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Review Article

Examining the Moral Values in Shanfara's Lamiyat al-Arab using Thomas Nagel's Ethical Theory

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Abstract

Introduction: Shanfara is one of the most prominent Arab poetries. His poems, especially his ode Lamiyyeh, along with the poems of other notable pre-Islamic Arab poetries, have a specific literary and sociological reputation. He was living during the Jahili era. However, his writings are full of strong moral principles and foundations, indicating the existence of excellent human thoughts and ideas, as he has mentioned some of the most important values and principles in his poetry. This descriptive-analytical article uses Thomas Nagel's ethical theory to investigate the ethical principles and values presented in Shanfara's Lamiyat al-Arab.

Materials and Methods: This article uses a library and review method. In order to achieve the research objective, we explored the books relating to the subject and searched articles matching the research keywords in ISC and Science Direct databases from 1990 to 2023.

Conclusion: According to Thomas Nagel's theory, Shanfara, as an Arab poet, is a freedom-loving human and a high-minded fighter whose character does not reflect racial or class discrimination and injustices used to rule society. Shanfara, to remove such inhuman customs, chose to fight. In addition, he was courageous, brave, and at the same time, forgiving and generous. He appreciates his friends, and while being able to exercise power and control, he does not prefer himself to others and respects their rights. Evidence of outstanding and valuable human and moral principles is extracted from the Lamiyah al-Arab poem.

Keywords: *Shanfara, Lamiyat al-Arab, ethical values, Thomas Nagel's ethical theory.*

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INTRODUCTION

Shanfara, with the full name of Sabet Bin Aus al-Azdi, is one of the 6th-century poets. As a pre-Islamic Arab poet, his birth date is not known correctly. The history of Arab literature just says that when he was a child, he was captured by invaders and grew up in a slave environment. When he got younger, he escaped from the slaverlholders' clutches and joined the Su'luk group of Arabs. Then, he took revenge on himself and other shaves from the slaverlholders and human exploiters with the help of other Su'luk group members." He was proud of his conquests and considered such behaviors towards unscrupulous men and exploiters as pure chivalry and a reflection of high morals and human values. Shanfara refers to some of these moral principles and values in his long and glorious poem called Lamiyat al-Arab. This research examines and analyzes some of the most important ethical points and principles based on Thomas Nagel's ethical theory.

Before getting started, it is necessary to introduce the ethical philosophy and the famous personalities of this

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field of philosophy, i.e., Thomas Nagel. Moral philosophy is a branch of philosophy discussing fundamental questions about the science of ethics. Rightness and wrongness, knowing good and evil, and recognizing virtues constitute the fundamental issues of ethics. Questions about these fundamental issues form two theoretical domains: meta-ethics and normative ethics. Moral philosophy includes both fields [1]. In other words, the philosophy of ethics is an approach to the science of ethics. One must consider its role, importance, and questions arising from it to understand ethics and morals completely [2]. Thomas Nagel is one of our contemporary thinkers in duty-oriented ethics, who may be considered the leader and the most prominent figure of contemporary ethics. He is an American thinker from Yugoslavia, working as a professor of philosophy and law at New York University. He is famous mainly because of his critique of reductionist explanations of the mind and his achievements in duty-oriented ethics. He defends the possibility of other choices in his philosophy of ethics. He believed ethics is a branch of philosophy that tries to understand a well-known type of valuation, i.e., the ethical evaluation of human character traits, evaluating ethical behaviors, and the ethical evaluation of human institutions [3]. In ethics, he clearly says that we are talking about good and bad people, morally right and wrong actions, just and unjust systems or laws, how things should and should not be, and how we should live [4]. He divides the topic of ethics into two parts: meta-ethics and normative ethics, and he analyzes them philosophically [3, 5].

This descriptive-analytical article investigates the aforementioned ethical principles and values using Thomas Nagel's ethical theory in Shanfara's Lamiyat al-Arab.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This article uses a library and review method. The library method is the most important tool for writing review articles. It is a normal and step-by-step process used to collect information for writing an article. During a library study, the researcher must always go back in depth and manipulate, modify, and rewrite the previous information.

In order to achieve the research objective, we explored the books relating to the subject and searched articles matching the research keywords in ISC and ScienceDirect databases from 1990 to 2023.

DISCUSSION

Overviewing Shanfara's life

Sabit ibn Aus (510 AD) is from the Azd tribe with the nickname of Shanfari. He is a famous poet from Yemen. It is unclear when and where he was born; historians have different opinions. He is of Abyssinian descent from his mother. His mother was a slave girl from Abyssinia, and he inherited her black skin and poorness from her mother's race. Although Shanfara is considered a poet from the Azad tribe, he did not live among that tribe because of their unkindness and oppression. He fled from his tribe and joined the Fahm tribe and grew among them. That is why in his poems describing his battles against Bani Salaman Azdi, he declares that he aims to take revenge on them. Shanfara's high spirit and indomitable character made him an adventurous man, and most of his life was spent in battles, looting, and banditry until the Bani Salaman tribe captured him in one of his raids and then was killed by Usayd ibn Jaber in 510 AD [6, 7].

Shanfara and Arab Su'luks

Su'luk refers to a group of brave and noble Arabs who rebelled against their social life and left their tribe. They lived in deserts and had no shelter except in the heart of the mountains. They robbed and looted the caravans of the rich to help the poor. Some of them were known for their generosity and bravery. Shanfara was a famous warrior of his era who had escaped from the poverty and unkindness of his fellow tribespeople and joined that group. Some famous Su'luk were Tababta Shara, Sulayk ibn Selkah, Urwat ibn Alvard, etc. Since Su'luk used the smooth and unpolluted expanse of the desert for their fights, the purity of their nature is evident in their poems. Their poems are written in a unique atmosphere and are affected by factors they were being faced with. Factors such as leaving the society, going to the plains and deserts, encouraging attack and taking revenge, and choosing nobles and anti-tyranny decreased the chance of their poems' protection compared to the poetry of other Arab poets. Therefore, many of those poems have probably not reached us, and what we today call Su'luk poems are just part of all [7].

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Shanfara and Lamiyat al-Arab

Su'luk were a group of thieves who rushed into battles to satisfy their desires, gain their interests, and protect the needy and helpless against slaveholders. They stole the properties of the rich to benefit both themselves and the poor and helpless people. Finally, they used to sing loud poems describing their daring and brave battles. One of these long epic poems is the famous poem of Lamiyat al-Arab, composed by Shanfara. What we have as Shanfara's book contains some short poems and two long and famous odes, i.e., Taiye, and Lamiyat al-Arab, which in Arabic literature have the same status as Mu'alllqat.

Lamiyat al-Arab is a long and magnificent epic poem. It is a perfect example of poetry in Bedouin period. It is far from urbanism and alcoholism of the Arabs of that time. Shanfara in his magnificent and long Lamiyat al-Arab talks about issues such as displacement, poverty, looting in cold nights, not tolerating humiliation, preferring wild animals to the people of their tribe, contentment, enduring severe hunger, courage, and revenge. This poem contains important Arab sociological components of that time. Shanfara's life is full of discrimination, inequality, and disrespect from his people. His high character, indomitable soul, and restless spirit that had connected him to Su'luk groups prompted him to compose a fluent poem including some of the important principles and foundations of moral and human values.

Here, we search for those principles and foundations in the verses of that famous poem, and we will analyze and examine them based on Thomas Nagel's ethical theory.

Avoiding humiliation and preserving human honor and dignity:

أقيمُوا بَنِي أُمِّي صُدورَ مَطِيِّكُمْ
فَقَد حُمَّتِ الحَاجَاتُ وَ اللَّيْلُ مُقْمِرٌ
وَ فِي الأَرْضِ مَنْأَىً لِلْكَرِيمِ عَنْ الأَذَى
لَعَمْرُكَ مَا فِي الأَرْضِ ضِيْقٌ علىَ إمْرِئٍ
فَإِنِّي إلىَ قَوْمٍ سِوَاكُمْ لَأَمْيَلُ
وَ شُدَّتْ لِطَيَّاتٍ مَطَايَا وَ أَرْحُلُ
وَ فِيهَا لِمَنْ خَافَ القِلىَ مُتَعَزَّلُ
سَرِىَ رَاغِباً أَوْ رَاهِباً وَ هُوَ يَعْقِلُ
[8]

Translation of the above verses:

My mother's children (my fellow tribesmen), lift up your breasts (get ready to travel and leave me), because I have selected another people.

The necessities (i.e., travel tools and supplies) are prepared and the night is moonlit (i.e., suitable for a night trip), and the camel's saddle are packed.

There are distant places on the earth for generous and forgiving people, far away from harm and suffering (by others), for whom are afraid of hatred and enmity (i.e., who seeks peace and tranquility), a cozy place far away.

I swear by your life that the earth is not narrow for someone who uses wisdom and travels willingly or by necessity.

Analyzing the verses: The tribal system in the Bedouin era was subjected to three extreme currents: class distance, racial discrimination, and adherence to strict tribal customs. This system had a deep impact on the thoughts and ideas of some poets of that era, resulting in the emergence and growth of Su'luk in the Arab society of that time. Undoubtedly, the poetry of this category of poets, like other Bedouin poets, depicts the tribal life of the Arab society; with the difference that the Su'luk poet has rebelled against the tribal, economic, and social system that stopped supporting him and neglected his rights and prevented him from everything [9].

The poet's hatred of social and tribal restrictions is evident in his feelings. He is of Abyssinian descent from his mother's side, a slave girl, with a darker skin color, a strange body, and a lowered lip. It is natural for such a guy to be discriminated against, unloved and humiliated by the heads of

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his paternal clan. However, his rebellious spirit hates surrendering to such humiliation and does not tolerate living next to lowly narcissists. Therefore, he asks those people around him who humbly accept any humiliation for the sake of their petty ambitions that to leave him alone as soon as possible, and otherwise, he will himself stay away from them. Following his request to those around him who obeyed humiliation to stay away from him, he says clearly that: if we do not accept enmity and harassment from ill-wishers, we can make a wise decision to leave a humiliating life and choose a corner of this extensive world for a generous and honorable life.
Thomas Nagel in his book entitled The Possibility of Alternative Choice refers to his main argument in his moral theory against moral skepticism. Even though, he believes the refusal of any kind of skepticism (whether epistemological or moral) cannot be proven, but the best method and approach against skepticism is to show the costs of its deep and extensive thought disorders. Nagel claims that his argument on living morally is not justified, but he tries to explain why moral justifications are generally able to convince and motivate us in a rational way [10]. When it comes to answering the question that how moral considerations motivate us, the two positions of internalism and externalism are very important in relation to motivation and ethics.
Introspection guarantees the truth of moral issues of the presence of a motive. In other words, there is an internal relationship between the truth of moral propositions and our motivation to do that work. When it comes to externalism, in addition to the need for our knowledge and understanding of moral propositions, another psychological guarantee that is one of the consequences of a moral act is necessary. However, Nagel is further in favor of internalism in moral action than externalism. Nagel believes that our capacity for expedient and alternative motivation is an indicative of metaphysical concepts. In addition, he believes that we think expediently, that is, the present moment of my life is just one among other moments, and all these moments are equally real. Moreover, he believes that we prefer others, that is, only one person among my other persons with the same reality of all people.

Secrecy, loyalty, intransigence, and altruism (preferring others):

وَ لِي دونَكُمْ أَهْلُونَ: سِيْدٌ عَمَلَّسٌ
وَ أَرْقَطُ زُهْلُولٌ وَ عَرْفَاءُ جَيْأَلُ

هُمُ الأَهْلُ لا مُسْتَوْدَعُ السِّرِّ ذائِعٌ
لَدَيْهِمْ وَ لا الجَانِي بِمَا جَرَّ يُخْذَلُ

وَ كُلٌّ أَبِيٌّ بَاسِلٌ غَيْرَ أَنَّنِي
إذا عَرَضَتْ أُولى الطَّرَائِدِ أَبْسَلُ

وَ إنْ مُدَّتِ الأَيْدِي إلىَ الزَّادِ لَمْ أَكُنْ
بِأَعْجَلِهِمْ إذْ أَجْشَعُ القَوْمِ أَعْجَلُ

وَ مَا ذاكَ إلاّ بَسْطَةٌ عَنْ تَفَضُّلٍ
عَلَيْهِمْ وَ كَانَ الأَفْضَلَ المُتَفَضِّلُ

[8]

Translation of the verses: I have a family and companions other than you, including a sharp wolf, a spotted leopard, and a crested hyena. They (i.e., the new companions of Shanfara) do not reveal my secret that is entrusted to them; the guilty person is not blamed for his criminal behavior in front of them; all [these fellows] are proud and daring, and they are brave when hunting. When they stretch their hands towards the baggage (i.e., prey and hunting), they are not hasty (or tempted). They are generous, merciful, and preferring others over themselves.
Analyzing the verses: unfair distribution of wealth among people of different tribes result in the emergence of two classes, rich and poor, in the tribal system. This follows with two streams of

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belief and thought based on Arab adherence to tribal customs and racial discrimination, pursued things such as skin color, race, and social status - a major part of which depended on being free or a slave. Accordingly, the scope of excesses in the prejudices of Bedouin extends to beyond stubbornness and staring, which result a few people consider even being dependent on the tribe and being under its protection and the obligation to comply with its regulations as a form of humiliation and disgrace. That is why, they prefer living by the predatory animals of the desert over the tribal and social life. Therefore, the life of wolf, hyena and leopard becomes an ideal model for Su'luk and the evolution of their personality so that a Su'luk can stand on its own feet like a hyena or a leopard, without relying on its own kind and independent from his society. The most apparent example of this thinking can be seen in Lamiyat al-Arab, where Shanfara compares himself with the desert beasts not needing a tribe [11]. Another painful reality of the ignorant society was taking away freedom and authority from Su'luk poets, which unintentionally have trapped him in the trap of internal, religious and external factors. These factors caused Shanfara to protest and confront these laws in order to escape from this bitter reality and to achieve social justice and economic equality and to confront and fight against racial discrimination and resistance against tribal customs and traditions. To avoid the tribe and its customs, he distanced himself from the society, took the path of sojourn and was alien to the customs and traditions of the tribe and the social and economic conditions of his community [11]. In these verses, Shanfara starts with mentioning companions with special characteristics, each of them is a symbol of a praised trait, such as: a fierce and sharp wolf, a proud spotted leopard, and a predatory maned hyena. These animals besides the attributes listed by Shanfara have other good qualities too. For example, wolves always live in packs and in their group movement against possible dangers constantly support and help each other even in the face of nature's adversities such as cold, snow, and storms. Shanfara has found companions who admires each of them with the following qualities and tries to be like them or in some cases superior than then. He says: my companions when facing with things are all brave to get those things, but they do not hurry and prefer others to themselves. This shows their generosity and ambition that do not consider themselves ahead of other friends.

One feature of Thomas Nagel's moral theory is altruism or preferring others. Altruism is a principle that acknowledges the reality of other people and equal capacity (equal ability) so that individual sees himself only among other persons. According to Nagel, one of the basic requirements in ethics is the principle of preferring others, which is based on confirming the reality of other people and the ability of each person to consider himself as just one person among many. He believes that if moral requirements become rational requirements, the motivation to comply with those requirements must be a motivation that disregarding them is irrational. Therefore, sensitivity to certain motivational effects like preferring others is considered a condition of rationality. Nagel considers the ethics' basis in human motivation something other than desire that can criticize specific desires that are against practical rational [12]. Nagel looks for a common element in ethics. To do so, he investigated the subject and the moral agent. Nagel refers to altruism as the common element of ethics. What Nagel means by altruism or preferring others is not submissive self-sacrifice, but rather the willingness to act for the benefit of others, without the need for ulterior motives [12]. In fact, he refers to altruism as any behavior whose cause is simply the belief that others should benefit from this behavior or not be harmed by it.

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Nagel's general opinion on the principle of altruism is that one can have direct reasons to increase and protect others' interests. These reasons can be not depending on mediating factors such as personal benefit or feelings of sympathy and benevolence. In fact, he tries proving a kind of altruism that he claims to be rational (i.e., something rooted in practical rational). Is altruism a rational thing? In other words, can someone's benefit in itself provide a reason for the subject to perform that good act? Ethical egoism emphasizes that rationality causes a person only to consider his own interests as the reason for doing works. Of course, it is possible that the realization of a person's interests to be dependent on the realization of others' interests.

Fearlessness, bravery and courage toward the goal and seeking for personal benefit:

وَ إِنِّی کَفَانِی فَقْدَ مَنْ لَیْسَ جَازِیاً بِحُسْنٰی وَ لا فِی قُرْبِهِ مُتَعَلَّلُ

ثَلاثَةُ أَصْحَابٍ فُؤَادٌ مُشَیَّعٌ وَ أَبْیَضُ إِصْلِیتٌ وَ صَفْرَاءُ عَیْطَلُ

وَ لَسْتُ بِمِهْیَافٍ یُعَشِّی سَوَامَهُ مُجَدَّعَةً سُقْبَانُهَا وَ هِیَ بُهَّلُ

وَ لا جُبَّاءِ أَکْهَی مُرِبٍّ بِعِرْسِهِ یُطَالِعُهَا فِی شَأْنِهِ کَیْفَ یَفْعَلُ

وَ لا خَرِقٍ هَیْقٍ کَأَنَّ فُؤَادَهُ یَظَلُّ بِهِ الْمُکَّاءُ یَعْلُو وَ یَسْفَلُ

وَ لا خَلافٍ دارِیَّةٍ مُتَعَزِّلُ یَرُوحُ وَ یَغْدُو داهِناً یَتَکَحَّلُ

وَ لَسْتُ بِعَلٍّ شَرُّهُ دُونَ خَیْرِهِ أَلَفَّ إِذامَا رُعْتَهُ إِهْتَاجَ أَعْزَلُ

وَ لَسْتُ بِمِحْیَارِ الظَّلامِ إِذا إِنْتَحَتْ هُدَیَ الْهَوْجَلِ الْعِسِّیفِ یَهْمَاءُ هَوْجَلُ

[8]

Translating the verses: when it comes to losing people who does not do any good for me, and there is no reason or excuse to keep me close to them; [Acquiring] three friends is enough for me: a brave heart, a bright and sharp [blade], and a long bow [when shooting]. I am not [like] a very thirsty man who closes the udder of his camel with a breastplate so that neither he nor the ostriches can drink from the camel's milk. [But I am a generous person, not a miser]. I am not a timid person to stay at home with my wife and do household chores. I am not a timid and weak person that a little sound can afraid me and make my heart to tremble and beat like a pigeon's heart. I do not stay at home to comb my hair and rub my eyes. I am not someone whose evil (deeds) to succeed his good; [Rather], I am a cheerful person who is neither unarmed nor cowardly. I do not lose my way at night (I travel in nights), and I find my way in deserts lacking water and grass, where all people lose their way.

Analyzing the verses: when it comes to morality and personal interest, Thomas Nagel mentions that one of the most important questions about ethics is that whether morality require us to make dependent our personal interest to the public good or not? And if yes, to what extent? He quotes the opinion of Thomas Hobbes, an English philosopher of the 17th century, in this regard that morality does not conflict with personal interest because morality requirements are actually derived from personal interest [13]. Then, he criticizes this theory as follows: Hobbes argues that some behavioral rules are necessary for living in peace with each other and enjoying the civilization's benefits, because if people do not observe these rules, they must live in an unfortunate, insecure, and violent situation. Everyone in society will benefit from moral rules, such as prohibiting murder, rape, theft, cheating, breach of contract, and so on. Adherence to ethics benefits all the society members. However, this

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does not guarantee that personal adherence to these rules will benefit to every member of the community.

The fact that everyone's adherence benefits to all society member, because a person's behavior cannot cause others to act in the same way. Therefore, collective benefits do not lead necessarily to what personal benefit [13].

Preserving human pride and self-respect and avoiding the blame of others:

وَ أطوِی عَلَی الخَمصِ الحَوایَا کمَا انطَوَت
خُیُوطَةُ مارِیٍّ تُغَارُ وَ تُفتَلُ
وَ أغدو خَمِیصَ البَطنِ لایَستَفِزُّنِی
إلَی الزَّادِ حِرصٌ أو فُؤادٌ مُوَکَّلُ
أُدِیمُ مِطَالَ الجُوعِ حَتَّی أُمِیتَهُ
وَ أضْرِبُ عَنْهُ الذِّکْرَ صَفْحَاً فَأَذْهُلُ
وَ أَسْتَفُّ تُرْبَ الأَرْضِ کَیْ لایَرَی لَهُ
عَلیَّ مِنَ الطَّوْلِ إمْرُؤٌ مُتَطَوِّلُ
وَ لَوْلا إجْتِنَابُ الذَّامِ لَمْ یُلْفِ مَشْرَبٌ
یُعَاشُ بِهِ إلاّ لَدَیَّ وَ مَأکَلُ
وَ لَکِنَّ نَفْساً حُرَّةً لا تُقِیمُ بِی
عَلَی الضَّیْمِ إلاّ رَیْثَمَا أتَحَوَّلُ

[8]

Translating the verses: [Because of extreme hunger] I wrap my body and stomach with ropes and spend the day with hunger and little food. I endure hunger to the extent to get rid of it and amuse myself with things to forget it (hunger). I eat dirt [when I am hungry] and do not request an arrogant person for my bread. If I didn't fear people's blame, I could definitely bring all the drinks and food with me. But my noble soul and high-minded nature is not satisfied with that. Analyzing the verses: Su'luk are divided into different categories based on their external and different characteristics. However, all of them have one characteristic in common, which is maintaining self-respect and avoiding humiliation. Of course, this characteristic is not specific to preserving self-respect and avoiding humiliation. Basically, the Bedouin Arab due to this tendency does not accept it [14]. According to Thomas Nagel's moral theory, the motivational foundation of morality in a person can be something beyond desires and can even measure desires. Nagel intends to find the motivational source of morality in a place other than desire, so that moral motivations can be evaluated and criticized at the most fundamental level. Desire, even if it is universal, is merely an emotion and emotion (and therefore is not sensitive to rational evaluation of whether an agent has it or not). He was always looking for answers to his two most important questions: 1. what kind of world will I end up in? (Theoretical and factual question); 2. How do I live? (A practical question about norms and, in an imprecise interpretation, values). Nagel is against two extremes of extremes in our time; Flows that are either based on reduction or elimination. Currents such as scientism and positivism are based on reduction or elimination; That is, they reduce mental facts to objective facts or remove mental facts altogether. On the other hand, currents such as relativism, subjectivism and constructivism, whose comprehensive aspect is postmodernism, reduce or eliminate objective facts and values to subjective facts and values. He was opposed to the two currents of positivism and postmodernism: the first insists on the objectivity of facts and the second insists on the subjectivity of facts and values. In response to the question "How should I live?", Nagel divides life into three general categories: a) good life (or in other words, happy life); b) Right life (or in other words, moral life); c) Religious spirit (or in other words, cosmic question) [15].

CONCLUSION

The results of this research is as follows:

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1) Shanfara, as an Arab poet, is a free-thinking human and a high-minded fighter, whose natural resistance does not agree the racial, class discriminations, and injustices ruling the society and chooses the path of struggle to remove such inhuman customs. From the point of view of philosophical ethics, such fighting and right-seeking people in every age and generation appear in different human societies. They to revive the collective interest, give up their personal interest at their own will. From the moral point of view of Thomas Nagel in the principle of ethics and moral living, some important moral principles express the rational conditions governing desire and action, which are derived from the fundamental requirement of altruism.

2) Shanfara has the spirit of courage and bravery, and at the same time, he is forgiving and generous, who appreciates his friends and while being able to exert power and control, he does not prefer himself over others and respects their rights. From the point of view of Thomas Nagel's ethics, altruism [alternative] is the main self-based and relying on acknowledging the reality of other persons and equal capacity (equal ability) on the fact that a person considers himself as just one person among other persons.

3) Despite the fact that, according to historians, he lives in an ignorant and primitive society, Shenfari has presented evidence of outstanding and valuable human and moral principles in his ode Lamiya al-Arab, which represents a large part of the people of his time and from Fahawa and The theme of the verses of this long poem of his can be seen in the social spirit of the poet's time, and he can make a detailed and reasonable review of the prevailing situation of that period.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical issues (such as plagiarism, conscious satisfaction,misleading, making and or forging data, publishing or sending to two places, redundancy and etc.) have been fully considered by the writers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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