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The Conference of the Birds

The conference of the birds is one of the most important and celebrated works of the Persian poet named Farid ud-Din Attar. The literary works have been composed in the form of poetry which was originally composed in the Persian language but was later translated into a number of other languages. The literary work by Farid ud-Din Attar describes the conference of the birds, as evident from the name of the book, which is held so that the birds can appoint their king, who can rule, as well as guide and unite them. The wisest of all the birds, hoopoe gives them the suggestion that they should embark on a long journey and search for Simorgh, who has the ability to rule them. The book describes the journey of the birds to reach and find the Simorgh, as well as highlight the struggle and hardships they encounter during their quest. The book, the conference of the birds by Farid ud-Din Attar, may have described the quest and struggle of the birds to find the Simorgh and make him their king or ruler, however, it discusses the deeper concepts of finding love, seeking knowledge, becoming selfless and finding the true way which can lead human beings to the god.

The book of poetry discusses the journey of almost a hundred thousand birds to search for Simorgh, under the guidance of hoopoe. The birds include the nightingale, peacock, duck, parrot, hawk, owl and many other birds. All of the birds possess a different quality and symbolize a significant fault as well. For the sake of finding the Simorgh, the birds have to pass through a long journey which consists of seven valleys. The seven valleys are of quest, love, knowledge, detachment, unity, wonderment, and poverty and annihilation. The purpose of this long journey is to purify the soul of the wanderer and bestow him or her with the treasures of knowledge, faith, selflessness and the love for humanity and god as well. The hoopoe tells the birds that the Simorgh was last seen in China on a moonless night and that it is inevitable for them to travel to that place, find him and persuade him to become their ruler. He also tells them that they all need to carry on this journey, in order to reach their new ruler and led their lives under his guidance. During their journey, different birds start making the excuses of not being able to carry on the journey, as they do not want to go through all the struggles and face the hardships and difficulties just to reach a bird to make him their ruler. The hoopoe tells them different tales of the well-known people, who had faced tremendous struggles in their life or who had faced difficult trails put ahead of them by their god, who wanted to test their belief, faith and their willingness to sacrifice for the sake of god and were finally rewarded by him. The hoopoe keeps telling them different stories in order to keep them motivated to carry on their journey and reach their destination. The description of the hoopoe taking the birds on a long journey actually signifies the journey of a Sufi sheikh and his students on the journey of achieving selflessness and becoming closer to God, by passing all of his trails and tests that were placed in their journey (Attar, 145).

One of the most important, as well as longest parables discussed in the book, is that of the Sheikh Sam'an, who spent a major part of his life in Mecca and taught hundreds of the students. He held the most important as well a dignified position in the society, as all the people consulted him for their issues and he was respected by all of the members of his society. He had the ability to read the hearts of the people and making the sick completely healthy and normal. In other words, it can be said that he was the savior of his society and people as he used to guide them during the tough and struggling periods of life in the light of his knowledge and wisdom. However, his respectful status and position were not eternal as he embarked on a journey to Rome, being inspired by one of his dreams. There, he fell in love with a Christian girl and utilized all his efforts and means to win her heart, however, he could not do so. He left his respectful stature, became Christian and did everything which he thought would make the girl accept him, but he failed in all his attempts. Finally, the god turned the heart of the Christian girl in his favor, who accepted his devotion and suffering, however, she did not desire him and considered that she had wronged him by distracting him from his path and finally died being afraid of her wrongdoing and the sheikh got his position back. The allegory in the parable is that the believers have to face the trials of the god, which strengthen their faith in his supremacy. It is also a mean for the believers to earn the blessings of the god by sticking to his path while facing all kinds of struggles and difficulties (Attar, 83).

Each significant player in the parable is representing a specific aspect. The most important payer in it is the sheikh who almost left the path of god, in order to find the worldly love. He signifies the valley of love and knowledge where reason, as well as knowledge, becomes useless in the path of finding love and beloved. The second player which is the Christian girl signifies the valley of detachment where all the desires and wished vanished.

The parable is suggesting that people have to give up on their status and position for the sake of love, however, the greater motive should be the acceptance, and the blessings of the god. The sheikh had to face the hard trial of falling in love with the Christian girl and ten facing her rejection because he had embarked on the journey of Rome following the will of his heart. In order to become a believer, it is quite important to sacrifice the desires of the heart and accept the will of God. The controlling theme is the journey of the sheikh from bewilderment to being the old pious soul after the death of the Christian girl.

The soul’s journey is being blocked from its path to God by the world attractions, and desires which motivate the individual to leave the path of god and follow them. The sheik had encountered a similar situation when he embarked in the journey to Rome. However, he was able to find the path which led him back to god, due to his suffering and most importantly due to the blessing of the god.

The parable is giving the answer in reference to the hoopoe’s advice that the individual or the soul should not get distracted by the worldly attractions and should not sacrifice its purity and wisdom for the sake of the useless and meaningless things. This will help the soul on its journey towards the right path in the way that the soul would not waste its time and energy on the things which carry no purpose or benefit. It will help the soul to stay true to god and stay on its path to seek his blessings.

The conference of the birds by Farid ud-Din Attar sheds light on the journey of the bird across the seven valleys to reach the Simorgh who has the ability to rule them. They become terrified by the struggles of their path and start making the excuses to avoid the journey. The journey of the birds signifies the journey of the Sufi sheikh along with his pupils to seek the blessings of God by strengthening their faith. It is the tale which highlights the sacrifices and struggles, the soul has to face in order to become close to god and develop an unshuttering faith in his supremacy.

Work Cited

Attar, Farid, Farīd al-Dīn ʻAṭṭār, and Farīd al-Dīn ʻAtṭạ̄r. The conference of the birds. Penguin UK, 1984.