popular and mystic individual” (Lahiji, 1971). Nakhjovani described the above-mentioned verse in this way: each of them (prophets) managed to achieve certain positions and ranks of monotheism and they freed and purified themselves from the anxiety, doubt and duplicity although it should be noted that at the head of them there is only one prophet” (Shafaie, 2012). Here, Nakhjovani believes that the prophets’ consciousness and awareness to their own rank and position refers to the fact that each of them has a particular standing and position based on his own capability. Consequently, Nakhjovani has used different words and phrases for describing different prophets in line with their positions. That is, Nakhjovani believes that different prophets have different capacities and abilities in achieving perception and recognition. He argues that only Mohammad prophet was able to achieve the perfect perception and understanding of the God. He maintained that each of the creatures can benefit from the manifestation and reflection of God based on their inherent talents and capabilities. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the above-mentioned verse from Golshan i-Raz has been described differently by Lahiji: “as they freed themselves from the restriction of the world, they were able to obtain true knowledge and wisdom and talked about the popular and mystics” (Shabestari, 1963). Hence, it should be noted that Nakhjovani’s description is more complete since Lahiji talks about a general perfection but Nakhjovani refers to the variable and individual capability and ability.

3. Seeming knowledge:
In describing the following verse, Nakhjovani differs from Lahiji in terms of defining the nature of seeming knowledge.

“one who possessed seeming knowledge can distinguish land from sea” (Shabestari, 1962). In Nakhjovani’s description of this verse, he argues that: “someone might have only superficial and seeming knowledge and he can’t understand the underlying issues and matters. Hence, due to the lack of knowledge and wisdom about the inherent unitary being of God, he faces big challenges and has to limit himself to the apparent senses. (Nakhjovani, NA, p. 11). In contrast, Lahiji describes the above-mentioned verse in the following way: in case an individual has the seeming knowledge which is the same as the knowledge of principles and rules, the rules of seeming knowledge will be dominant for him (Lahiji, 1971).

As mentioned above, Nakhjovani maintains that people with seeming knowledge are the ones whose knowledge is limited to trivial and superficial matters; hence, they are unaware of the critical intrinsic and deep issues and they remain at the elementary stage of mysticism. Thus, they cannot achieve the ultimate truth. However, Lahiji interprets seeming knowledge as the principles and rules.

4. Internalism and externalism:
Nakhjovani believed in internalism in religion. Hence, it can be observed that he does not agree with Lahiji in interpreting the following verse of Golshan i-Raz: “someone brought jewel and became a target, another one let it untouched that became a shell” (Shabestari, 1962). According to Nakhjovani, the interpretation of the first hemistich is that he cleaned and extricated himself from the worldly stuff and unnecessary material things and refined himself and yearned for the unity of the supreme being. The interpretation of the second hemistich is that he was impressed by the precious being of the supreme being that changed his low quality into something valuable (Kahaleh, 1993). However, Lahiji’s interpretation is different from Nakhjovani. Lahiji argued
that a group of truth and knowledge seekers tried to extract the underlying realities from apparent events; hence, they became the target of reprehension and criticism. However, another group kept the mysteries of truth and realities hidden and untouched and did not reveal them to anyone. Whatever they mentioned were about the rules and principles (Lahiji, 1971).

In describing and interpreting the above-mentioned verse, Nakhjovani acknowledged that only few people were able to achieve the reality and quintessence of truth and that many ignore the underlying principles and are confined to imitations of the apparent and superficial issues. That is, they only persist on doing shallow rules. Indeed, Nakhjovani interprets target as achieving the goal. Nevertheless, it is not the case in Lahiji’s description who interprets it as being reprimanded by the others. Hence, to avoid being criticized and chastised, they conceal the truth and restrict themselves to the ostensible rules.

In another verse in Golshan i-Raz: “when the words are mentioned at the supreme level they make their understanding difficult for people” (Shabestari, 1962), Nakhjovani refers to the previous verses and argues that everyone speaks according to his position and status and that the mystic and popular people are perceived differently. This is a significant issue in Nakhjovani’s description. Hence, Nakhjovani description differ from Lahiji’s description not only in meaning but also in the type of prose used by them.

5. Nakhjovani’s great interest in Quran and hadiths:
One of the remarkable features of Nakhjovani’s description in comparison with his contemporaries is that he has a good command of Quran and prophetic hadiths. Indeed, he almost always refers to hadths and Quran notes in interpreting and discussing different issues. For example, when death is approaching you and you hear the sound of death, tell yourself: we are close to you and hear what you hear (Shafaie, 2012). Indeed, in this interpretation of the verse, Nakhjovani has referred to the 16th verse of “G” Surah in Quran: “we are closer to you than the jugular veins of your neck”. Moreover, Nakhjovani used a hadith for explaining the above-mentioned verse. Also, in another interpretation of Golshan i-Raz, Nakhjovani makes a conceptual reference to the following hadith from the prophet: “it is not possible for me to count all your attributes and qualities, you yourself should introduce your attributes for us.”

Indeed, the frequent use of Quranic verses and hadiths reveals that he did not just want to demonstrate his power of expression and communication. Rather, he tried to make a cross-reference to the points in Quran verses and hadiths and highlight their significance for people. In fact, these characteristics make Nakhjovani’s description of Golshan i-Raz very distinctive and outstanding.

5. Conclusion
Numerous descriptions and interpretations Golshan i-Raz masnavi is a distinctively succinct, concise, figurative and allegorical literary work. Also, it is replete with mystical points. As a result, numerous descriptions and interpretations have been written for it by several different scholars throughout five centuries. One of the notable descriptions for it was written by Nematollah Nakhjovani who was an analyst and a Hanafi interpreter. In addition to interpreting Golshan i-Raz, he has written many dissertations in the realm of mysticism which indicates his strong underlying mystical knowledge.
By investigating Nakhjovani’s description in this study, we found that he had significant knowledge in the well-known subjects in his own time such as philosophy, wisdom, etc. His description is highly fluent and coherent. Nakhjovani observed all the mystical issues in his description and did not intend to demonstrate his eloquence and expressiveness in writing. Rather, using simple language, Nakhjovani interpreted and clarified Shabestari’s complicated and mysterious ideas. Furthermore, Nakhjovani’s description includes numerous mystical verbal terms and compounds, philosophical theological and astronomical terms and invaluable interpretations of Quran and hadiths. With respect to content, it is regarded as one of the most valuable and useful descriptions and interpretations of Golshan i-Raz. As mentioned in the paper, it should be reiterated that Nakhjovani’s discussions and interpretations were affected by Ibn Arabi’s mysticism. Since the description prose is simple at some parts and highly literary, figurative and attractive at other parts, it can be argued that it is highly diverse.
References