The first Stages of Development of Pre-Islamic Poetry and its Main Focus

Karima Boutaren

University center of Barika(Algeria), faculty of literatures and languages, Arabic Language and Literature Department ,karima.boutaren@cu-barika.dz

Abstract:

The hypothesis driving this study aimed to challenge the prevailing approach that marginalized pre-Islamic poetry from the temporal axis and overlooked its influence on human consciousness. Thus, the study sought to trace the evolution of pre-Islamic poetry across a significant two-hundred-year period, shedding light on its central themes. Findings indicate that pre-Islamic poetry underwent transformations reflecting the journey from existence to death, and back to existence, intertwining themes of life and social responsibility towards others.

Keywords: pre-Islamic poetry, stillness, movement, existence, self-pity.

1. Introduction

Numerous studies have established a connection between pre-Islamic poetry and the natural environment of that time, considering it as a mirror thereof. However, this study seeks to underscore the notion that pre-Islamic poets, along with their poetry, have a purpose beyond just conveying the stagnant and intricate aspects of reality.

The poet's contemplation of his own existence and the existence of others around him was prompted by the historical need of the era, which involved contact with various cultures. The advancement in consciousness played a key role in the evolution of poetry, transforming it from simple verses to comprehensive compositions that encompassed the works of subsequent poets who were influenced by the past. Therefore, pre-Islamic poetry transitioned from a state of stagnation in its early stages to a dynamic expression of

Corresponding Author: Karima boutaren : karima.boutaren@cu-barika.dz

consciousness. The concept of the self and the other is a topic of interest in contemporary discourse.

This study originated from the notion of challenging the prevailing method adopted by earlier studies, which tended to distance pre-Islamic poetry from the temporal axis and the transformative effects it has on human awareness. Hence, the objective of this study is to observe the advancements that transpired in the realm of pre-Islamic poetry over a span of two centuries, a substantial duration. In the context of the pre-Islamic era, this study aims to identify and analyze its fundamental focal points. This is achieved by employing a suitable descriptive methodology to address this issue.

2. The juxtaposition of stillness and movement during the pre-Islamic Era

In the pre-Islamic Era, silence prevailed before yielding to movement and freedom under evolving circumstances. This passage explores two key elements contributing to this transition:

2.1. The Tribal System and Sedentarism in the Pre-Islamic Era

The tranquility characterizing the pre-Islamic era stemmed from the adoption of a nomadic lifestyle, well-suited to the Arabian Peninsula's environmental conditions. This lifestyle exhibited a static nature, persisting with minimal variation over time and functioning as a self-contained system highly susceptible to external environmental factors. Economically, pastoralism and agriculture were primary, with occasional reliance on climatic conditions. Individuals felt deeply connected to their land, forming the basis of a tribal system dominated by kinship ties. This system fostered collective affection, communal property ownership, and the imperative to unite during discord (Al-Jihad, 2001, p.72).

The social structure governing individuals within the tribe, known as the vengeance system in social science, is characterized by the isolation of the Bedouin community and significant interdependence among familial members. Any assault on the group or its members is perceived as an attack on the collective identity, principles, and sustenance of the organization, often leading to acts of homicide and retribution (Al-Jihad, 2001, p.72).

Revenge holds paramount importance in pre-Islamic societies, sometimes even attaining religious sanctity. Individuals would refrain from indulging in pleasures until they had sought retribution, leading to swift mobilization of the entire tribal community in response to grievances. This attribute, seen as essential for masculinity and heroism, has been glorified in poetic verses, as evidenced by Taabt Shara's statement:

قليلُ غرار النـــــــوم، أكبرُ همه   دمُ الثأرِ، أو يلقـــــى كمَا مسفَعا (Sakkal, 1995, pp. 97–98).

The Bedouin individual emerged within this societal structure, deeply influenced by the collective awareness that governed it. Their consciousness was consumed with safeguarding the abstract collective identity, intricately tied to the system of retribution. The pre-Islamic society followed a cyclical trajectory, hindering historical development (Al-Jihad, 2001, p. 72). The breakdown in collective awareness, depicted in early pre-Islamic poetry, compromised psychological equilibrium upon detachment from the collective identity, leading to significant influence and inevitable demise upon detachment from the tribe (Suef, pp. 124-125).

2.2 The pre-Islamic Arabs' openness to Yemeni civilization

Following the migration of Yemenis to the Arabian Peninsula during the second century A.D., a series of additional conflicts emerged alongside the pre-existing retaliatory conflicts prevalent in the region. Nevertheless, this recent battle did not solely revolve around disputes concerning land and water resources. Instead, it manifested as a clash between two distinct spiritual entities characterized by divergent sets of principles and beliefs.

The distinction between a nomadic individual and a civilized individual lies in the latter's capacity for introspection and intellectual freedom. The civilized individual engages in contemplation regarding their own existence, the society they inhabit, and the knowledge they possess. Through this process, they gradually develop an understanding of their historical context, with a focus on achieving ecological independence. The Yemeni civilization is characterized by its foundation on the concept of individual organized consciousness and the pursuit of freedom. In contrast to early human societies, characterized by their limited ability to transcend the constraints imposed by ecological conditions (Al-Jihad, 2001, p. 73).

This underscores the influence that the natural environment has on the emotional state of individuals and, consequently, its impact on their cognitive growth (Plekhanov, p.79). It is important to acknowledge that Plekhanov, as a writer, holds a specific perspective regarding the interplay between thinking and the natural environment.

The Yemeni civilization has demonstrated a notable commitment to preserving a significant cultural aspect within the

Arabian Peninsula, namely the royal system of governance, despite its efforts to adapt to the changing environment. This stands in contrast to the prevailing retaliatory style of rule observed throughout the broader Arabian Peninsula. The advent of pre-Islamic civilization prompted individuals to contemplate their marginalized existence within the context of the retaliatory tribal system (Al-Jihad, 2001, p. 72).

2.3. Language and consciousness of the pre-Islamic Arab

The issues at hand primarily manifested within the realm of language, serving as a medium for social interactions and cultural expression. As a result, a linguistic system emerged, amalgamating dialects from both southern and northern regions, symbolizing the convergence of Yemeni cultural perspectives with those of the Arabian Peninsula.

This novel historical context spurred a transformation in the cognitive state of individuals in pre-Islamic society, where language became the sole means of self-expression. Caught between adherence to the tribal framework and a yearning for emancipation and personal growth influenced by the ideas of civilization, individuals utilized language, particularly metaphor, to navigate this conflict (Al-Jihad, 2001, p. 75-76).

Metaphor, according to Youssef Murad, facilitates the transfer of language and social integration, transitioning language from a utilitarian role limited to tribal awareness to a medium of individual self-expression and dynamism (Suef, p. 129). However, repeated use of metaphor leads to its materialization and necessitates the

establishment of new metaphorical frameworks to disrupt fixed societal language and reconstruct it, mobilizing individual consciousness for collective advancement (Al-Jihad, 2001, p. 77).

This linguistic style was prominent in poetry, employing vivid imagery to depict states of being and the world. Poetry's abstract nature limits its effectiveness in addressing reasoning aspects of the human psyche, yet it remains a powerful tool for achieving comprehension and communicating truth through imagination (Lakhdar, 1983-1984, p. 29).

Muslim philosophers are considered fundamental to poetic expression, with imagination's role crucial in both the creative process and the reception phase. Imagination's logical methodology in communicating knowledge and influencing listeners further emphasizes its importance (Lakhdar, 1983-1984, p.20). The association between the creative poet and the individual serves to transmit perspectives on the nature of being, shaping both the poet's surroundings and their own identity.

3. Stages of development of pre-Islamic poetry

Pre-Islamic poetry, from the above, has transformed itself from the existence of death to the new existence of life. Its main techniques can be elaborated as follow:

3. 1. The stage of existence of death

During this period, Arabic poetry had a predominant theme of self-pity and introspection, centering around the Arab identity. This poetic expression was deeply rooted in the belief of fatalism, including notions of mortality and eternity, while also reflecting the

socio-economic hardships and tumultuous surroundings prevalent during that time.

Therefore, the temporal rhythm exhibited variations between periods of desolation and abundance, encompassing the presence and absence of the cherished individual, as well as the contrasting seasons of summer and winter, making the pre-Islamic life always raging between the two poles of opposition, and the feeling of time and its modernity always placed the pre-Islamic person as a prey, and the traps of nothingness surrounded him from all sides, (Sakkal, 1995, p. 135), which limited the aspirations of the Arab and the fulfillment of his self.

One of the notable aspects pertains to the realm of poetry, wherein certain poets have garnered recognition from scholars for their historical precedence in the field. Notably, the poet Dawid bin Zaid bin Nahd has been acknowledged for his contributions to the poetic tradition, as affirmed by scholarly consensus, he said:

<div dir="rtl">

اليــوم يبنى لدويد بيته   لو كان للدهـر بلى ابليته

أو كان قرني واحدا كفيته   يا رب هَب صـالح حويته.

</div>

He also said:

<div dir="rtl">

ألقى علي الدهر رجــلا ويدا   والدّهـر ما أصلح يوما أفسدا.

</div>

The aforementioned verses illustrate the act of surrendering to the concept of eternity and the inevitability of death. Humans are inherently compelled to surrender to these forces. These books provide insights into the ontological nature of self within the world, highlighting their inherent state of being as static entities influenced by their surrounding circumstances and ultimately susceptible to

mortality and extinction. These individuals experienced an existential state of being that spanned from their biological inception at birth to their eventual demise at death, therefore leading to the absence of existence. There is another somebody who is awaiting her presence, (Al-Jihad, 2001, pp. 90-95).

Regarding this matter, Al-Mustaghar Ibn Rabia Ibn Kaab Ibn Saad Ibn Zaid Manat Ibn Tamim asserts that he is a poet of antiquity who had a lengthy lifespan. He expressed his thoughts over the life he had experienced and expressed a sense of weariness towards it.

<div dir="rtl">

ولقد سئمت من الحياة وطولها   وازددت من عدد السنين مئينا

مئة أتت من بعدها مئتان لي   وازددت من عدد الشهور سنينا هل ما بقا إلا   كـما قد

فاتنا   يوم يكر وليلةٌ تحـدونا

</div>

(Al-jumahi, p.33)

Time, "the enemy of the pre-Islamic era, steals his life from him and leaves him with nothing but hope, broken like a machine, chasing him among the dunes of the desert and its horrors" (Sakkal, 1995, p. 134).

Obedience and submission to eternity and the inevitability of death shaped the existence of this pre-Islamic man and made him a static existence.

3. 2. Existential stage of life

Numerous early pre-Islamic lyrical verses have conveyed the concept of embracing mortality, although it is worth noting that the prevailing perception of this notion, as depicted by Orientalist and Arab studies, may not accurately reflect its inherently negative connotations. The concept of death's presence is accompanied by a distinct sense of positive, as evidenced by the rise of a novel notion

embraced by the early pre-Islamic poets: the notion of life's existence. The human self has the capacity to create itself within a dynamic life that is open to continuous development, as it grapples with the concept of mortality and becomes conscious of its own existence. The notion of reality for an individual is contingent upon their own creation through the process of engaging in action and experiencing sorrow. (Al-Jihad, 2001, p. 96).

As long as an individual continues to traverse the mortal realm and acquiesces to the inexorable forces of eternity, mortality, and obliteration, their contemplation of mortality leads them to recognize the inherent futility and purposelessness of their existence. Thus, they will exercise agency in determining their preferred mode of being. No one possesses the inherent entitlement to dictate the manner in which their existence takes shape.

Consequently, they strive for complete autonomy, liberated from external influences, and exhibit a resolute commitment to explore unexplored avenues for personal growth and actualization. The poet's realization of the new capacity for existence is limited to moments of impending mortality, so restricting the opportunity for full comprehension and actualization of this newfound existential possibility. The individual discovered that poetry was the sole means by which he could manifest his newfound consciousness of his own existence and identity, as his subjective expression included transforming his self into an object of awareness for others, (Al-Jihad, 2001, p. 96), " The process of reception involves the blending of two consciousnesses: the consciousness of the recipient and the

consciousness of the poet as expressed in her poetry. This implies that the recipient's consciousness will expand as they assume the role of a poetic observer, leading them to explore and confront their mortality, and strive to maximize their capacity to exist in the face of this inevitable reality″, (Al-Jihad, 2001, p. 97).

This is what the early poets tried to embody when they separated from reality and its chaos, so he extracts himself from the floundering being in annihilation and places it on a high place to supervise everything and observe the movement of destiny to which this life rushes, searching for possible outlets achieved by the action that confronts the darkness as salvation from the death that devoured others. Those who submitted to him, including the words of the poet: Judhaimah bin Al-Abrash:

<div dir="rtl">

ربما أوفَيْـت في علَمٍ   ترفعن ثوبي شَمـالاتَ.

في فتوٍ أنا رابئُـهم   من كلاَلٍ غزوة مـاتوا.

ليت شعري ما أماتَهم ؟   نحن أدْلجنا وهـم بـاتُوا.

</div>

The present conceptualization serves as a conduit for the reemergence of the societal structure that was prevalent prior to the advent of Islam, encapsulating a fresh perspective on affliction, anguish, and aspiration for an equitable, liberated, and spiritually-oriented global community. This is achieved through the deliberate engagement with the disconcerting actuality of mortality, which impelled them towards the realm of potentiality and ultimately civilization, (Al-Jihad, 2001, pp. 91-97).

In the Encyclopedia of Arabic Poetry, Elia Al-Hawi and Al-Safadi highlight the notion that " pre-Islamic poets were required to draw upon a fundamental creative tension in order to evoke their emotions. This tension encompassed enthusiasm for qualities such as pride, courage, generosity, originality, amusement, enjoyment, and indulgence in sexual and alcoholic pleasures. The absence of proof is evident in the aforementioned enthusiasm. Initially, I have a sentiment that opposes the passage of time, the aridness of the desert, the state of infertility, ailments, and the pangs of hunger ", (Al-Hawi, Safadi, 1974, p. 30)

The aforementioned paradigm shift in their perception of reality is regarded as a transition towards an alternative framework for their societal structure, wherein the individual assumes an active role due to the voluntary nature of artistic expression, which is intrinsically linked to the production of cultural artifacts that contribute to the collective heritage of the community. The aforementioned outcome arose from the conceptualization of mortality, wherein the subsequent impact was then inverted, leading to the emergence of vitality. The individual assumes the duty of existence for both himself and others, as he imparts his unique presence inside the poetry text. He urges people to embrace a multitude of potentialities and to reject notions of stagnation and determinism, (Al-Jihad, 2001, p. 99).

The phenomenon of death, which gave rise to the phenomenon of life, was attributed to feelings of self-pity, a prominent theme in early pre-Islamic poetry, the initial pre-Islamic poetry compositions.

4. Conclusion

Based on the information presented above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

The pre-Islamic period was characterized by a prevailing sense of tranquility, where individuals' consciousness accepted the eternal nature of existence and mortality. Additionally, the individual consciousness of tribe members was absorbed into the collective consciousness of the tribe itself.

Individuals living during the pre-Islamic era faced the challenge of their own identity being overshadowed by the collective identity of their tribe, often referred to as the "we." This phenomenon intensified following interactions between pre-Islamic societies and the invading Yemeni civilization, which entered the Arabian Peninsula.

The battle between these civilizations manifested primarily in the realm of language, leading to the development of a shared linguistic system. Early pre-Islamic poetry focused on themes of self-pity and contemplation of mortality, with poets expressing their diminished self-awareness within the tribal system while grappling with the realities of eternity and death.

Early poets sought to liberate themselves from the dominion of eternity and mortality by expressing their emerging consciousness through their works, aiming to impart this awareness to their audience and transform their self-perception. These poems exhibited a dual awareness, reflecting both the poet's introspection and their acknowledgment of the audience's self-knowledge.

The concept of mortality has given rise to the concept of vitality, endowing the human essence with the capacity for a fluid existence receptive to continuous transformation. This allows individuals to manifest their reality through their actions and creations, thereby transcending the dichotomy of mortality and immortality.

References

Books:

-Al-Jihad, H. (2001). *Philosophy of pre-Islamic poetry, an analytical study in the movement of Arab poetic awareness*. Syria: Dar Al-Mada for Culture and Publishing.

- Al-Hawi, H. Safadi, M. (1974). *Encyclopedia of Arabic Poetry*, Part 1, Beirut: Khayyat Company.

- Al-Jumahi, M. *Layers of stallions of poets*, the first book, Jeddah: Dar Al-Madani, Jeddah.

-lakhdar, J. (1983-1984*). Poetry Theory of Muslim Philosophers*, University of Algiers, Algeria.

-Suef, M. *The psychological foundations of artistic creativity in poetry, in particular*, (4 edition). Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif.

-Sakkal, D. (1995). *The Arabs in the pre-Islamic era*, (1 edition). Beirut: Arab Friendship House.

Internet websites:

-Plekhanov. *(*2023). Philosophy of history The materialist concept of history. https://www.noor-book.com. (16/8/2023).