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## **Growth and Development of Arabic Poetry under the Umayyad Period: A Discussion**

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### **Abstract**

Arabic poetry got new development during the Umayyad period. This period witnessed the spread of new social, political and romantic poem (Ghazal) keeping the tradition of pre-Islamic. The poet patronized the Umayyad kalifat and enriched the literature through eulogies, satires (hija), and love poems. During this period, the provincial poetry movement was led by al-Farazdq (d. 728 AD), Zarir (d. 729 AD) and al-Akhtl (d. 710 AD). These three poets were famous for their satirical and admirable poetry. Apart from this a new genre of Arabic poetry (Ghazal) flourished during this period which was led by Umar ibn Abi Rabiyyah. In short, the Umayyad period was a fusion of Arabic poetic convention and innovation that make the step for the literary excellence of the later Abbasid period.

**Keywords:** Umayyad Poetry, characteristic, Ghazal, Hija etc

### **Introduction:**

The Umayyad period was a time of intellectual advancement in poetry. During this period, poetry gained the poetic power of the pre-Islamic era. Therefore, the literature of this era refers to the entire poetic literature. In the early days of Islam, the obstacles to poetry were removed and thought was given to the development of poetry. However, no attention was paid to poets in winning wars and expanding their kingdoms at that time. The Umayyad poetry lovers' passionate attitude towards poetry drew attention to it. The poems of the Umayyad period were consistent with the themes and structure of ancient poetry. Instead of praising the victories and courage of Muslim heroes, poets wrote poems describing the abandoned abode of a lover in an unknown place outside the city, the desert and camels. It was during this time that the first Arabic romantic poets appeared. The lover was described as the mask of the pre-Islamic qasida. However, during the Umayyad period, a new type of Arabic love poetry was born called ghazal. These ancient qasidas gave birth to Arabic song poetry from the romantic melody 'Naseeb' in the words of the famous scholar Brockelmann-

“Fortunately, the imitation of the antique Qasida at any rate with the greatest Umayyad Poets, is to same extent only an accessory to another form of art that excites over historical interest in a high degree, namely the

occasional poems which are- suggested, by the mood of the moments can shed a vivid light on contemporary history.”<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, the famous poets of the Umayyad period recorded the qasidas of the past at such a stage that they introduced another form of art and drew attention to history. The poems, especially those written from time to time, referred to that particular time and gave a clear view of contemporary history.

Arabic lyric poetry was born in imitation of Persian singers. Arabic songs and poems were born from ghazals. Umar bin Abi Rabiya (d. 719 AD) was the main patron of this genre of love poetry. He was accustomed to writing love poems; even the beautiful women who came to Mecca and Medina made his passion of love unforgettable to pure sex. Umar bin Abi Rabiya called for free love. Another contemporary poet was Jamil (d. 701 AD). Jamil calls for simple love through his poetry. The poet, who lives in the Hijaz, describes his love for his girlfriend Busaina in most of his poems. They are composed of songs in later eras in view of the beauty and simplicity of the language of the poems. Another famous poet of the time was Majnun Laila, whose real name was Qais bin al-Mulawah. He became famous for writing song poems. He fell in love with a young woman from the tribe named Laila and became known as ‘Majnun’ His love failed and his girlfriend married another young man. Meanwhile, Majnun was desperate and wandered half-naked in the mountains of Najd, in the forests, with tears in his eyes to see Laila. Laila Majnun's name became a symbol of romance in Arabia, Persia and Turkey.

Apart from romantic poetry, political poetry flourished during the Umayyad period. Caliph Yazid ordered Mishkin al-Darimi to compose poems in praise of him. Hammad al-Raria took responsibility for compiling the pre-Islamic poems.<sup>2</sup>

During the Umayyad period, the provincial poetry movement was led by al-Farazdaq (d. 728 AD), Zarir (d. 729 AD) and al-Akhtl (d. 710 AD). These three poets are famous for their satirical and admirable poetry. All three are excellent poets. Al-Akhtl was a Christian, an alcoholic and a shameless man. Al-Farazdaq was the royal poet of the Umayyads and Yazid in the days of Abdul Malik, Walid, Sulaiman. Zarir was the assembly poet of al-Hajjaj. Al-Farazdaq and Zarir often attacked each other with poetry in vulgar and fierce language. Al-Akhtl sided with Farazdaq as a rule.

### **Salient Features of Arabic Poetry under the Umayyad Dynasty:**

#### **1. Free from rude speech:**

Under the influence of the Jahili era, Umayyad poetry followed the description of the nature of rural life. The poetry of the Umayyad period retained the poetic rhetoric of the poetry of the Jahili period and refrained from strange descriptions and rude speech under the influence of the Qur'an and Hadith.

#### **2. More use of tashveeb:**

Tashabih is comparing women with other things. In the pre-Islamic era, he wrote praise poems about his lover. However, there are few examples of comparisons to other objects. When the Muslims conquered various cities during the Umayyad period, they gained a

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<sup>1</sup> Brockelman, Gesck. d. Arab Litteratur, vol. I, P. 45. And quoted from Reynold A. Nicholson. A Literary History of the Arabs, P- 236.

<sup>2</sup> P.K. Hitti. Arab Zahir Itihas, P- 280-82.

large amount of war booty. Among the spoils they captured many slave girls who were Roman and Persian beauties. These attractive young maids were the source of metaphorical poetry. They were condemned during the reign of the Khulafa' al-Rashidin. However, in the Umayyad period, the mixture of non-Arabs removed the purity from the hearts of the people and began to write poetry in comparison. The author of this type of poetry was Jamil ibn Ma'mar.

### 3. Condemnatory Poetry:

The poets of the Umayyad period composed the most condemnatory poetry. Among Bani Hashim and Bani Umayya, slanderous poetry was written for political reasons. The famous poets on this subject are Farzdak, Zarir and Akhtal.

### 4. The Poetry of the newly educated Muslims:

The subject matter of the poems of the pre-Islamic period did not go beyond Arabia. During the Umayyad period, the conversion of various ethnic groups, Arabs and non-Arabs, created a new trend. As a result, new words entered the pre-Islamic world of poetry which were used for other than their true meanings.

### 5. Political poetry or praise in the hope of gifts:

In the Umayyad era, praise poems were found that were written in the hope of receiving donations. It was led by a group of poets who wrote such praise poems.

### 6. Description of the properties of alcohol:

Since the days of M'awiyah, who founded the monarchy, people have been luxurious and indulged in sports. Ralid ibn Yazid is famous as the first Muslim to describe the tune.<sup>3</sup>

### **Growth and development of Ghazal form of poetry during the Umayyads:**

The word 'ghazal' has many meanings in the field of poetry. Among these, the ghazal al-Uzra points to the Uzra dynasty, the poet of which the story is world famous for true love, that is Majnoon. The poet was crazy about his girlfriend and wodered around mountain and forests. Such poems are called ghazal al-ujra. Among the poets who wrote these types of poems were Qais bin Juraiz, Qais bin Maluh (who is called Majnoon Laila), Tawba Bib al-Hamir and Laila al-Akhiliya etc. Qasir bin Abdur Rahman wrote poems in love with Uzzah, Qais bin Zuraiz, the most pioneering poet, wrote ornamental poems in love with his uncle's daughter Lubna. Then came Qais bin Maluh, the world-famous lover known as 'Majnoon' Qais's poetry is beautiful in meaning, full of simple explanation and powerful word structure. Qais bin Maluh said,

"سنبكي على نفسي بعين غزيرة      بكاء حزين في الوثاق أسير"

"I wept for myself with copious tears, a sorrowful cry, a prisoner in chains."

Another ghazal poet was Tauba bin al-Hami, a famous lover of Arabia. He loved Layla al-Akhilya. But her father marries her to someone else. Tauba was killed in 80 AHS. Tauba composed sharp ghazal poems using the finest literature. The poem also shows her lover Layla being in love with her lover Tauba and appealing to her father for marriage. But her father did not fulfil her hopes and in this way, Layla died in 90 AHS. No one but Khansa is more pioneering in writing mournful poetry than Laila. Being devastated by the death of her husband Tauba, saying-

البيت ابكى بعد توبة هالكا اخا الحرب ان دارت عليه الدوائر

<sup>3</sup> Faruqi and Al-Mujaddidi, *Al- Arabiya wa Adabiha*, p. 156-157.

The main poets who wrote Ghazal al-Abahi (free ghazal) are Walid bin Yazid, Umayyad Khalifa and Umar bin Abi Rabia. Umar bin Abi Rabiya paved a new path in ghazal through description of qualities and dialogue.

Ghazal al-am (General Ghazal), the general type of Ghazal was born in this era. The most famous poets on this subject are Adi bin al-Riqqa, al-Amili, Jul Rumma, Arzi and Urwa bin Aznia. They used tashveeh in ghazal poetry to praise Dimaskar as well as to write poems of praise and condemnation. He died in 96 AHS.<sup>4</sup> Thus, ghazal poetry advanced through the efforts of other poets.

#### **Shaer Al-Naqaid or Shaer Al-Hija (Satirical poem) in Arabic under the Umayyads:**

The Umayyad period is famous for its blasphemous poetry in Arabic poetry. There are many poetic talents developed around condemnatory poetry and poetry literature flourished during the Umayyad period. Condemnatory poetry was born in imitation of pre-Islamic poetry. To protect the honour, reputation and heritage of one's clan, one writes slanderous poems to express the glory of one's clan through poetry and to undermine the opposing party. Sometimes it is made in honour of the king and sometimes it is made fun of another person or group or empire for the sake of religion. In the Islamic era, this changed and blasphemous poetry was permitted only for the sake of Islam by the Prophet (peace be upon him). Islamic poets refrained from exaggerating and obscene speech. However, during the Umayyad period, it showed an exceptional aspect. Zarir, Farzdaq and Akhtal are among the first to write blasphemous or satirical poetry of the Umayyad period. This was followed by the other poets who recited poems in groups of three and preached them to the public.

Zarir and Farzdaq belonged to the same lineage but were poets of different groups. Zarir and Farzdaq belonged to the Tamim tribe, but Zarir was born in the Qulayb branch of the Bani Hashmim tribe and Farzdaq was born in the Hikam branch of the Bani Umayyad tribe. Akhtal of the Taghlib dynasty was also a Christian. And he strengthened Bani Umayya through poetry. It was a natural feature of poets in that era to write condemnatory poetry which was written at an early age in different forms at different times through his father's condemnatory poems. As a young man, he wrote poems defamatory of the Taghlib poet Ka'b bin Zail, disrespecting and humiliating him. He was named 'Akhtal' for this stupidity. For the Umayyad caliphs to give him due dignity, Akhtal defended them all his life, sided with Farzad and wrote condemnatory poems against Zarir and shared his poetic talent with the world. Despite being born into a noble family, Farzad wrote poems denouncing the people of his tribe in Basra. Fortunately, he found Zarir and his scope of work expanded. Like his two companions, Zarir began writing poetry at an early age and began his condemnatory poetry with ancient rural scenes.

It is noteworthy that the forty-year war of condemnatory poetry at that time began with the first condemnation of a man named Gachchan Sulati by Zarir. In response, Gachchan turned to a poet named Buaz, who condemned Zarir. Zarir responds strongly. Later, Farzad entered the competition. The conflict between Zarir and Farzad intensifies. The poems of these two condemnatory poets became popular among the public and the powerful. The people also split into two factions. Farzad's supporters gathered at a place called Marbad and composed defamatory poems against their opponents. Zarir's

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<sup>4</sup> Rabi Nadwi Hasan, *Tarikh al-Adab al-Arabi*. P. 259-271

supporters gathered near the grave of Bani Hisam with his other poet-supporters to prove the superiority of their party. Akhtal judged Farzad to be the best in order to provide security to Qais or to take a bribe from Muhammad bin Umair. They got the news and rose up against Akhtal. Thus, the discussion of the condemnatory poetry of the three major poets became prolonged. The poems in the two places of poetry discussion were judged by people in terms of word structure, sweetness and various aspects to decide whose poem was the best. The famous poem "Kitab al-Agani" states that "a supporter of Farzadak gave preference to Farzadak for bribing the judge with four thousand dirhams and a horse."<sup>5</sup> Thus, the Umayyad period saw the development of various condemnatory poems.

### **Conclusion:**

The growth and development of Arabic poetry got an unprecedented level in Umayyad period. The fusion of pre-Islamic tradition and new Islamic ideals was very beautiful. During this period poetry was not only confined to tribal pride but also developed into political prose, love (ghazal) and praise songs (madah). The genre of poetry began to develop rapidly because of the patronage of the Umayyad Khalifa. Poetry of politics was one of the most important features in this period. During this period naqaid or satirical poetry achieved top position and the chief poets were Jarir, Farazdaq, and al-Akhtal. Moreover, urban love ghazals were popularized by Umar Ibn Abi Rabiyyah.

The poems of the Umayyad period were consistent with the themes and structure of ancient poetry. Instead of praising the victories and courage of Muslim heroes, poets wrote poems describing the abandoned abode of a lover in an unknown place outside the city, the desert and camels. It was during this time that the first Arabic romantic poets appeared. The lover was described as the mask of the pre-Islamic qasida. However, during the Umayyad period, a new type of Arabic love poetry was born called ghazal. These ancient qasidas gave birth to Arabic song poetry from the romantic melody 'Naseeb'.

Apart from this a new genre of Arabic poetry (Ghazal) flourished during this period which was led by Umar ibn Abi Rabiyyah. In short, the Umayyad period was a fusion of Arabic poetic convention and innovation that make the step for the literary excellence of the later Abbasid period.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. P. 279-281.