CHAPTER—III

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During the forty years, beginning with the migration of the Prophet to Medina and the assassination of Hazrat Ali (R.A.) in 661 A.D., Arabic poetry produced at a large scale on different themes is very meaningful. Most of the followers of the new Religion belonged to the generation of the pagan Arabs, who, used to compose poetry on Islamic Ideology. Among the poets who expressed the dominant spirit of the times may be mentioned Abdullah bin Rawaha, Ka‘b bin Malik, Hassan bin Thabit, Ma‘n bin Aus, Ra‘fi bin Huraym, Nabiga al-Ja‘di and Ka‘b bin Zuhyr. They are termed as Mukhadramin poets and the impact of Islamic Ideology was visibly felt in the verses of these poets. These poets were continued to cultivate the poetic art to its highest perfection. Most of the poetry produced during this period was composed in the battle field in praise of mysterious life of the Prophet and his companions. A good deal of poetry of this period may be called mystical, as it continued ideas introduced by Islam. Such as Unity of God, His power, His Majesty and glory, His relation to creature and virtues taught by Prophet.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) neither prohibited nor discouraged the poets, rather he encouraged Hassan bin Thabit to satire the Quraysh of Mecca in response of their satire by telling "Gabriel will help you in composing poetry". Tradition of Prophet is a substantive proof of his interest to listening poetry having wisdom. The tradition is—

 حدثنا عمرو الثناو و ابن أبي عمر. كلاهما عن ابن عبيبة. قال ابن أبي عمر: حدثنا سفيان عن إبراهيم بن ميسرة، عن عمر بن الشريد، عن أبيه قال: ردفت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يومًا، فقال: هل ملك من شعر إمامة ابن أبي الصلت شيئًا؟ قلت: نعم، قال: "هيه" فاشتدت بيتا. فقال "هيه" ثم اشتدت بيتا. فقال "هيه" حتى اشتدت مائة بيت.

[2255] Amr bin Sharid reported what his father said: One day when I was riding behind Allah’s Messenger (PBUH), he said (to me): Do you remember any poetry of Umayya bin Abi al-Salt. I said: yes. He said: say it. I recited a couplet and he said: Go on. I again recited a couplet and he said: Go on. I recited one hundred couplets (of his poetry).
In another Tradition, Abu Hurayrah (R.A.) reported that Prophet said: The truest word by a poet is in this verse of Labid: Behold! Apart from Allah, everything is vain, and Umayya bin Abi al Salt was almost to be a Muslim.²

It may be mentioned here that Arabic mystical poetry attributed to the companion of Prophet is hardly deep enough to be called mystical. But there is neither any separate Diwan on mystical poetry nor is any famous exclusive poet found on the topic. But this does not mean that companion of Prophet never wrote such poetry. Perhaps, it may away from the memory of preserver. However, there are some mystical sayings of Islamic Saints and couplets of mystical poetry composed by Mukhdramin poets as well as by the companions of Prophet will be proper if brought for discussion in this chapter.

Among the Mukhdramin poets, Hassan bin Thabit (563-661, A.D) known as the poet ‘laureate’ of the Prophet, devoted his life in composing poetry in defense of Islam and in praise of Prophet. His devotional poems are full of mystery and Miracle of Prophet which bestowed on him. Hassan explains the Miracles of Prophet, his Night Journey, and Light of his life which is the desire of Allah, who bestow upon Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), the key to unfolding the every mystery. As Hassan said regarding the miraculous light of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), that Allah created Mohammed (PBUH) out of His own light and Allah created the universe for sack of Mohammed (PBUH) which Hassan sang in a lyrical poem:

الله! الله! الله! الله!
الصبح بدأ من طلعته وليلة دجي من وفرته
كنز الكرم مولى نعام هدى عام لشريعته
الشجر نطق الحجر شق الكرم باشرته
جبريل أنا ليلة أسرى والربَّ دع في حجرته
فوسيلة هو شيدنا والعزُ لنا بِإجابته
Allahu! Allahu! Allahu! Allahu!

The morning light is by your countenance, and the splendor of the night by your plaits. The master is a treasurer of grace, The master is a treasurer of mercy. He is the guide of the whole community,
And the one who shows the way of the sacred law.
They came upon the gesture of a finger,
Stones from the Hijaz began to speak.
And the Moon was split in two,
By a single gesture of a finger.
On the night of the Ascension,
The Archangel Gabriel came with tidings of God.
Allah called him to the Heavens,
(And) bestow upon him, the honor of intimacy.³

The above quoted verses have a deep mystical attitude with the creation of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), as Allah says, “I do not created world if would not have created Muhammad”⁴ He is the purpose behind all the creation. It has been earlier discussed that Allah has created first Mohammed (PBUH) out of his own Light and then He created all other things in the world. Therefore, the poet Hassan wants to say that for sack of Muhammad (PBUH), the creation comes into existence. The poet also describes the mystery of Night Journey of Prophet to heaven, which is the information of the celestial archetype of heavenly bodies to the Astronomer of 19th century.

Allah is the Light of sky and earth (Sura Nur-35); in that light Allah himself is visible and makes other things visible. Allah created Muhammad (PBUH) from his own light. Allah created Mohammed (PBUH) in the image of God and Adam is created in the image of Prophet, which the poet exclaimed in his praise just after the demise of Prophet:

“He was the light and brilliance we followed,
He was sight and hearing second only to God;
By Allah, no women has conceived and given birth
To one like the Messenger, the Prophet and Guide of His people
Nor Allah has created among His creatures,
One more faithful to His sojourner or His promise
Than he who was the source of our light.
Blessed in his deeds, just and upright,
O, best of mankind, it was though I wherein a river,
But now, without you I have become lonely in my thirst”⁵
The poet Hassan bin Thabit became infatuated and highly shocked in the death of Prophet. He felt lonely and became thirsty without Prophet. The poet elegies in the demise of Prophet saying that the friend of Allah, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the source of all creation and his Divine Light radiates the whole universe which guided the mankind towards right path reaching to the Real. After Prophet, mystics of Islam endeavor to illuminate the mysterious Divine Light in their heart to see the Reality and they strictly observed the rules and regulations prescribed by Prophet.

Abdullah bin Rawaha bin Thalba al-Ansary (d.629, A.D.) is grandson of Imrul Qais, a poet yearning for heaven and was chosen as secretary of Prophet, took part in the Holy Wars with Prophet Mohammed (PBUH). When Allah revealed the سورة الشعراء and said in regard to poets:

 الشعراء يتبعهم الغازوون- أم تر أنهم في كل واد يبيرون و أنهم يقولون ما لا تفعلون

(It is those straying in evil, which follow them. Seest Thou not that they wander distracted in every valley and that they say what they practice not). Abdullah bin Rawaha frightened and said, “Allah knows that I am a poet too”. But Prophet consoled him saying that except for those who believe and do good works, who remember Allah a lot, and those who make retribution after they oppressed themselves.

Since then Abdullah bin Rawaha tried to be one of those exceptional poets. He fought for Islam with full faith and confidence in the two points of certainty either martyrdom or victory as recites his mystical realization in a beautiful poem addressing to his soul:

“Hey! My soul! I see don’t want heaven,
These desires are empty, my heart is happy,
You are a drop of water, in the water pouch.
Hey Soul! Even if you don’t fight you will die one day
Now the dove of death is near,
Whatever you want, He will give you my soul”.

The above noted verses have the close resemblance with the Qur’anic verse كل نفس ذاته الموت (every man will taste the dose of death). The poet did not want to spoil his life dying a natural death. Therefore, he asked his soul to fight for truth in order to get martyrdom.
Esoteric teaching of Prophet towards his companion felt impact in their thought and realization, which instigated them to know something more lying mystery behind the outward law of Islam. The famous Abu Hurayra remarked, “I learnt two things from Prophet, one I have told you. If I disclose the other my throat will be cut”.

There are some individual mystics who devoted themselves for sake of the religion of Islam. Among them Abu 'Amr Uwais bin Harb bin al-Muradi al-Qarni (594-657, A.D.) is numerous. He was the founder of Uwaisiya order and a contemporary of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), but he could not meet Prophet due to the responsibility to look over of his old mother. He lived in a village called Qaran of Yamen, where he used to herd camels for maintenance livelihood.

Once he saw the incident of شق القمر (split of moon), a Miracle of Prophet. Which he narrated to his teacher, who said that this Miracle is a proof of last Prophet as described in the Torah. Then his teacher came to Mecca and accepted Islam. On returning his teacher, he embraced Islam in the hand of his teacher. He became martyr in the battle of Siffin. Sometimes, Prophet used to enjoy smell coming from Yemen which he expressed to his companion: “There is a man at Qaran, called Uways, who at the Resurrection will intercede for a multitude of my people, as many of the sheep of Rabi'a and Mudar”. Prophet pointing out to ‘Umar (R.A.) and ‘Ali, (R.A.) said to find out the man and to convey my greetings to him, and bid him to pray for my people. Prophet also expressed some identification mark lying on his body. After death of Prophet both the Caliphs find out him and gave the Prophet’s greetings and requested him for blessing the Muslim people. Prophet did not meet him, but spiritual intercourse between them often occurs, for which one knew the other. He says, “Hidden invocation is better than visiting and meeting”, because, Hypocrisy (riya) might enter in the latter two. As he says in an invocation:

O Allah, You created me when I was not worthy of mention;
And You provided for me when I had nothing;
And I wronged my soul and sinned, and I confess my guilt.
If You forgive me, that will in no way diminish Your sovereignty;
And if You punish me, that will in no way argument Your authority
You can find others to punish besides me,
But I can find none to forgive me but You.
Truly You are the most merciful of those who show mercy.  

The Author of Kashful Mahjub narrated that once Harim bin Hayyan visited Uways and saluted him. Response came: peace be upon you o, Harim bin Hayyan. Harim said, “How did you know that I am Harim”? He answered, “My spirit knows thy spirit” and he added more, “Keep watch over thy heart” (عليك بقلبك), which means ‘guard your heart from the thought of others’. This saying has two meanings: Make your heart obedient to God by self mortification and make yourself obedient to your heart.

This saying of first rate Sufi master Uways has the close resemblance with the poem of Abu Sulyman al-Darini (d. 830, A.D.) regarding spiritual eyes through which one may see the Truth. The celebrated verse is--

When the Gnostic’s spiritual eye is opened,
His bodily eye is shut: He sees nothing but Him.

A single saying may expose the one’s own inner feelings and mystical life on which he is subsisted. Such a case happened in the life of four rightly guided Caliphs through them esoteric teachings of Prophet transmitted to the later generations. Now their sayings will be discussed chronologically in bellow:

The first Caliph of Islam Abu Bakr Siddiq, R.A. (632-34, A.D.) is considered to be the head of the Sufi Sheikhs; who adopted a contemplative life. When he prayed at night, he used to recite Qur’an in a low voice, whereas ‘Umar (R.A.) used to recite in loud voice. The Apostle asked Abu Bakr why he did this. Abu Bakr (R.A.) replied, “He with whom I converse will hear”. This saying is the inner expression of the Qur’anic verse (God remain nearer than the Jugular vein, Sura: Qaf). So Allah is aware of every palpitation and every whispering of His servant very well.

In another saying Abu Bakr (R.A.) said, “O God gives me plenty of wealth and make me desirous of renouncing it”. The underlying mystery of this saying is that the abundant of wealth makes the renunciation voluntary and which is more favorable to Allah than the compulsory renunciation which caused due to lack of wealth. Therefore, Abu Bakr (R.A.) is the foremost of all the mankind after Prophet. His Doctrine of voluntary renunciation is strictly followed by the later Sufis. His mystical fragment in the form of praise of Prophet is that concerning the lights which enlighten the world, as Allah praised the Prophet, “O Prophet! Truly We have sent you as a witness, a bearer of
glad tidings and a Warner, as one who invites to Allah by his leave, and as Lamp spreading Light”. This is confined by first Caliph in a beautiful poem:

أمين مصطفي للخير يدعو
كضوء البدر زائه الظلم

A trustworthy chosen one, calling to goodness,
Resembling the light of full moon set off from darkness.

The second Caliph Hazrat Umar, R.A. (634-44, A.D.) said, “Retirement (uzlat) is a means of relieving one’s self of bad company”. Now, retirement may mean turning one’s back on mankind and then entire severance from them. This is called spiritual state which is not connected with external world. Spiritualists may outwardly corporate with mankind but their heart always clings to God. This is called annihilation in God (قنا فی الله) by the later Sufis. Umar (R.A.) further added, “An abode which is founded on affliction can’t possibly be without affliction”. Therefore, Sufis of Islam made him their model in wearing patched frock and they are strict observers of performing rites of religion. Umar (R.A.) praised the Prophet in mystical terms to describe his quality in a beautiful poem:

لا كنت من شبيئ سوى بشر
كنت الماضي للليلة البدر

“If you were anything other than a human being
You would be the light in the night of a full moon set off from darkness”.

Resignation (توكل) or self surrender is a basic quality of Sufis which, frequently happens in the time of calamity or distress. Sufis of Islam depend on God for every action and repudiate the own self which they modeled from the saying of Hazrat Uthman Ghani, R.A. (644-56, A.D.) which he uttered in the day of his Martyr. When the crowd of rebels surrounded his house, he was still reciting holy Qur’an. Hassan bin Ali wanted to defend him and prayed permission for. Uthman (R.A.) replied, “O my cousin go back to thy house and sit there until God shall bring his decree to pass. We don’t want to shed blood”. Such a situation was happened with Prophet Abraham also. When Namrud threw Abraham at fire, Gabriel came to help him. But he refused to take any help alleging that God knows his condition very well. So, he was not ready to seek further help from Allah. Here, Uthman (R.A.) was in Position of Abraham in respect of reliance. Abraham was saved and Uthman (R.A.) was perished. Thus, the destruction is
connected with annihilation (فَتَاة) and salvation is connected with subsistence (بَقا). Therefore, Sufis of Islam follow Uthman (R.A.) in their strong determination or complete faith on Allah in the time of stress.

As far as the mystical poetry composed by companions of Prophet as well as Sufis of Islam, which supply mystical attitude, may be attributed to Hazrat Ali (R.A.); who composed poetry in praise of Prophet and about his surprising Miracles which is full of admonition and wisdom. Thus, he received mental as well as spiritual solace.

Hazrat Ali, R.A. (656-661, A.D.) is considered to be the gateway of esoteric knowledge of Prophet through whom the inner light of Islam radiates to the next generation of Sufis. He composed mystical poetry regarding the nature of soul and its relation with the creator. As the Hadith-e-Qadsi provides to know us that Allah was hidden treasure, He wanted to be known, therefore, He created Adam. So, the interpretation of this Tradition may be such that Allah is known for sack of Adam and Adam is known for sack of Allah. There is a relation between creator and creature, while one is visible and the other is hidden. As Azan pir, a saint of Baghdad came in Assam for preaching Islam sang in a dhikr and Jari (chorus):

\[ Pani more piahat aagni more jarat \]
\[ Khoda rasul lukai aase muminor arat. \]

Water dies in thrust, fire dies in cold,
Allah and His Messenger is hidden,
in the heart of believers.²⁰

Water itself fulfils the need of thirsty and fire fulfils the need of heat. So, it is impossible for water to be caused it thirst and for fire to be caused it cold. Therefore, one should not go here and there being frustrated in search of God. God remain in the heart of man. As Hazrat Ali (R.A.) stated in the following couplets with suitable melody in the form of lyrical poem exclaiming the nature of one’s own self:

دواءك فيك وما تشعر
و داعك منك وما مبتصر
وتزعم أنك جرم صغير
و فيك انطوى العالم الأكبر
وانتم الكتاب المبين
وانتم الوجود و نفس الوجود و فيك الوجود فما يحصر

Thy remedy lies in thee, but thou art not conscious of it,
And thy malady is caused by thee, but thou don't see it.
Thou assumeth thyself to be a small body,
While, Thou encompasseth the whole universe.
Thou art the clear book with letters disclosing mysteries,
Thou art the being—the very being itself,
Thou contained what can't be encompassed.²¹

The above quoted verses of Hazrat Ali, (R.A.) denote a monist interpretation that one who knows himself knows his Lord (من عرف نفسه فقد عرف ربه). Therefore, it may be said that God remains in every heart. Man may perceive God through self realization and emotional love to Him. Knowledge of self is the key to the knowledge of God. It is written in the Qur'an, “We will show them our signs in the world and in themselves, that the truth may be manifested to them”.²² Outward shape of a man can't give real knowledge. The real knowledge lays in the one's own self which may be called as, “Nothing is nearer to us than ourselves”. The above quoted verses of Hazrat Ali (R.A.) induce to know the meaning of soul is that it is Divine command or breathe of God. Soul is part of universal intelligence or it is a part of self existing being. Soul has the capacity to illuminate the names and attributes of God through manifestation in it. Soul contains the knowledge of everything; but it forgets that knowledge in the world of phenomena. Through sincere devotion and secret vision, one may recover the forgotten knowledge; because of the relation between man and God. The above verses of Hazrat 'Ali (R.A.) motivates to know that creature is within the creator. This sense may only be realized through invocation and meditation. The above quoted verses have the resemblance with the Doctrine of wahadat al-wujud (unity of existence), propounded by mystic philosopher and poet Ibn al-‘Arabi which means that all the Divine attributes are united in man which are illuminated in the various forms as the need be in order to fulfill the spiritual desire emanated in him and in man alone does God became fully conscious of Himself.

Huzzat al-Islam Imam al-Ghazzali records in his book Ihya Ulum al-Din, the four lines written by Ali bin Husayn, commonly known as Zain al-Abedin (658-712, A.D.) in which he depicted the esoteric knowledge as the mystery of God which is not open for all who has no capacity to understand the same. Such kind of knowledge should be exchanged with those persons who have the capacity to digest it.
Undoubtedly, the following couplets are the milestone of the mystic poets of the next generation. The voluminous couplets are—

\[
\text{يا رب جو بر علم لو اپوه به لکتل انت سمن معبد الوئا و لا استحل رجال المسلمین دمی پرون اقیح ما یکونه حسننا}
\]

There is much mystic knowledge (lit: essence of knowledge) which, if I disclose it will be said, “You are one of those who worship the Idols”. And man belonging to Muslim community would deem it lawful to shed my blood and they will consider evil what previously thought to be good.\(^{23}\)

The above quoted mystical verses make a distinction between the sacred law of Islam (شرحه) and mystic path (طريقة) or it may be termed as esoteric knowledge and it is lying behind the secret of universe. Statement of Ibn Abbas induces us to know the esoteric branches of knowledge, who is regarded as one of the greatest authority on Qur’anic exegesis once said, “If I were to explain the Qur’anic verse one who made seven skies etc. you would stone me to death”.\(^{24}\)

The mystical verse of Imam Zain al-Abedin and statement of Ibn Abbas have the similar tune prohibiting to disclose the esoteric branch of knowledge openly among the common people which may deviate them from right path, because such kind of knowledge is unthinkable without the knowledge of divinity. Rarest of the rare people of this world may dedicate their life for sack of Divine Love leaving behind the worldly pleasure. A person can’t perceive more than his mental capacity. Likewise, every man has not possessed same mental faculty to understand the divinity. Mental faculty of some person may be God gifted or it may be widen by dedication, devotion and spiritual realization or it may be shorten by negligence and non-utilization of mind in this sphere. Such mental faculty termed by the later Sufis as ‘station of Gnostic’.

The above quoted verses of Zain al-Abedin and Saying of Ibn Abbas (R.A.) clearly pointed out not to disclose the esoteric knowledge to the person who has no mental capacity to grasp it. It is universal truth that, speak to the person according to his capacity of understanding; otherwise the knowledge shall be abused. One the other hand, knowledge earned by constant perseverance should be kept in safe custody and it should transmit to the person of likeminded roaming on the similar path. Perhaps, the martyr Mansur al-Hallaj violated the prohibition as stated above and freely exchanged his mystical experiences or his state of ecstasy among the common people or he could
not control himself and pronounce the controversial saying ‘Ana al-Haqq’ (I am the truth) for which he was hanged to be death. Therefore, Prophet himself did not disclose the esoteric knowledge to all his companions. Only a few of them whom he considers to be able to understand, expressed his secret knowledge. Among them Hazrat Ali (R.A.) was exclusive. Prophet said, “I am the city of knowledge and Ali (R.A.) is gateway of that city”.

It may be summed up that the advent of Islam brought revolutionary changes into the life and ideology of Arabs. During this period lesser importance was given on Arabic Poetry than Pre-Islamic period. There are two main reasons which may be conceived in the mind for this: One is that the literary personality of Arabia galvanized into the interpretations of the miraculous verses of the Holy Qur'an and the warlike companion of the Prophet became infatuated themselves to take part in the holy wars. Secondly, there needed a reasonable period to adjust the feelings of the poets with the newly cultivated religious spirit of Islam to perform a perfect artistic talent. Nevertheless, many prominent poet of Pre-Islamic period converted to Islam and continued to cultivate the poetic art incorporating the Islamic ideology. The main object of the poem of this period was to defend the Islamic faith and ideology. A good deal of poetry of this period is full of mystical ornaments concerning the miraculous teaching of Prophet, his God gifted quality of truthfulness, piety, sagacity, brightness of his wisdom and hidden mystery lying behind his prophecy are elaborately portrayed. The esoteric spirit of Qur’anic verses induced a number of poets to penetrate into the deep ocean of Islamic knowledge and they translated their emotions in the form of poetry and thereby enriched the treasury of mystical poetry in Arabic produced in this period.
References:

2. Ibid, p. 8
6. Sura xxvi, 224, 26
13. Ibid, p.71
14. Q: 33: 45-46
17. Ibid, p.73
20. Azan Fakir was a Sufi Poet, Muslim preacher and saint of 17th century. His real name was Shah Milan, migrated from Baghdad and settled in Sivsagar area of Assam. He is particularly known for dhikr and Zari (Qawali).
22. Field, Claud (Trans.): Al-Ghazzali’s Alchemy of Happiness, p. 15, Kitab Bhavan, New Delhi, Reprinted-2004

24 Ibid, p. 11