

Reflection of Social Values and Cultural Ethos in Pre-Islamic Arabic Poetry: A Study

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Abstract

In this paper an attempt has been made to explore the social values depicted in the pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. It also aims to uncover the significance of these values, providing a deeper understanding of the cultural and moral framework of the pre-Islamic Arab society. The anthology *Dîwān al-Ḥamāsa* by Abū Tammām serves as a testament to this ethical richness, featuring a diverse array of virtues such as generosity, hospitality, kindness, compassion, sincerity, honesty, respect, equality, righteousness, and justice. One of the chapters of this anthology *Bāb al-Adāb* meticulously documents the noble conduct of pre-Islamic poets, highlighting qualities like generosity, kindness, and a strong sense of cooperation. Apart from this, other anthologies like *Mu'allaqāt*, *Kitāb al-Aghāni*, *Mufaḍḍaliyāt*, *Jamhara Ash'ār al-'Arab*, and *'Iqd al-Farīd*, serve as invaluable sources of wisdom, safeguarding a wealth of poetic verses that celebrate ethical and moral principles. These collections carefully preserve numerous poems that reflect values such as honesty, generosity, equality, kindness, respect, virtuous conduct, justice, compassion, forgiveness, righteousness, and sincerity, thereby contributing to the literary heritage with lasting and profound insights.

Keywords:

Pre-Islamic poetry, *Qasīda*, *Mu'allaqāt*, *Bāb al-Adāb*, ethical values.

Introduction:

The period from 500 to 622 AD, preceding the emergence of Islam, is commonly referred to as the Pre-Islamic period. Pre-Islamic poetry, often referred to as *Jāhiliyyah* poetry, provides a rich window into the moral values and cultural ethos of Arabian society before the advent of Islam. During its early years, literary works were not documented due to the largely illiterate and nomadic lifestyle of the Arab people. However, despite the absence of a written tradition, Arabs skilfully preserved their history, genealogy, and poetry through oral transmission.

Pre-Islamic literature is manifested in two primary forms: prose and poetry. Prose included proverbs and maxims (*al-muthul*), speeches (*al-khiṭāba*), death-bed advices (*al-wasāya*), and wise sayings (*al-ḥikma*), each serving distinct purposes in society. Poetry, however, was the dominant literary form and the primary mode of artistic and intellectual expression during this era. In this regard, historian P.K. Hitti notes, "In this heroic age of literature, poetry was the only means of literary expression."¹ Considered the "public register (*dīwān*) of the Arabians,"² pre-Islamic poetry functioned as a repository of traditions, historical events, battles, moral values, geography, culture, genealogy, and the natural world. It provided a vivid depiction of Bedouin life, reflecting the intellectual and social realities of the pagan Arabs.

Approximately 150 poets gained recognition during the Pre-Islamic period, with prominent figures including Imru' al-Qais, Ṭarafa bin al-'Abd, Zuhair bin Abī Sulmā, Labīd bin Rabi'a, 'Antara bin Shaddād, 'Amr bin Kulthūm, Al-Hārith bin Hilliza, Nābigha al-Dhubyani, 'Abid bin al-Abras, Abu Basīr al-'Aasha, al-Muhalhil bin Rabi'a, and Hātim al-Ṭā'ī. It is estimated that around 125 poets left a lasting literary legacy, with two dozen achieving widespread recognition for their skill

and a select few celebrated as exceptional poets. Among them, a distinguished group of seven poets contributed to the renowned collection of odes known as the *Mu'allaqāt*, regarded as masterpieces of Pre-Islamic poetry. These odes were so highly esteemed that they were believed to have been inscribed in gold and displayed at the holy Ka'ba, earning them the title *al-Muḍhahhabāt*.⁴

It is noteworthy that, despite widespread illiteracy among poets of the pagan era, they effectively safeguarded their cultural heritage through oral tradition. By relying on memorization, they ensured the transmission of traditions, genealogy, history, and, most notably, poetry across generations.

Description:

The term '*Al-Shi'r*' is an Arabic term means poetry. It originally comes from the Hebrew word '*Shîr*,'⁵ signifying the chanting of spiritual songs, hymns, or glorification. According to Muhammad al-Râbi' al-Hasanî, this word has been derived from the root '*Shu'ûr*,' denoting the emotion and excitement felt by people.⁶ Qudāma ibn Ja'far (873–932/948), a medieval critic of Arabic literature, defined pre-Islamic poetry as "a metrical and rhymed statement denoting a suitable meaning."⁷

Pre-Islamic poetry was lyrical in form and it was called *al-Shi'r al-Ghinā'î*. The choice of lyricism was apt for singing and expressing diverse ideas, offering an effective outlet for personal tensions and excitement.⁸ This poetry served multiple purposes, ranging from alleviating the monotony of desert life to inspiring and disciplining children, advising friends, thanking benefactors, censuring wrong-doers, remonstrating with unkind relatives, expressing sorrow at mishaps, rebuking and threatening enemies, and circulating personal and tribal merits. There was no religious influence in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. Although

Al-'Asma'ī, an Arab philologist, has criticized it due to its handiness of moral and religious themes.⁹

Different themes have been found in pre-Islamic poetry, such as, *al-Faḥhr* (glorification), *al-Hamāsa* (bravery), *al-Madiḥ* (eulogy), *al-Riṭha* (elegy), *al-'Itāb* (censure), *al-Ghazal* (feminine love), *al-Waṣf* (description), and *al-Hikma* (wisdom). Pre-Islamic Arabs used to participate actively some of the prominent fairs held in different parts of Arabia like 'Ukāz, *Dhu'l-Majāz*, and *Majanna* and exchanged their ideas and thoughts.¹⁰ The poets played multifaceted roles in Arab society, serving as spokespeople for their tribes, historians, musicians, and defenders as well. The emergence of a notable poet was a cause for celebration and mass delight among tribes. Regarding this Ibn Rashīq, north-African critic, says:

“On the rise of a great poet in a tribe in a tribe, friendly tribes would come to congratulate it; feasts would be held, women would assemble and play on guitar, as is done in marriage celebrations and men and children congratulate one another. The reason for these jubilations was that the poet defended their honour, immortalized their memorable deeds and spread their reputation.”¹¹

R.A. Nicholson mentions in his book as follows:

“Every tribe had its poets, who freely uttered what they felt and thought. Their written words flew across the desert faster than arrows.”¹²

Krishna Chaitanya, an Indian author, also mentions in his book as follows:

“Whenever a poet emerged in an Arab tribe, the other tribes would come and congratulate it. Feasts would be prepared and the women would gather together, playing on lutes, as people do at weddings. For the poet was defense to their honor, a protection for the good repute. He immortalized their deeds of glory and published their eternal fame. On three things, the tribes congratulated one

another; the birth of a boy, the emergence of a poet in their midst, or the foaling of a mare."¹³

Significance of Morals values:

The term *Al-Akhlāq* (الأخلاق) in Arabic encapsulates the essence of virtue, morality, and good manners, while its singular form, '*khulq*,' (خُلُق) conveys the idea of character, nature, and morals. In this connection, the holy Qur'ān says as follows:

*"Wa innaka la-'alâ khuluq azîm"*¹⁴

(And indeed, you (O Muhammad) are of great moral character).

In fact, this verse certainly reinforces the significance of moral values, and it is also followed by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who also gave emphasis to the role of noble character, and in support of this issue, we can exemplify stating the following prophetic tradition as under:

*"Wa innamâ bu'ithtu li-'utammim makārim al-akhlāq"*¹⁵

(I was sent to perfect the most noble of character).

The field that delves into morals and ethics is termed '*Ilm al-Akhlāq*.' Moral values hold immense importance as they serve as crucial dispositions that distinguish human beings from non-human life forms. At the core of all human behaviour, values act as guiding forces, shaping individuals' philosophies of life and influencing their behaviour and perceptions in various circumstances.

Moral values in the pre-Islamic Arabic Poetry:

Character of a youth: The poets of the pre-Islamic period attributed great significance to the morality of an individual, emphasizing a dual concept of beauty encompassing both inner and outer dimensions. In their view, the external beauty of a person held no inherent value; instead, they underscored the paramount importance of a person's moral character as the true essence of beauty.

These poets articulated a belief that the outward physical beauty of a youth held little meaning if not accompanied by a virtuous and moral character. A poignant expression of this sentiment is found in the verses of a pre-Islamic poet, who astutely remarked on the intertwining of moral character and true beauty. The transliterated text captures this sentiment, highlighting the profound connection poets of that era drew between the intrinsic qualities of an individual and their genuine beauty.

In essence, the pre-Islamic poets articulated a timeless understanding that inner virtues are the true measure of a person's beauty, transcending the ephemeral allure of external appearances. This perspective not only reflects the cultural ethos of the time but also serves as a timeless reminder of the enduring value placed on moral character in the broader human experience. In support of the above-mentioned stand-point, we may cite example from the pre-Islamic poetry as follows:

"ولا ينفع الفتیان حسنُ وجوههم إذا كانت الأخلاق غيرَ حسانٍ" 16

*"Wa-lā yanfa' al-fityān ḥusn ujūhihim
idhâ kānat al-aḥlāq ghaira ḥisān"*

(The outward beauty of the youths is valueless; until they have good morals.)

Character is of two types:

Human beings inherently embody two distinct types of character – one that is praiseworthy and another that is deemed undesirable. According to the insights of a poet, individuals carry within them both commendable and despicable traits. It is the manifestation of good behaviour that earns person praise, while the display of bad character elicits censure.

In illustrating this dichotomy, the esteemed pre-Islamic poet Yazîd bin al-Hakam al-Thaqafî imparts valuable guidance to his son, Badar. In the poet's counsel, there lies a timeless wisdom emphasizing the importance of cultivating praiseworthy traits and steering clear of undesirable characteristics. This poetic advice transcends its historical context, resonating as a universal truth about the duality inherent in human nature and the choices individuals make in shaping their character.

In essence, the poet's words serve as a poignant reminder that individuals have the agency to shape their character, and the distinction between commendable and despicable traits ultimately defines how they are perceived by society. This counsel encapsulates the enduring significance of ethical conduct and the perpetual quest for virtuous character. As such, the poet Yazîd bin al-Hakam al-Thaqafî imparts valuable guidance to his son, Badar as follows:

"والناس مبتنيان مع ... مود البناية أو ذميم" 17

"Wa al-nās mubtaniyān maḥmūd al-bināya aw dhamîm".

(Human beings are based upon two qualities; they are either praiseworthy or blameworthy)

Character is always apparent:

We are aware of the fact that some verses of *Mu'allqât* poetry, highlight the idea that a person's true character cannot be concealed or hidden from others. In this connection, the poet, Zuhair bin Abî Sulmâ, suggests that regardless of a person's attempts to keep certain aspects of their nature secret, their true character will ultimately become evident to those around them.

This emphasis on the transparency of character is in line with the cultural and social values of the time. The pre-Islamic Arabian society placed great importance on personal honour, integrity, and the reputation of individuals. Poets often used their verses to explore and convey these values, as well as to comment on the nature of human behaviour and relationships.

It's important to note that the *Mu'allaqât*, including the works of poets like Zuhair bin Abî Sulmâ, played a significant role in shaping the literary and cultural landscape of the Arabian Peninsula before the advent of Islam. These poems were highly esteemed for their linguistic excellence, eloquence, and depth of meaning. In support of the above stand point, we may cite example from the verses of Zuhair bin Abî Sulmâ as follows:

"وَمَهْمَا تَكُنْ عِنْدَ امْرِئٍ مِنْ خَلِيقَةٍ وَإِنْ خَالَهَا تَخْفَى عَلَى النَّاسِ تُعْلَمُ"¹⁸

"*Wa mahma takun 'inda imri' min khalîqa;
wa 'in khâlahâ takhfâ 'alâ al-nâs tu'lam.*"

(And whatever the nature a man may possess with him; although he thinks to keep secret it forms people; it will be known to them.)

Refraining from miserliness:

The inherent qualities of individuals, such as avarice and a narrow mind-set, are widely condemned in societal norms. Those inclined toward such traits face disapproval within their communities, even if they possess considerable wealth and prosperity. Their reluctance to extend help to the less fortunate is viewed negatively.

Amr bin al-Ahtam al-Naqrî, a notable pre-Islamic poet, expressed the detrimental consequences of such behavior in a set of verses. In addressing Umme Malik, he cautioned against the perils of miserliness, highlighting its potential to erode the innate goodness of an individual. Amr advised Umme Malik to rid herself of this undesirable trait, emphasizing the importance of abstaining from such behaviour for the preservation of a virtuous nature. Moreover, he says that a country won't be degraded but because of lacking good character. In this regard he says:

"ذَرِّبْنِي فَإِنَّ الْبُخْلَ يَا أُمَّ هَيْثُمْ لَصَالِحِ أَخْلَاقِ الرِّجَالِ سَرُوقٌ"¹⁹

"Dharînnî fa'inna al-bukhl yā umma Mâlik

li-ṣâlih akhlāq al-rijāl sarūq"

(Leave me, oh the mother of Malik! because the miserliness; that snatches the good morality from the people)

"لَعَمْرُكَ مَا ضَاقَتْ بِلَادُ بَاهِلِيهَا وَلَكِنْ أَخْلَاقُ الرِّجَالِ تَضِيقُ"²⁰

La'amrūk mā dāqat bilād bi-ahlihā

Walâkinna akhlāq al-rijāl taḍîq."

(By your life! (O the mother of Malik) the country has not become narrow by its people; But it has become so due to the narrowness of the morality of them.)

Caring towards natural disposition:

The poets of the pre-Islamic era were deeply engaged in discussions concerning character, recognizing its pivotal role in shaping the lives of individuals. Their keen observations led them to the realization that many young people were undermining their futures through the cultivation of negative qualities. They understood that a person lacking good character would find themselves estranged from society, as character served as the true measure of recognition.

An adage prevalent during that time encapsulates this sentiment: "Money is lost, nothing is lost; health is lost, something is lost; and when character is lost, everything is lost." Ibn 'Abd al-Asadî, a distinguished pre-Islamic poet, echoed this wisdom in his verses. His words underscore the profound impact of character on one's life, emphasizing that the loss of character equates to the loss of everything. In support of the above stand point, an example has been cited here from the mu'allaqa poetry in the form of transliteration of the related Arabic texts of verse as follows:

"وَأُبْذِلُ مَعْرُوفِي وَتَصِفُو خَلِيقَتِي إِذَا كُذِرَتْ أَخْلَاقُ كُلِّ فِتَى مَحْضٍ"²¹

"Wa a'bḍhul ma'rūfī wa taṣfū khalīqatī;

I'dhâ kadirat aḵhlāq kull fatân maḥḍ."

(I offer my kindness, and thereby my nature becomes spotless; while the nature of every sincere young becomes dirtiness.)

Parallel sentiments are evident in the poetry of Muhammad Ibn Bashir, a notable Umayyad poet from Hijaz. He skilfully conveys moral values with eloquence, and a prime illustration of this can be found in the following verse. In this connection, a related Arabic verse is exemplified here in the form of transliteration as follows:

"إِنِّي وَإِنْ قَصُرْتُ عَنْ هَمَّتِي جَدَّتِي وَكَانَ مَالِي لَا يَقْوَى عَلَى خَلْقِي"²²

*"Innî wa 'in qasurat 'an himmatî jidatî
Wa kâna mālî lā yaqwa 'alâ khuluqî."*

(Although, I failed to reach my determination by means of wealth; while my assets do not have influence over my character.)

Another poet also exalts moral values in the following verse. The transliterated text runs as follows:

كذلك أدبت حتى صار من خلقي أني وجدت ملاك الشيمة الأدب²³

*"Kadhāka uddibtu ḥatta ṣāra min khuluqî
I'nnî wajadtu milāk al-shîma al-adabâ."*

(In this way, I was educated then it has become the part of my character; indeed I have got the whole of my conduct is polished.)

Noble character exceeds physical short-comings:

A poet hailing from the Fazar clan eloquently expressed, "In stature, I may be deemed short among my peers, yet this diminution in height fails to besmirch my standing. For, through the nobility of my character, I aspire to attain my objectives, outshining even those loftier in physical stature." In this connection, the Arabic verse has been quoted below in the transliteration form:

والأ يكن عظمي طويلاً فإني له بالخصال الصالحات وصول²⁴

*"Wa I'llâ yakun aẓmî ṭawîl, fa'innanî
lahu bi-al-khiṣâl al-ṣālihāt waṣûl."*

(Despite my short stature, I successfully achieve my goals through the embodiment of noble characteristics.)

Showing sympathy to the people:

Hâtim al-Tâ'î was a distinguished poet from the pre-Islamic era, renowned for crafting numerous verses that extolled moral virtues and noble principles. A poet of esteemed lineage, his generosity became the subject of numerous historical anecdotes. His daughter Safana who accepted and lived through the period of Islam. Once she had fallen captive to Muslim army in one of the battles. She pleaded to the Prophet to release her from the captivity. She said: 'My father used to release the captive, defend honour, entertain guest, feed the hungry, relieve the distressed, diffuse peace and would never disappoint a needy person. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) asked her who she was. She replied; I am the daughter of Hatim. Then Prophet immediately ordered her to release saying: 'These are the qualities of a believer, were your father been alive we would have shown him mercy.²⁵ The embodiment of his noble and ethical values can be discerned in the following verses:

"وَمَا أَنَا بِالسَّاعِي بِفَضْلِ زَمَامِهَا لَتَشْرَبَ مَا فِي الْحَوْضِ قَبْلَ الرَّاكِبِ"²⁶

"Wa mā 'anā bi-al-sā'î bi-faḍl zimāmiḥā

Li tashrab mā' al-ḥauḍ qabla al-rakâ'ib"

(I don't allow the she-camel to roam freely so that she can drink water from the reservoir before other riding animals.)

"وَمَا أَنَا بِالطَّائِي حَقِيبَةَ رَحْلِهَا لِأَرْكِبَهَا خِفًّا وَأَتْرُكُ صَاحِبِي"²⁷

"Wa mā 'anā bi-al-ṭāwî haqiba raḥlihâ

li-'ab'athahâ khiffan, wa atruk ṣāhibî"

(Nor am I the one who folds the bags of the riding animal, so that I can send her unburdened without regard for my friend.)

إذا كُنْتَ رَبًّا لِلْقُلُوصِ فَلَا تَدَعْ رَفِيقَكَ يَمْشِي خَلْفَهَا غَيْرَ رَاكِبٍ²⁸

Idhâ kunta rabban li-al-Qalûş, falâ tada'

Rafîqaka yamshî khalfahâ ghaira rākib"

(If you belong to the young she-camel, then do not let your friend come behind her without riding on it.)

أَنْخِهَا فَأَرْدِفْهُ فَإِنْ حَمَلْتَكُمَا فَذَاكَ وَإِنْ كَانَ الْعِقَابُ فَعَاقِبْ²⁹

"Anikhhâ, fa'ardifhu, fa'in ḥamalatkumâ

faḍhâka, wa 'in kâna al-'iqāb fa-'āqib."

(Kneel her down, and then have him sit behind her. If she is able to carry both of you, then it is good. If it requires carrying in turns, then do the same.)

Abu Bakr al-Arzami, another prominent poet of pre-Islamic period, who says about the miserliness in his poem. The transliterated text runs as follows:

وَيَرْزُقُ مَعْرُوفَ الْجَوَادِ عَدُوَّهُ وَيَحْرِمُ مَعْرُوفَ الْبَخِيلِ أَقَارِبَهُ³⁰

"Wa yurzaq ma'rūf al-jawād 'aduwwahu

Wa yuḥram ma'rūf al-bakhil 'aqāribuhu".

(The wealth of a generous person extends to their own allies, while the possessions of a miser deprive them of their own relatives.)

It appears from the above discussion that the verses of the above-mentioned poets definitely highlight the contrasting outcomes of generosity and miserliness on one's social connections and relationships, emphasizing how the benevolence of the generous person positively impacts allies, while the selfishness of the miser creates distance and deprivation within their own family.

Settlement of a conflict and dispute:

Among the Mu‘allaqāt poets, Zuhair bin Abī Sulma stands as one of the preeminent figures in pre-Islamic Arab poetry. Within his Mu‘allaqa, there are verses in which he extols the virtues of two tribal leaders, namely Harim bin Sinān and Harith bin ‘Aūf, who played pivotal roles in bringing peace between the rival clans of ‘Abs and Dhubyān. In the poem, war is metaphorically likened to a millstone that grinds down those who set it in motion. The poet, drawing wisdom from a long life, articulates humanity's profound need for morality. The following verses exemplify this sentiment.

يَمِينًا لِنَعْمَ السَّيِّدَانِ وَجِدْتُمَا
عَلَى كُلِّ حَالٍ مِنْ سَحِيلٍ وَمُبْرَمٍ³¹

*“Yamīnan la-ni‘ma al-sayyidān wujidtumā
alā kull ḥāl min saḥīl wa mubram”*

(By God! What an excellent leader they two are! you have been found; in every situation whether it is poor condition or strong they were good.

تَدَارَكْتُمَا عَبَسًا وَذُبْيَانَ بَعْدَمَا
تَفَانَوْا وَدَقُّوا بَيْنَهُمْ عِطْرَ مَنْشَمٍ³²

*“Tadāraktumā ‘Absan wa Dhubyān ba‘damā
wa daqqū bainahum ‘iṭra manshim”*

(You have restored peace among the tribes of ‘Abs and *Dubyan*, after they had annihilated each other being mixed the perfume of *Minsham* upon themselves.)

وَقَدْ قُلْتُمَا إِنَّ نُدْرِكَ السِّلْمِ وَاسِعًا
بِمَالٍ وَمَعْرُوفٍ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ نَسْلَمَ³³

*“Wa qad qultumā: ‘in nudrik al-silm wāsi‘an
bi-māl wa ma‘rūf min al-qaul naslam”*

(And both of you have told: if we could bring peace largely; By means of property and good sayings, then we would be free from blood shedding.)

"عظيمين في عليا معد هديتما ومن يستبح كنزا من المجد يعظم"³⁴

"Aẓimain fī 'ulyā ma'dd hudaitumā

wa man yastabiḥ kanzan min al-majd yu'ẓim."

(Greatness to both of you! Who were, being noble descend of *Ma'ad*, achieved the highest rank of honor by reconciliation, may you be guided in the right way; and he who expends his treasure of glory will be measured great.)

Showing bounteousness to the people:

The pre-Islamic poets demonstrated remarkable generosity and liberality towards the needy and poor. They willingly distributed all their possessions without hesitation, taking pride in such acts. One of the most notable figures in this regard was Urūwa b. al-Ward al-'Absī (d. 615 A.D.), a heroic and wandering poet of the 'Abs clan. He gained particular acclaim for his generosity, with some writers even preferring him over Ḥātim al-Ṭā'ī for his verses on benevolence.³⁵ It is said that Abdul Malik bin Marwan, a renowned Umayyad caliph, once commended him. "He who thought that Ḥātim is nobler among people then he has done injustice to Urūwa b.al-Ward."³⁶

The poet Urūwa bin al-Ward al-'Absī used to express frequently in his verses about the moral values like generosity, bravery, kindness, sympathy, compassion and liberality. The transliterated text runs as follows:

"إِنِّي أَمْرُؤٌ عَافِي إِنْأَيَّ شَرَكَةً وَأَنْتَ أَمْرُؤٌ عَافِي إِنْأَنْكَ وَاحِدٌ"³⁷

(Inni imru' 'aāfī 'inā'ī shirka

wa anta imru' aāfī inā'īka wāḥid)

(I am a man who releases his vessels to the people to have food with him; on the other hand, you provide your vessel only to one person.)

"أَقْسَمُ جِسْمِي فِي جُسُومٍ كَثِيرَةٍ وَأَحْسُو قَرَاخَ الْمَاءِ وَالْمَاءِ بَارِدٌ"³⁸

(Uqassim jismî fî jusūm kathîra

Wa aḥsu qarāḥ al-mā', wa al-mā' bārid)

(I share my body i.e. food among many bodies' i.e. needy people; and I drink only the pure water, while the water is cold i.e. in the season of hardship.)

'Alqama bin Abada, a renowned poet from the pre-Islamic period, has composed verses on liberality and generosity. The poet extols the virtues of charity, aligning with prophetic traditions that assert how charity not only fails to decrease one's wealth but, in fact, doubles it for the giver. In this regard he says as follows:

"وَالْجُودُ نَافِيَةٌ لِلْمَالِ مُهْلِكَةٌ وَالْبُخْلُ مُبْقٍ لِأَهْلِيهِ وَمَذْمُومٌ"³⁹

"Wa al-jūd nāfi'a li al-māl muhlika

Wa al-buḥl bāq li-'ahlîhi wa madhmūm"

(And the benevolence is beneficial to the property which is destroying; while the miserliness remains dishonor to its family)

Showing respect to the guest:

One of the most celebrated virtues in pre-Islamic poetry is generosity, particularly in the form of hospitality. The desert's scarcity made welcoming strangers a moral imperative and a point of pride. Abd Qais bin Khufaf, one of the outstanding poets from Tamim clan of pre-Islamic period, also composes a few verses on respecting and showing honor to the guest and it's a right for the guest to get hospitality from the host. Regarding this he says as follows:

حَقُّ وَلَا تَكُ لُعْنَةً لِلنَّزَّلِ⁴⁰

"وَالضَّيْفَ أَكْرَمُهُ فَإِنَّ مَبِيتَهُ

"Wa al-ḍaif akrimhu fa'inna mabîtaḥu,

ḥaqq wa lā taku lu'natan li al-nuzzal"

(And show respect to the guest because his shelter for the night is his right; and it should not be a curse for the host)

Findings:

1. Preservation of Oral Tradition: Despite widespread illiteracy, the Pre-Islamic Arabs adeptly preserved their history, genealogy, and poetry through oral transmission and memorization.
2. Prominent Poets: Notable poets like Imru' al-Qais, Ṭarafa bin al-'Abd, Zuhair bin Abî Sulmā, and others played a significant role in shaping the literary landscape.
3. Mu'allaqāt as Masterpieces: The Mu'allaqāt, seven long odes, were considered masterpieces of pre-Islamic poetry, earning great reverence and being suspended at the Ka'ba.
4. Cultural Significance: Despite lacking religious themes, the emergence of poets was celebrated with feasts, and poets played multifaceted roles as spokespeople, historians, musicians, and defenders in Arab society.
5. Common Themes in Pre-Islamic Poetry: Themes like glorification, bravery, eulogy, elegy, censure, feminine love, and wisdom were prominent, reflecting the social and religious milieu of the time.
6. Social Impact of Poets: The rise of a great poet was a cause for celebration, and poets served as defenders of honour, immortalizing deeds, and spreading tribal reputation.

7. Role of Poets in Society: Poets were not just entertainers; they played crucial roles as historians, defending the honour of tribes and spreading their reputation through their written words.
8. Literary Competitions: Fairs provided platforms for poets to engage in competitions, exchange ideas, and celebrate the emergence of notable poets, contributing to the cultural progression of Arab society.
9. Prophetic Emphasis on Noble Character: The Qur'ânic verse and prophetic tradition emphasize the significance of noble character, aligning with the broader focus on moral values.
10. *Ilm al-Aḫlāq*: '*Ilm al-Aḫlāq*,' the field of study delving into morals and ethics, recognizes the crucial role of moral values in shaping human behaviour and perceptions.
11. Pre-Islamic Poetry in '*Diwān al-Ḥamāsa*': The anthology '*Diwān al-Ḥamāsa*' showcases moral values in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, recording virtuous manners in a chapter called '*Bāb al-Adāb*.'
12. Importance of Inner Virtues: Pre-Islamic poets highlight the paramount importance of an individual's moral character over external beauty.
13. Duality in Character: Poet Yazid b. al-Hakam al-Thaqafi emphasizes the duality in character, with good behaviour earning praise and undesirable traits leading to censure.
14. Transparency of Character: Zuhair bin Abī Sulma's verses emphasize the transparency of character, indicating that one's true nature becomes evident despite attempts to conceal it.

15. Condemnation of Miserliness: Poets like Amr bin al-Ahtam al-Naqri condemn miserliness, cautioning against its detrimental impact on an individual's innate goodness.
16. Impact of Character on Society: The poets stress the societal importance of personal honour, integrity, and reputation, with the emergence of a great poet celebrated for defending honour and immortalizing deeds.
17. Universal Relevance: The guidance and wisdom imparted by pre-Islamic poets resonate as universal truths, transcending their historical context. Ethical conduct, virtuous character, and moral values are emphasized as enduring and significant.

Conclusion:

In fact, the exploration of Pre-Islamic Arabic poetry reveals a rich tapestry of cultural, moral, and literary dimensions that shaped the ethos of Arab society. Despite prevalent illiteracy, the Arabs adeptly preserved their history and traditions through oral transmission, with poetry emerging as a predominant literary form. The *Mu'allaqāt*, considered masterpieces, and prominent poets played pivotal roles in societal celebrations and as defenders of tribal honour. The themes in pre-Islamic poetry, ranging from bravery to love and wisdom, reflect the societal values and priorities of the time. The poets, though lacking explicit religious influence, were instrumental in cultural progression. They engaged in literary competitions, exchanging ideas during fairs, leading to the emergence of celebrated poets and communal jublations. Pre-Islamic poetry, as preserved in anthologies like '*Diwān al-Ḥamāsa*,' provides insights into the ethical richness of the Arab world. The transparency of character, condemnation of miserliness, and

the societal impact of personal honour and integrity are recurrent themes. The guidance imparted by poets resonates as universal truths, offering timeless reminders of the enduring value placed on ethical conduct in the broader human experience.

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