The Revelation of the Ego in the Moa’llaqat

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Abstract

Despite his strenuous efforts to attain perfection, Man will continue to be imperfect, for perfection is only an attribute of Allah. This, however, does not cause Man any disgrace or inferiority. Allah has created him as such. In this study, we are primarily concerned with the ego of the poets of the Mu’allaqats who lived in a society that sanctifies servitude of imitation and rejects freedom of expression. It also imposes certain values and refuses others on the premise that they represent individuals rather than the tribe. As such, the pre-Islamic era can be described as the society of habit in which the new generation must follow the steps of the older one. If the new generation abstains from traditional habits, the tribe will not be responsible for what happens to it. This may explain why most pre-Islamic poets adopted their tribal values, not because they honored them but because those values were an essential part of their tribal traditions. That is why those poets commemorated the value of retaliation in their poetry while some verses points out their peace loving disposition. Thus, a few poets challenged tribal servitude and expressed their own beliefs, tolerating solitary life in the desert in order to achieve freedom of decision. On the other hand, some poets remained divided between the two extremes.

Although the term ‘ego’ is a foggy one, as we have indicated, yet its philosophical and psychological connotation, as manifested in poetry, simulates the human soul. The term consists of a twofold interwoven entity which is too mysterious to disclose. Consequently, we considered Umru’-I-Qais’s ego an individual one; Antara’s a tribal one; Turfa ibn al-Abd’s a masked one; Zuhair’s a contemplating ego; Amr bin Kulthum’s a communal one; al-Harith bin Hilliza’s a balanced one; and Labeed bin Rabee’a’s a muslim one.

Although we distinguished one ego from another, we are aware that the ego and the self are not apparent to us as is reflected in one’s behavior and words. Consequently, we have attempted to keep a track of ego in poetic rhythm and music which sometimes point out what words do not reveal. This has been done in order to get to that ego in many ways rather than only one way.
To achieve an ultimate benefit, and to make the 'ego' issue as clear as possible, we have spared no effort to define the notion of ego via poetic discourse which we have utilized to distinguish between the egos of the Mu'allaqats poets. Employing this method, we have succeeded to reveal what disturbs the ego and what delivers it from agony. By so doing, we have left no stone unturned to get to the ego as is explicitly expressed in what it says about itself and in those poets' tones. Eventually, poetic discourse reflects the relationship between the poet's ego and the poetic ego, hence clarifying the mysterious ego in the human soul.

Keeping track of the ego remains to be a human issue which is far from perfection, and it will continue to pose challenges to any human effort.