



## Pratidhwani the Echo

A Peer-Reviewed International Journal of Humanities & Social Science

ISSN: 2278-5264 (Online) 2321-9319 (Print)

Impact Factor: 6.28 (Index Copernicus International)

Volume-XIV, Issue-I, October 2025, Page No. 69-73

Published by Dept. of Bengali, Karimganj College, Sribhumi, Assam, India

Website: <http://www.thecho.in>

DOI: 10.64031/pratidhwanitheecho.vol.14.issue.01W.032



### The Muallaqa Poetry and Imru al Qays: A Discussion

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Received: 06.10.2025; Accepted: 22.10.2025; Available online: 31.10.2025

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#### Abstract

Al-Muallaqat is an outstanding collection of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. The word muallaqa is derived from the Arabic word "علق" which means to hang. In the preIslamic period the literary fair "Uqqaz" was very famous in Arab. Poets from different corner of the Arabs gathered and participated in a poetry recitation competition. In that era, persons with special skills with poetic knowledge were appointed as judges. The poems that the judges considered the best were written in golden letters and hung on the walls of the Kaaba in the holy city of Mecca. It was called Muallaqa. It is said that the judges declared the poems of seven poets the best and the best poems written by them were hung on the walls of the Kaaba. Therefore, the poems of those seven poets together are called "المُعَلَّقَاتِ السَّبْعَةُ" or "Sabu Muallaqat".

**Keywords:** Muallaqat, Pre-Islamic, Imru al Qays, Qasida etc

In the pre-Islamic era, there was a poet among all classes of people, from kings to slaves and from Christians to pagans. They preserved their history and traditions through the practice of poetry. At that time, poets had dominance and dignity over everyone. This is because the poets were the guides and supporters of their people. Poets spoke in the language of poetry as mouthpieces of the tribe, threatened the enemy, and preserved the past history of the tribe, including the events of their wars. As a result, the poets were highly respected by the Arabs. The poets' poems were one of the ways to preserve the history and traditions of the time. The social, political, economic, religious, cultural and military history of the time was preserved through poetry. Moreover, the poets pondered on some important issues that no one but the chief of the tribe had the opportunity to ponder. Poets maintained their dignity and superiority among the respected and distinguished persons of a tribe in their behaviour, speech and lifestyle. Poets were unimaginably respected among the nomadic Arabs. Poets were their experts, advisors, decision makers and omniscient. He gave various advice and counsel to the members of the tribe at different times.

Muallaqa Poetry (Hanging Odes) and Muallaqa Poets:

Muallaqa are selected Qasidas or long poems that were hung at the door of the Ka'bah to preserve and immortalize their dignity. "Shabe Muallaqat" is one of the best poetry books compiled about the poetry of the pre-Islamic period in which those Muallaqa poems were expressed. 'Muallaqa' comes from the Arabic word علق. That is, to hang something. Ancient

folklore tells us that the best book of poetry of the Jahili era was Shab-e-Muallaqat. The annual fair was celebrated at Ukaz, between Taif and Nakhla in the Hijaz. The seven poems that won first place in poetry competition were declared the best and hung on the wall of the Ka'bah. The poems were not written in that era. In the power of memory, the strong Arabs preserved them by word of mouth. In the late Umayyad rule, in the middle of the eighth century, a famous poet named Hammad al-Rawiya compiled Sabe Muallaqat<sup>1</sup> separately from other song poems in a book of poems because they were written in golden letters on Egyptian silk during the Jahili period, they are called 'Mu'allaqat' because they are as popular with the Arabs as they are with neck ornaments. According to the critic Naldek, the length of these poems probably influenced the compiler to make them 'seven long poems'

Most of the Muallaqat poems beautifully present various contemporary events as well as the tragedies of poet's life in vivid images. It reflects the poet's adventurous love affairs with women, desert travels and other activities. Sometimes the poet praised his sponsors and sometimes he expressed condemnation of the enemy. Women were the main focus of poetry. And here it is Imru al Qays who was the first Arabic poet to be overwhelmed by the pain of separation when he saw his girlfriend's abandoned home. Moreover, his poetry reflects all the characteristics, on which pre-Islamic poems were based, such as wise statements, proverbs, objections to time, pride in oneself and one's community. His poetry describes strong optimism and adventure etc. The language of his work is very clear, the final rhythm is elegant, joyful and strong.

The common theme of pre-Islamic poetry was the laughter and tears of nomadic life, sorrow and happiness, love and separation, courage in war, patience in danger, revenge, etc. All these qualities are evident in his poetry. His poetry is incomparable in its depth of poetic beauty, mature wisdom and emotion. His poems are characterized by beautiful descriptions of the female body.

Muallaqa is the immortal creation of Imru al Qais. This verse is based on several stories. It contains a total of 81 lines. His Muallaqa is a collection of several love stories. The poem begins with a reminiscence of a gratuitous union with several Bedouin women. The poet compares the physical beauty of his lovers to the limbs of various animals in the desert. About half of his Muallaqa poems describe the female body. He skillfully describes the physical beauty, interests etc. of women. The next 4 (four) lines of his poem describe his competition with the dark night. In the next 18 (eighteen) lines, he describes his horse. It mentions the speed, endurance, patience, courage, etc. of the horse. The last 8 (eight) lines conclude the poem with a description of heavy rain and heavy flooding.

There are various differences of opinion about the poets of Muallaqa. Some say they are seven in number and others say ten. However, the consensus is that the poems of seven were hung in the Ka'bah and that three others can be added to their equal for a total of ten. They are: (1) Imru al Qays (2) Nabiga'al-Zubayani (3) Zuhair bin Abi Salma (4) Al-A'sha (5) Antara bin Shaddad al-Absi (6) Twarfa bin Abd (7) Amr bin Kulsum (8) Haris's bin Hilliza al-Yashkuri (9) Labid bin Rabia (10) Urwa bin Ward. Others Duraid bin al-Samma, Murqash al-Akbar and Umayya bin Abi Chak want to be included among the 'Muallaqa' poets.

These poets can be divided into three categories according to the characteristics of their poetry.

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<sup>1</sup> Reynold A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, P. 103

1. Part I: Imru al Qays, Zuhair bin Abi Salma and Nabiga'al Yubayani.
2. Part II: Al-A'sha Qays, Labid bin Rabi'a and Twarfa bin Abd.
3. Part III: Antara bin Shaddad al-Absi, Urwa bin Ward, Duraid bin Shamma and Muraqqash al-Akbar.

Literary critics want to say differently who is the best of the Muallaqa poets of the Jahili era?

It is said that:

اشعر الشعر اربعة  
زهير اذا رغب. النابغة اذا رهب  
والاعشى اذا طرب. و عنتره اذا غضب وامر القيس اذا ركب

The most poetic of the four Zuhair when he desires, Al-Nabigha when he fears Al-A'sha when he is delighted, Antarah when he is angry, and Imru al-Qays when he rides Their superiority is evident when describing vehicles, such as horses or mules.

Imru al Qays and his Muallaqa Poetry:

Imru al Qays was one of the outstanding muallaqa poets of the pre-Islamic period. He was born in 480 ADS in the Kinda clan of the Yamani dynasty in the province of Najd, Arabia. His full name was Abul Haris Imru al Qays Junduh bin Hujr al-Kindi. He was given the title ملك الضليل because he embraced a misguided life. From childhood, his playful mind left the life of a prince and travelled everywhere. Bad associations in youth lead to bad character. His father threw him out of the house as an abandoned son because he became intoxicated with alcohol, women and love affairs. Suddenly one day, while lying drunk, he heard of the murder of his father and swore that he would not eat wine or meat until he had killed a hundred men of the tribe of Bani Asad. Then he sought refuge with the Roman emperor for the help of other tribes. The poet cannot give up his old habits and falls in love with the king's daughter. The king found out and gave him poisonous clothes that caused the flesh to burst into pieces. He died in 560 ADS at a place called Ankara.

His poetry:

Imru al-Qays grew up in Najd, although he was Yemeni. He grew up among the Banu Asad, in the heart of the pure Arabs. He heard and recited poetry, and his soul yearned to debate poets, so he wrote poetry despite his young age. He had rich words, many strange expressions, and good compositions, and was quick-witted, with a wonderful imagination and eloquent similes. Travel, dangers, and socializing stimulated his genius, so he devised new meanings and followed modern schools. The innovations of his time were reflected in his poetry, so genius, superiority, and prestige were attributed to him. They said he was the first to stand at ruins, weep over homes, and sing of women, likening them to gazelles and deer. He excelled in describing the night and horses, due to his frequent riding and frequent travels. We find in his poetry a complete picture of his life and character. In it, there is the pride of kings, the vagabonds' extravagance, the debauchery of the licentious, the fervour of the rebel, the complaint of the agitated, and the humiliation of the homeless. In short, he was the leader among the poets of pre-Islamic era.

He was the first to introduce new genres and personal experiences into Arabic poetry. He was the first Arabic poet to be overwhelmed by the abandoned homeland of his lover. Later poets followed that style closely. His poetic talent has earned the admiration and respect of all ages and his poetry has inspired deep understanding and hope in the lives of people of

all ages. It has also gained popularity in the pre-Islamic, Umayyad, Abbasid and modern periods.

Imru al Qays's poems dealt with the laughter and tears, happiness and sorrow, love and separation, courage, patience, etc. of Bedouin life. His poems are characterized by youthful emotions and love poems. The body parts of the lover are compared to objects in nature. His rhythmic poetry surpasses other poets. Although his poems are obscene, they are funny characters in real life. His poetry expresses the subtlety of feeling and the speed of the heart through external emotions.

He says:

وقد اغتدى والطير فى وكنا ته  
بمنجرد القيد الاوابد هيكل

That is, I go out early in the morning, when the birds are in the bamboo, Short-haired, fast, sturdy hunting horses.

“Muallaqa” is the immortal creation of Imru al Qays. Novelistic poems are collections of love stories. He revealed the culture of Bedouin life and described the memories of his meeting with beloved and the incomparable physical beauty of lovers. The body parts of the lover are described with metaphors of the limbs of the desert, and his work at night and his horse are extraordinarily praised. He concludes his Muallaqa by drawing pictures of rain and floods among the natural descriptions.<sup>2</sup>

Examples of his poetry:

One of the best things attributed to him is his famous Mu'allaqa, which became a proverb among the people. He composed it about an incident that happened to him with his cousin, Unayzah. Then he went on to describe the night, describe the horse, and mention debauchery and hunting. He said at the beginning of it:

فقا نبك من ذكرى حبيب ومنزل  
بسقط اللوى بين الدخول فحومل<sup>3</sup>

“Stop, oh my friends, let us pause to weep over the remembrance of my beloved. (Here was her abode) on the edge of the sandy desert between Dakhool and Howmal.”

Some of were mourned in the models, and some in love poetry:

أفاطم مهلا بعض هذا التدلل  
وإن كنت قد أز معت هجري فأجمالي  
أغرك مني أن حبك قاتلي  
وأنك مهما تأمري القلب يفعل<sup>4</sup>

O Fatima, leave some of this coquetry; if you had already decided depart me then do it fairly. 'Did it (have I tried to) deceive you, (this) from me, that your love is my killer, and that you **importantly?** command my heart, and it does (what you commanded.)'

: وقال من قصيدة يذكر فيها رحلته مع عمرو بن قمينة إلى قيصر

And he said in a poem in which he mentions his journey with Amr ibn Qami'ah to Caesar:

إذا قلت هذا صاحب قد رضيته  
وقرت به العينان بدلت أخرا  
كذلك جدي لا أصحاب واحداً

<sup>2</sup> Abdul Haleem Nadwi, *Arbi Adab ki Tarikh*, P. 170-183. New Delhi, 1979.

<sup>3</sup> Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat, *Tarikh al-Adab al-Arabi*, p.38.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. P. 39

If I say, "This is a companion I have been pleased with, so is my grandfather. I do not befriend just one." I remembered my righteous family, and you. When Hauran appeared, and the family were before it, the causes of frankincense and love were cut off. My companion wept when he saw the path before him. So, I said to him, "Do not let your eyes cry. We are only striving for a kingdom or we die and are excused."

### Conclusion:

From this brief analysis of *Muallaqa Poetry and Imru al Qays* it is found that he was one of the outstanding Muallaqa poets in the realm of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. He wants to reflect the society in different angles. So far, the rhythmic poetry, and language are concerned, he is certainly unrivalled in the realm of Arabic poetry. His honest description on the history of pre-Islamic Arab and the depiction of social, political and cultural themes are worth noticeable. His poems deal with the laughter and tears, happiness and sorrow, love and separation, courage, patience, etc. of Bedouin life. His poems are characterized by youthful emotions and love poems. The body parts of the lover are compared to objects in nature. His rhythmic poetry surpasses another poet. Although his poems are obscene, they are funny characters in real life. His poetry expresses the subtlety of feeling and the speed of the heart through external emotions.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. P. 39