

The Prologue of Jahiliyyah Odes: A Study

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Abstract: One of the significant aspects of Jahiliyyah poetry which attracted attentions from new and old schools of criticism is their prologues. These prologues which open the odes, introduce concepts such as homeland, loss of beloved, standing over the ruins and lamentation over the losses and wreckages. The old schools critics in their analysis paid much attention to the formal aspects of these verses and found them imitative however, the contemporary critics evaluated divergent facets of them and had different interpretations which rarely been noticed. Hence, based on the new exegeses which are different from what old schools of criticism, this paper tries to explore and deal with concepts such as sociology, psychology and existentialism in the prologues of Jahiliyyah poetry.

Key words: The prologues of Jahiliyyah poetry, sociological criticism, psychological criticism, existentialism, exegeses

INTRODUCTION

The Jahiliyyah poetry is a significant case of Arabic poetry. It begins with a deliberation on or an observation of the ruins and lamentation over the loss of beloved. Jahiliyyah poets used to stand over the ruins and address the beloved abodes which were part of their remembrance and recollection and then composed poetry.

Some critics regard the ruination prologues of this form of poetry only a division which poets relied on to compose their poetry. Ibn Qutaybe is the most prominent critic from the old school which had a formal criticism of the prologues of Jahiliyyah poetry. According to him, a Jahiliyyah poet usually recounts the accounts of her/his homeland and the ruins of her/his beloved abodes. S/he addresses these wrecked and collapsed abodes and invites her/his friends to sympathy and understanding. The poet laments over her/his split and separation from beloved and complains about the extension of his longing and enthusiasm for the beloved, so as the addressee will continue reading or listening to the rest of the poem enthusiastically. Accordingly, critics of old schools found the ruination prologue actually a stage to the next part of Jahiliyyah poetry. However, in their analysis of these Jahiliyyah prologues, contemporary critics had quite different perceptions. They did not find these verses poetic habits or imitation of the past poetry but believed in factors which induced Jahiliyyah poets to recount their accounts of migrations, departures, ruins, lamentations and so on. The psychological, sociological and existential receptions of the prologues are to be discussed later in this study. The existential stance or attitude in the

prologues are reflected in poet's pursuit for concepts and ideas like existence, life, death, conflict with fate and so forth. The poet's lamentations over the ruins is believed to be a result of her/his instability; in situations like this, poets do not feel secure and do not feel at home anywhere. Moreover, poets' remembrance of things past is due to her/his unknown fate which actually represents their lamentation over the unexplained and unexplored fate and progression or transformation from one life to another. Nevertheless, other critics found the ruination prologues to receive psychological interpretation. This interpretation found poet's journey to his or her past life as a comeback to 'self' or to 'the nature of self,' moreover they found these images of ruination and decay as 'archetypes' which the poet benefits her/his poetry with deliberately. Some other critics mark the psychological aspects of Jahiliyyah poetry. They found the act of standing and lamenting over the ruins and ashes a sociological action. In the following, thus, ideas and notions of these critics regarding the prologues of Jahiliyyah poetry are discussed and elaborated.

SOCIOLOGICAL DIMENSION

One of the effects of nature on social life is the phenomenon of migration and departure from one place to another in search of water and plants. This phenomenon, apparently, happened in Bedouin lives and was inseparable from them.

On the morning of separation, severity and intensity of my tears by the shrubs around the tribe, made me split colocynt (Abedi *et al.*, 2014).

From a very long time, drought made the Arabian Peninsula stricken with changes and transformations. The particular climate of this region, made people to migrate and departure repeatedly. Hence, one of the side effects of droughts were on literature of the period which is observed in Jahiliyyah poetry's narratives. The front piece or prologue of each ode is the stage of emotions and feelings which migration and departure created in the poet; accordingly, poets had been influenced by these mandatory geographical shifts. They experienced and understood the consequences of droughts such as ruins, decays and departure of their beloved on their lives. What made the Bedouin poets to compose the prologues was the drought phenomenon which they believed to be the result of nature's atrocity towards them. Because it was nature which was in fight with society and did not grant them the mercy of raining. Hence, they made their tears to flow and gush like rain to make people sympathize with them and the beloved would become their pretext and justification. "Crying and shedding tears over the ruins, is the replacement for the rain which the sky does not let fall on the droughty and withered earth".

Some critics found repetition of the ruination prologues in Jahiliyyah poetry to be the techniques of allusion to the ruination of homeland and like other poetic techniques in Arabic poetry of Jahiliyyah period to be the obligation and commitment of artists and poets to the society's superior needs (Nasif, 1981). According to Nasif, addressing the society and alluding to the ruinations and decay and remembrance of things past were the part of the traditions and rite the Jahiliyyah poetry held. However, it seems to be an untrue interpretation. Recurrence of the prologues in fact, represents the social crisis of Jahiliyyah period and the period's poets resisted the ill fitted social and incapable environmental situation through the ruination prologues; moreover, through composing poetry they were able to reduce and soften the severity due to droughts and their consequences. "The poet does not lament alone, but call and summon for collective lamentation to ask for raining." Therefore, wreckage or ruin is a symbol in which reminds the poet of drought, decay, disintegration of his society and people which had to migrate due to dearth and drought. Apparently, there is a hidden misery in society which poets transform to an elegy opening their odes in departure of beloved.

Dr. Ali Al-Batal believes that the poet's lamentation over the wrecked and ruined abodes is the first case of remnants' portrayal of kinship and affinity in which transform the poet's deliberation on the ruins and wreckages to poetry and the rite of calling for rain. So, as the earth would be saturated with water and its habitants

would return to inhabit it. Moreover, the image of flood following the image of migration and departure is portrayal of part of the poet's ideal and wish; for, they would create a thriving life in their poetry so as in reality it would transform to the magic of kinship and affinity (Ahmed and Fetah, 1999; Abedi *et al.*, 2011). Accordingly, it seems there is a heritance or genealogy in this genre of poetry with no direct imitation or influence.

PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSION

The wondrous composition of the dream world images and the language fluctuation between reality and unconscious been always with human beings; it has created intense and rebellious excitements in human mind and has dismantled the word orders of speech to construct wondrous texts. Jahiliyyah poetry is such a text in which one can find plenty of dreamy and fantastic surrealistic (unconscious) images and symbols. Creation of poetic images in the ruination prologues is in a sense, a collision stream; the collision of the real order and the imaginary order in which is called "the spontaneous streams of consciousness" (Adonis, 1997). It would be simplistic to interpret Jahiliyyah poetry images of ruinations and wreckages and women (beloved) as the direct representation of reality hence, it should be looked at from a different perspective such as the unconscious dimension (Ahmed and Fetah, 1999) which is divided into two category: individual unconscious and collective unconscious.

Personal unconscious: Freud considered personal unconscious to be the collection of personal memories and experiences which are stored in the mind since childhood (Freud, 1978). These memories stored in personal unconscious, in certain conditions would transfer to consciousness; hence, this branch of psychoanalysis is related to the childhood of artist. Abdel Fattah Mohamed Ahmed writes: "desires, anxieties and antagonistic tendencies which are adverted to the rational life of the poet, would cumulate in the unconscious gradually; and in a certain point of his or her life the poet would be able to make use of them through his or her consciousness (Ahmed and Fetah, 1999). Moreover, s/he would enforce her or his unconscious potentials to manifest in a conscious life.

The Jahiliyyah poets associate ruins and wreckages with the past for the past in fact is the natural or inherent self (Freud, 1978). That is why poets portrays or represents "locus;" for they find themselves amidst these ruins and wreckages and locus is as a spirit for body. Moreover, they emphasize their affiliation with the present

time and chant about romances and beloveds. All of these are to reconcile them with life. According to Badawi, the ruins and wreckages are codes of a lost world for the old-times human beings did care about place more than about time. The old-times poet chant over ruins and wreckages to highlight the departure of life spirit; they did start chanting to manifest the triumph of life over death and to highlight the victory of alliance over diaspora.

In his interpretation of Jahiliyyah prologues, Dr. Izz al-Din Ismail did support Freud notion of personal unconscious and believed the prologue of Jahiliyyah poetry comprise of two elements. The first one reminds one of death and non-existence which alludes death drive; the other one is love and remembrance of things past reminds one of life and existence which alludes to love. According to some critics, the poetic images found in the prologue of Jahiliyyah poetry is taken from their personal unconscious: however, some other critics disagree with the idea and consider these prologues only to be part of a collective unconscious.

Collectiveunconscious: The second part of unconscious mind which is considered to comprise of the deepest layers of psyche is called collective unconscious. This part is impersonal and common among all human beings and through personal consciousness, it manifests some states of mind, behaviors, similar symptomatic tendencies in all people. According to Carl Gustav Jung, contents of collective unconscious are latent within every human being's brain tissues. However, this unconscious can only inspires artists, especially poets and their signs and symbols manifest themselves as dreams through waking life; nevertheless for ordinary people they manifest themselves only through dreams. Hence, artist is a collective human being which carries collective unconscious within him/herself and forms psychological life of the unconscious (Abd-al-Meti, 1984).

The ruination prologues in Jahiliyyah poetry is also a consequence of this unconscious; in other words, the images of collective unconscious which poets are being influenced by unconsciously. These images which in fact originate from superior archetypes and patterns are the essential source of many images and fantasies which manifest in aesthetic texts and in poetry (Halal, 1987). The higher or superior patterns called archetypes are common forms with a history of thousands of thousands of years of human civilization which been transmitted from generation to generation and been located in the unconscious mind. These forms and figures manifest themselves through different signs and symbols to reach consciousness and are manifested in the works of art.

EXISTENTIAL DIMENSION

People in Jahiliyyah period lacked stable religious thoughts and believed death to be end of their lives. From their viewpoints, death was to constrain and limit life and deprived them of an immortal life. The quiddity of death was their only preoccupation and they found death to be the end of life and existence. This mentality of them is similar to the contemporary philosophy of existentialism. These ideas are to be found in Martin Heidegger's philosophy in which he believed death to be one side and existence to be the other side of the same coin and he believes it is possible for human being not to being any moment. According to him, this possibility cancels all other possibilities and it is the extreme limit of all possibilities.

These ideas and concepts about death did permeate significantly in the literature of time, henceforth death was a huge crisis for Arabs and specially Arab poets, who found death to be the end of life since the moment they were born into life.

"Whoever fears the causes of death, those causes would influence them even if they were in form of a ladder towards the sky".

Among the manifestation of these suppositions about death are the ruination prologues which are the opening verses of many odes. Dr. Izz al-Din Ismail believed these were not imitative odes but poets were inspired from the latent emotions in their selves which were expression of their existential anxieties or angsts (in a Kierkegaardian sense of word). Since, these anxieties were not just personal feelings to influence one person and not to influence another but were common feelings which embodied common position and humanistic perspective. Poets did lament over ruins and wreckages of their beloved abodes; their lamentation were not just shedding tears over the lost beloved and a lost happiness but is the outcry of frustration and despair against the truth of death.

When poets did use words such as chastity, honesty, the absence of beloved in their compositions in fact they were expressing their anxieties about death.

Therefore, the poet resisted death, destruction, fate and their manifestation which is an obstacle on his way to freedom. The passage of time is the death manifestation and Jahiliyyah poet found it a sign of death and negation of freedom. He tried to resist it. In the ruination prologues when the poet did use the word 'stand,' he wanted to strop a hypothetical movement which is the passage of time. The poet's objective were to stop time and triumph over it.

Indeed, the passage of time draws human beings nearer to death and apparently all manifestations of life, condense the poet's feelings to existence and crisis of his or her life; moreover, happiness, pace of life, graying hair and so on all make poets aware of threats of life and promise of immortality. In addition, human awareness of the world and their sense of life ending and thinking about it lead them to live an absurd life.

CONCLUSION

One reason of recurrence of the prologues are the ideological mindset of Jahiliyyah period about death and destruction. People of Jahiliyyah period, like contemporary existentialist, found death to be the end of life. In fact, in encounter with the remnants of beloved's abode and the sense of decay and destruction and death, Jahiliyyah poets tried to compose verse about the ruination and loss of beloved to represent their sense of loss.

Migration and departure due to intermittent droughts in Jahiliyyah period which led to separation of people, sociologically accounted to recurrence of prologues in the opening of odes. Through the prologues, they tried to represent their society's issues and problems. According to the individual psychology, human beings tend to restore to the antecedent or primitive states hence, Jahiliyyah poets tried to restore to the same organic state of life through representing ruins and wreckages of the life. They associated ruins to the past life for the past was the same as their essential selves. Moreover, some critics

think collective unconscious influenced the ruination prologues. In fact, they found the poetic images or imageries to be originated from the superior and dominant archetypes. They are common forms and figures which transmit from one generation to another to locate within the unconscious mind and manifest in consciousness through different signs and symbols.

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