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# The Pre-Islamic Poem And Its Significance Among Arabs

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## Abstract:

The pre-Islamic era witnessed a robust poetic movement unparalleled in the eras that followed. Poetry was innate to the Arabs and was rare if someone did not excel in it. Poetry was akin to their soul which was essential for their lives, its significance made it deeply influential. It was esteemed by men, women, thieves, and even the insane. Poets held a high status and played a vital role in building their tribes and making them a unified social unit. They were the protectors of honour, preservers of legacy, and conveyors of news. Pre-Islamic poetry portrayed their eloquence and how they were profoundly affected by it, capturing their aspirations, dreams, and every hue and scene of life. Painting vivid pictures of their environment, heroism, and ethical virtues like generosity, loyalty, courage, and chivalry.

**Keywords:** Pre-Islamic Poetry, Poet, Pre-Islamic Era, Poetic Themes, Poetic Environment.

## Introduction:

The pre-Islamic poem has been the subject of significant studies conducted by Arab and Orientalist researchers working in various fields of Arabic and Islamic studies, including linguistic, historical, intellectual, and cultural disciplines. The main reason behind their meticulous study is the evident interest that the pre-Islamic society had in literature, especially poetry which reached its zenith during that era. Poetry resonated with their identity, as it was intrinsically tied to their lineage, heritage, and history. For this reason, Arabs named their poems much like they named mountains and valleys as if these poems were major landmarks in Arabic literature. Examples include the Mu'allakat, Mudhahhabat, Samut, and Munasafat. Arabs also named poems based on their opening verses, such as "Qifa Nabki" and "Banat Suaad."

## 1. Pre-Islamic Poetry as a Representation of Arabian Life

### A. Religious Life

Pre-Islamic poetry reflected the religious life of Arabs, much of which has been lost. Many aspects connected to idolatry were forgotten and erased by Islam. The Arabs, like other primitive nations, were diverse in their religious beliefs. They believed in deities that served as protectors for their tribes, and each tribe worshipped its specific deity while recognising the authority of other deities from other tribes. Religious peace prevailed in the desert during sacred festivals, where hostilities and wars were suspended.

This poetry illustrates their worship of idols and their devotion to them, their oaths by them and their rituals around them, including divination and sacrifice offerings. "Their idols were numerous, and they worshipped them with unwavering dedication, venerating

them as they did the sacred sanctuary. For instance, no one leaving Mecca would depart without taking a stone from the sanctuary, which they revered and circled as they circled the Kaaba<sup>1</sup>.

Despite their multiplicity of gods, they acknowledged a Creator of the universe. Allah says: **“If you asked them who created the heavens and the earth, they would surely say Allah”** [Quran 31:25]. However, they adopted idols as intermediaries to bring them closer to Allah, as indicated in the verse: **“We only worship them so that they may bring us nearer to Allah in position”**<sup>2</sup> [Quran 39:3]. The oldest idols they worshipped included Manat, Al-Lat, Al-Uzza, and Hubal.

## **B. Social Life**

Historians have stated that: “Most ancient societies were said to consist of three classes: The kings and the princes, the producers and the craftsmen, and the slaves. However, the accounts provided by historians and narrators about pre-Islamic Arabian society mention that it was composed of two classes: The upper class, which included kings and nobles, and the lower class, which comprised slaves, maidservants, shepherds, servants, outcasts, vagabonds, the common people, and the marginalised.”<sup>3</sup> This reflects that no one could change the system prevalent within the tribe and universally accepted.

### **The Upper Class:**

At the top level of the upper class were the kings, described by narrators as selfish tyrannical oppressors. For instance, Hajar ibn Al-Harith Al-Kindi demanded certain tributes from his people; when they refused, he marched against them and captured the leaders of the Banu Asad, killing them with sticks. This incident led to them being named “the slaves of the stick.” Among the captured was Abid ibn Al-Abras<sup>4</sup>. Al-A'sha portrays an image of the kings' oppression and their destruction of the lands, saying: “When he marches toward the lands of a people, death and ruin accompany him.”

### **The Lower Class:**

At the bottom of the classes in pre-Islamic Arabian society was the lower class, primarily consisting of slaves, acquired by Arabs through raids or by purchasing them from neighbouring nations. Slaves became the property of their captors, giving rise to a trade known as Al-Nikhaasa “slave trading.” Among the categories of slaves were:

**Qin:** A slave who worked in a land and was sold with it.

**Shidhadh:** Those of unknown lineage.

**Khal'a:** These were individuals disowned by their fathers, whether legitimate or adopted sons. A man could disown a son who disgraced him, and tribes could do the same. In such cases, a group would take the disowned individual to the Ukad Market and publicly declare the disownment. There were many disowned individuals in pre-Islamic Arabia and they often formed bands of vagabonds who robbed travellers and rebelled against the tribe.

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmad Muhammad Al-Hufi, Arab Life in Pre-Islamic Poetry, Dar Al-Qalam, Beirut, Lebanon, 5th edition, 1972, p. 390.

<sup>2</sup> Surah Az-Zumar

<sup>3</sup> Ahmad Muhammad Al-Hufi, Arab Life in Pre-Islamic Poetry, p. 390.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Qutaybah, Poetry and Poets, Dar Al-Thaqafa, Beirut, Lebanon, Vol. 1, p. 50.

Pre-Islamic poetry not only depicted the social hierarchy but also illustrated family relationships, the status of women within the family and society, marriage, divorce, polygamy, child-rearing, tribal relations during war and peace, manifestations of wealth and luxury, and poverty. It also highlighted the Arabs' indulgence in alcohol and gambling and clearly depicted the rebellion of vagabonds against the stingy wealthy.<sup>5</sup>

### **C. Economic Life**

Some Arabian Peninsula inhabitants engaged in trade, amassing great wealth by leveraging their country's location among active trading nations. They traded their land's local products and transported them to northern regions, along with goods from Africa and India, such as spices, perfumes, and incense, their trade also included ivory and precious stones. Notably, Yemen reached a high level of civilization, influencing the rest of the Arabian Peninsula, with products that include fruits, grains, and dairy. And among the most famous commercial hubs of Hejaz is Mecca as it was the most prominent<sup>6</sup>. The dedication to trade was evident in their biannual trade journeys: a winter journey to Yemen and a summer journey to the Levant, as found in the Qur'an:

“For the covenants of Quraysh, their covenants of the journeys of winter and summer, let them worship the Lord of this House, who has fed them against hunger and secured them against fear.” (Qur'an 106:1-4)<sup>7</sup>

Quraysh gained cultural, intellectual, and civilizational benefits from engaging in trade. They interacted with people of ancient civilizations, such as the Romans, Persians, and Indians, acquiring valuable knowledge from them that significantly shaped their intellect and awareness; such an awareness no nomad tribe has acquired before them. This cultural exchange left a mark on their language and literature.

### **D. Moral Life**

The morals of pre-Islamic Arabs were shaped by their environment. They were nomadic and itinerant people, leading lives of poverty, simplicity, and a lack of luxury. They lived in a harsh environment with scarce resources, which shaped their bodies but not their morals. An Arab once said:

“The desert environment carries the scent of camels; its transportation is arduous, its roads scarce... its sun scorching, and its sands burning.”<sup>8</sup>

Arab life was unstable, and with limited resources, they often carried bows to hunt for food. Their diet was simple, primarily consisting of hunted animals, and their clothing was modest. Despite the dangers of their environment, filled with wild animals, the challenges fostered resilience and endurance. Al-Rafi'i remarks:

“Nature's law disciplined them into this morality; it is the poetry of their ethics.”

The noble principles of life remain eternal, unchanged and unaltered, in a society without formal guarantees or recorded contracts, a man's word was his bond. When an Arab spoke, his word became a binding pledge; failure to honour it would tarnish his reputation and bring disgrace. This belief prompted a sage to advise caution in actions and steadiness

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<sup>5</sup> Ahmad Muhammad Al-Hufi, Arab Life in Pre-Islamic Poetry, p. 47.

<sup>6</sup> Hussein Al-Hajj Hassan, The Civilization of the Arabs in the Pre-Islamic Era, The University Institution for Studies, 3rd edition, 1997, p. 192.

<sup>7</sup> Surah Quraysh

<sup>8</sup> Abda Shamali, Studies in the History of Arabic-Islamic Philosophy: Its Works and Figures, Dar Beirut, Lebanon, 4th edition, 1965, p. 92.

in speech, saying:

“When I speak, my word owns me; when I remain silent, I own it.”

Cultivated over generations, freedom was an intrinsic value for the Arabs. Living in vast deserts without end on the horizon, they cherished their independence, likening themselves to free birds and strong winds. Strong at heart and resilient as stone, with pure emotions as bright as the sun, fearless of death, a life worth living according to them was a life of heroics, they did not accept servitude and were full of pride, they rejected subjugation and would only obey a leader from their own tribe.<sup>9</sup> An Arab preferred death over a dishonourable life. Antara expressed this reflection of his own and his society's ethos.<sup>10</sup>:

“Do not give me the water of life with humiliation; instead, give me the cup of bitter colocynth with dignity.”

For the Arab freedom is boundless and knows no limits, they were so excessive in their love for it that they overstepped the true meaning of freedom and its boundaries, perceiving it as complete liberation from all restraints. Amro ibn Barrakah encapsulated the motto of every Arab in his verse:

“When the steady and resilient heart; noble pride lives within, oppression avoids you.”<sup>11</sup>

It is unjust to call pre-Islamic poetry a portrayal of all Arabs as generous and courageous, as Taha Hussein pointed out, pre-Islamic poetry depicts a wide spectrum of traits, including generosity, stinginess, bravery, cowardice, acknowledgement of fleeing in battle, and even admiration of the enemy's valour. It also reflects wisdom, impulsiveness, chastity, and debauchery. Furthermore, it portrays habits and beliefs, discussing topics such as wine, gambling, jinn, poets' demons, omens, divination, and other themes.

## 2. Themes and Purposes

It has been said, “Poetry is the Arabs' archive,” as it serves as a reflection of the environment in which its owners lived. It mirrors various psychological aspects and the moral ideals of the Arabs. As a consequence, the themes and forms of pre-Islamic poetry were diverse. Al-Rafi'i notes:

“The first to classify these forms and distinguish poetry by them was Abu Tammam, who restructured the 'Hamasa' book into ten sections: bravery, elegies, ethics, love poetry, satire, commendations, descriptions, journeys, humour, and understanding of women. Later, Abdulaziz bin Abi Al-Asbag expanded them to eighteen categories thus including love, descriptions, pride, praise, satire, reproaches, excuses, ethics, wine poetry, gift poetry, elegies, good news, congratulations, warnings, encouragement, humour, and a specific category for questions and answers.”<sup>12</sup>

### 1. Satire

This genre was not very famous in pre-Islamic poetry compared to pride or love poetry, but its impact on individuals was significant, leaving deep emotional wounds. It relied on

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<sup>9</sup> Mustafa Sadiq Al-Rafi'i, *The History of Arabic Literature*, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st edition, 2000, p. 32.

<sup>10</sup> Muhammad Ashraf Abdul Aziz, *The Diwan of Antara Ibn Shaddad*, Dar Maktabat Al-Ma'arif, 2nd edition, 2016, p. 144.

<sup>11</sup> Hussein Al-Hajj Hassan, *The Civilization of the Arabs in the Pre-Islamic Era*, p. 89.

<sup>12</sup> Mustafa Sadiq Al-Rafi'i, *The History of Arabic Literature*, p. 49.

humiliating the satirised individual, stripping them of the virtues and morals their community valued. Thus, pride, praise, and satire collectively represent a spectrum of virtues and their opposites. For example, generosity was a virtue, while stinginess was its opposite; bravery contrasted with cowardice, and so on. An example of what Arabs condemned was fleeing during battles. Al-Harith ibn Hisham fled during the Battle of Badr, abandoning his brother Abu Jahl, so Hassaan ibn Thabit reproached him for it<sup>13</sup>:

“If you have lied about what you told me, then you saved like Al-Harith ibn Hisham.

He abandoned his loved ones and did not defend them, escaping with just his horse's reins and bridle.”

Satire also targeted social relationships and psychological flaws, such as stinginess, attacking neighbours, baseness, betrayal, and neglecting honourable deeds. Ibn Bassam mentioned in Al-Dhakheera that Alkama ibn Ulaatha when he heard Al-Asha's verse:

“You sleep with full stomachs, while your neighbours go hungry, lying in agony.”

He wept and asked, “Do we do this to our neighbours?”<sup>14</sup>

In Arab satire, there were two types: individual and collective, the first targeted a person, while the latter aimed at entire tribes, a poet might combine both forms. Satire in the pre-Islamic era often followed a serious tone, avoiding vulgarity and direct insults. Instead of that, it employed sarcasm, allusion, and sharp, indirect jabs.

## 2. Praise

People in the pre-Islamic era upheld high ideals and moral standards they had agreed upon and inherited from their ancestors. Praise poetry emerged as a testament to these virtues, such as sound judgment, or other commendable qualities that surfaced in their time, such as noble actions, the kindness shown, or the release of a captive. Such acts warranted acknowledgement and gratitude. Thus, praise can be defined as:

“Praise is directed at a person of significance for commendable moral virtues, such as sound judgment, chastity, justice, and courage—qualities deeply rooted in the individual and their people, enumerating their ethical merits. Praise poetry became widespread when poetry became commercialised, with poets adopting it as a profession. Among the earliest praise poets were Zuhair, Al-Nabigha, and Al-Asha.”<sup>15</sup>

Praise often served as a poetic record, illustrating various aspects of the lives of prominent figures, whether kings, leaders, or noble figures. Pre-Islamic poets followed two paths or both:

1. **Professional and Commercial Praise:** Often frequenting royal courts and the assemblies of nobles, this involved poets using their skills to gain favours, though it can border over-exaggeration and seeking financial gain. Pre. Al-Nabigha al-Dhubyani pioneered this approach, using professional praise and dedicating his

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<sup>13</sup> Ahmad Muhammad Al-Hufi, Arab Life in Pre-Islamic Poetry, p. 343.

<sup>14</sup> Mustafa Sadiq Al-Rafi'i, The History of Arabic Literature, Vol. 3, p. 56.

<sup>15</sup> Ahmad Al-Hashimi, Jewels of Literature, Dar Al-Fikr for Printing, Publishing, and Distribution, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st edition, 2010, Vols. 1 & 2, p. 201.

poetry to kings like Al-Nu'man ibn Al-Mundhir. Al-Nabigha praised the Ghassanids, highlighting their virtues, religion, and luxuries, as in his verse<sup>16</sup>:

“They possess a nobility granted by God to none other than them, with generosity and wisdom unparalleled.”

Al-Asha followed in the footsteps of Al-Nabigha in praise poetry, but in fact, was excessive in seeking patronage and financial gain. He would visit the kings of Al-Hirah and praise Al-Aswad ibn Al-Mundhir, the brother of Al-Nu'man. In one of his poems (Why Does the Elder Weep Over the Ruins?) he says:

“You are better than a thousand upon thousands of men; When men's faces are cast down crying.”<sup>17</sup>

Among the poets known for seeking patronage were Hassan ibn Thabit, Al-Musayyab ibn 'Alas, and Al-Munakhil Al-Yashkari.

2. **Sincere and Emotional Praise:** This type stems from deep love and genuine emotion. It was exemplified by Zuhair ibn Abi Salma, who dedicated his poetry to all who promote reconciliation. He praised figures like Haramm ibn Sinan and Al-Harith ibn Awf for ending the long-standing war between the tribes of Abs and Dhabyan, as seen in his verse:

“He is the generous one who bestows without hesitation; and bears burdens even when asked for the impossible.”<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Elegy (Al-Ritha):

Elegy and praise share a common feature of extolling and elevating an individual's status. However, elegy celebrates the deceased and their virtues, while praise honours the living, portraying their deeds and qualities. Elegy is a poetic art with fixed goals and meanings, often expressing profound emotional reactions containing grief and sorrow. This is especially evident when a family or tribe loses a cherished individual, plunging them into mourning. The poetic sentiment stirs to express shared sorrow and the glory whose foundation has crumbled, often accompanied by the enumeration of the deceased's virtues and weeping for their loss; offering consolation while urging patience, acceptance, and submission to fate.

In pre-Islamic poetry, elegy commonly focuses on those who die a natural death or are killed in events other than major wars. They do not mourn those killed in wars because they went out only to die; thus, if they weep for them, it becomes a form of satire. Amr ibn Kulthum said<sup>19</sup>:

“By God, our women do not wail over the dead, nor do they raise their voices in mourning for those slain in battle.”

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<sup>16</sup> Shawqi Daif, *The History of Arabic Literature: The Pre-Islamic Era*, Vol. 1, pp. (284, 285).

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Qutaybah, *Poetry and Poets*, Dar Al-Thaqafa, Beirut, Lebanon, Vols. 1 & 2, 2007, p. 180.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn Qutaybah, *Poetry and Poets*, Dar Al-Thaqafa, Beirut, Lebanon, Vols. 1 & 2, 2007, p. 180.

<sup>19</sup> Shawqi Daif, *The History of Arabic Literature: The Pre-Islamic Era*, Vol. 1, p. 72.

Elegy is for those who die a natural death or are killed outside the context of historical wars, such as raids and the like. In such cases, they enumerate the virtues of the deceased and exaggerate the tragedy, as if this death is unnatural for someone worthy of living.<sup>20</sup>

Elegy for these poets often cantered on relatives, as seen in Al-Muhalhil's lament for his brother Kulayb, Al-Khansa's elegy for her brothers Sakhr and Mu'awiya, and Labid's for his brother Arbad, also it can be dedicated to other prominent figures, such as Aws ibn Hajar's elegy for Fadala Al-Asadi, as it is regarded as one of the finest examples of pre-Islamic elegy. Al-Asma'i commented, "I have not heard an elegy better than":  
"O soul, restrain your grief; what you fear has come to pass."<sup>21</sup>

If the subject of the elegy was of high status, poets sought exaggeration often involving nature in their expression of the calamity. Notable elegy poets included Al-Muhalhil ibn Rabi'ah, Durayd ibn Al-Sammah, Al-A'sha of Banu Bahilah, and Labid. Women, too, were distinguished in this art, with poets like Al-Khansa and Jalilah the wife of Kulayb.

Their elegies frequently employed specific phrases, such as the prayerful "May you not be far" or "May you not vanish." Also, prayers for rain to bless the grave often invoked phrases like "May rainwater grace your grave" or "May your thirst be relinquished by rain" to ensure the land surrounding the grave remained lush and fertile.

#### **4. Love Poetry (Al-Ghazal):**

Love poetry occupies the most significant portion of pre-Islamic poetry, as it resonates deeply with human emotions and connects closely to the human soul. This is due to the profound influence of women on men's lives, stirring their feelings and accompanying them through their journeys. Critics and scholars have identified four related terms often used in discussions of love poetry: Ghazal(Love poetry), Taghazzul(Flirtation), Nasib(Romantic prelude), and Tashbib(Amorous description). Some try to seek to distinguish between Nasib and Ghazal. The difference is that Ghazal refers to the emotions one experiences in longing for women, which are then poetically expressed as Nasib. In essence, Nasib is the mention of Ghazal, while Ghazal itself represents the feeling. It is said that Ghazal is, in fact, the indulgence and infatuation with the affection of women.<sup>22</sup>

One of the most prominent features of Ghazal among the pre-Islamic poets is the attachment to women, the pursuit of their affection, and the description of their physical charms. The leading poet in this regard is Imru al-Qais, spending his youth indulging in pleasure and drinking. A result of reading love poetry from this period reveals a set of standards for evaluating beauty and physical charm. Shawqi Daif explains, "They describe women in detail, describing the body and leaving almost nothing untouched—forehead, cheeks, neck, chest, eyes, mouth, saliva, wrists, legs, breasts, hair, they also describe her clothes, accessories, jewellery, perfumes, modesty, and chastity"<sup>23</sup>

The poet may turn in his Ghazal to singing the praises of a woman's virtues, especially when reflecting first before the main goal. As for poetry of passion between lovers, it is widespread Ghazal is depicted as a hardship one endures due to the pangs of love. Most of those who followed this approach were known for their chastity, and their Ghazal can be considered the early foundation of the 'Udhri Ghazal (chaste love poetry) that became

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<sup>20</sup> Ahmad Muhammad Al-Hufi, Arab Life in Pre-Islamic Poetry, p. 337.

<sup>21</sup> Ibn Qutaybah, Poetry and Poets, Vols. 1 & 2, p. 135.

<sup>22</sup> Mustafa Sadiq Al-Rafi'i, The History of Arabic Literature, Vol. 3, p. 76.

<sup>23</sup> Shawqi Daif, The History of Arabic Literature: The Pre-Islamic Era, Vol. 1, p. 212.

well-known during the Umayyad era. Each of these poets became associated with the woman he loved and became famous for, such as Antara who loved Abla, Al-Mukhabbal Al-Sa'di and Maylaa, and Abdullah ibn Al-'Ajlan, one of the famous Arab lovers who died of love, who loved Hind, and about whom he said:

"I became like a madman under his weapon's blade, turning between his palms a bow and arrows"

He prolonged his cry and then collapsed dying of love.<sup>24</sup>

### 5. Pride (Al-Fakhr):

It is a person's praise of his qualities and those of his people, speaking of their noble deeds, virtues, noble lineage, large tribe, high status, and renowned bravery<sup>25</sup>. This poetry genre is closely related to many themes of praise poetry, it deals with the same meanings as in praise poetry. A part of the reason is that life in the pre-Islamic era was characterised by constantly facing dangers, competing for water and resources, celebrating heroism, glorifying victories, boasting about numbers and strength, engaging in combat with peers, and maintaining honour and protecting neighbours. These factors sparked the creativity of the poets and provided them with reasons to be prideful. Their tongues were fluent in poetry filled with strong emotion, in which historical facts were adorned with imagination and exaggeration. This pride would sometimes be tribal, driven by an overwhelming enthusiasm, especially in moments of attack and retreat, seeking revenge, tightening the noose on enemies, and relishing death in war. Tribal pride poetry often carries strong bursts of fervour, a good example of this passionate tribal pride is the Mu'allaka of Amr ibn Kulthum, in which he recorded his tribe's victories and the courage, dignity, and pride of its members. This one Mu'allaka made him famous and stood as his only significant work, representing his abundant poetry and lofty pride.

"The tribes of Maad knew that when we established camps on their plains, We are the ones who feed when able, and destroy when tested."<sup>26</sup>

This exuberant enthusiasm does not prevent the poet from being fair to his enemies, acknowledging their strength and courage. This sense of justice in pre-Islamic poetry was known as **Al-Munṣifat** (fair depictions), with notable poets such as Al-Abbas ibn Mirdas, Awf ibn Al-Ahwas, and Khadash ibn Zuhayr, who said:

"We wrestled the mighty warriors, and they wrestled with us, as fierce as tigers clashing with lions we wrestled.

I have not seen the likes of them vanquished and diminished, nor those who abandoned us, honourable and noble."<sup>27</sup>

At other times, pride becomes personal, stemming from souls that aspire to dignity, glory, and noble values. This form of pride is evident among a group of virtuous and chivalrous poets, such as Antarah, Hatim al-Ta'i, and the Ṣu'luuk poets like al-Shanfara and Ta'abbata Sharran. Poets here delight in speaking of themselves, their traits, and their virtues, particularly generosity and valour. Examples of such personal pride are found in the works of Tarfah, Labid, and Antarah, whose odes are replete with many illustrations of this individualistic pride.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibn Qutaybah, Poetry and Poets, Vols. 1 & 2, p. 604.

<sup>25</sup> Ahmad Al-Hashimi, Vols. 1 & 2, p. 201.

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Qutaybah, Poetry and Poets, Vols. 1 & 2, p. 604.

<sup>27</sup> Ahmad Muhammad Al-Hufi, Arab Life in Pre-Islamic Poetry, p. 340.



## 6. Description (Wasf)

It predominates in all genres of poetry as it is a vast domain that encompasses everything that is perceived by the senses, from natural phenomena to living and inanimate objects. Poets in the pre-Islamic, who settled and travelled the deserts, became familiar with the harsh environment and what it consisted of desolate wilderness, mountains, valleys, and animals. These poets often described their journeys, narrating their arduous travels on camels back in exhaustive detail, as exemplified by Tarfah in his celebrated ode. They compared camels to palaces, their legs to columns, it was also compared to ships, bridges, and even mountains. They compare it to many animals, such as the ostrich, the bull, and the zebras<sup>28</sup>, to the extent that camels especially the female came to dominate a significant portion of their long odes.

The horse was the second most mentioned in poetry, a companion in both hunting and war, enduring fatigue and hardship with them. The Arabs cherished their purebred horses, giving them unique names and preserving their lineage. Each poet had a distinct way of describing his horse, as Imruu Al-Qays, praised his horse in these famous lines.<sup>29</sup>:

Boldly advancing, retreating, charging together, like a boulder hurled by a torrent from above.

Its flanks are like those of a gazelle, its legs like those of an ostrich, its body sleek and agile like a wolf in motion.

Others spoke about horses in their poetry such as Antarah describing them in battle, Ṭufayl Al-Ghanawi, known for his remarkable descriptions of horses, earning him the title of **Al-Muhabbar** (the embellisher) in pre-Islamic times. As Abd Al-Malik ibn Marwan said:

"Stingy, when it is said, "Ride," he does not say to them, Fools fearing death—where shall we go?"<sup>30</sup>

Poets didn't stop at camels and horses, they also described other animals in their environment, such as bulls, wild cows, cats, roosters, snakes, wolves, ostriches, and ravens. These descriptions were woven into their lengthy odes, the opening verses, however, were dominated by descriptions of ruins and encampments, as seen in odes and other pieces.

Pre-Islamic poets also described natural phenomena around them, such as the night, clouds, wine and its gatherings, war and weapons. These detailed depictions reflect their keen observation and their ability to describe their surroundings with simplicity, beauty, and honesty.

## 7. Wisdom

Wisdom has been a prominent feature of pre-Islamic poetry, found in the works of early poets like Imru Al-Qays and Ubayd ibn Al-Abras. Their wisdom is drawn from their environment, shaped by experiences of war and peace, ethics, and traditions. These insights reflect the purity of their instincts, the richness of their experiences, and their ability to derive lessons from events. Their wisdom also holds historical, social, and moral significance, varying across time and individuals, as it reflects their views on life, people,

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<sup>28</sup> Shawqi Daif, *The History of Arabic Literature: The Pre-Islamic Era*, Vol. 1, pp. 214 & 215.

<sup>29</sup> Ibn Qutaybah, *Poetry and Poets*, Vols. 1 & 2, p. 54.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn Qutaybah, *Poetry and Poets*, Vols. 1 & 2, p. 54.

and the changes of time. This wisdom is often interspersed throughout their odes or presented in their conclusions. Shawqi Dayf noted that the foundation of this wisdom lies in their deep-seated ethics shaped by habit and a natural inclination for self-reflection. This formed the basis of their natural religion, no doubt they directed their wisdom in poetry towards matters related to ethics and politics, without concerning themselves with advocating any particular religious doctrine, nor did they give weight to the outward aspects of these religions in their poetry.<sup>31</sup>

The Mu‘allaqat are a prime example of poems full of wisdom touching upon many themes. Such as Zuhayr’s ode, where he addresses themes of war and peace, life and death. While Ṭarafah’s wisdom reflects his hedonistic personality, seeking to enjoy life before encountering death unexpectedly.

Wisdom also appears in the poetry of other poets like Labid, Ubayd ibn al-Abras, and Aws ibn Ḥajar and others. Another example is Umayya ibn Abi al-Ṣalt who stood out for his extensive use of wisdom relying on religious knowledge and ancient nations. His verses combined personal experience and cultural insights, encompassing religion, along with a speech on the transience of life and the dominance of fate over people.

### **Conclusion:**

The Arabic poem, with its diverse themes and purposes, will always remain an honest reflection of life in the pre-Islamic era. And that the environment played a pivotal role in inspiring many of these varied topics. Perhaps what inspired the poet's exquisite expression and precise descriptions was the desert itself, it played a significant role in clearing the poet’s mind and planting hope despite its harsh nature. As a result, the poems emerged as refined works of considerable artistic value, earning them a prestigious status and the admiration of audiences across all eras and times.

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<sup>31</sup> Shawqi Daif, *The History of Arabic Literature: The Pre-Islamic Era*, p. 87.