CHAPTER—II

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As already mentioned in the previous chapter that Pre-Islamic Arabic poetry is the mirror of intellectual and social conditions of the Arabs. They expressed their communal sentiments, opinions, tribal excitements, feelings of infatuated love to Bedouin women etc. through poetry. It is popularly called Diwan al-Arab (الشعر ديوان العرب), that is to say a kind of Register, in which their traditions, history, contemporary morality, descriptions of battle etc. are preserved. The rise of poet among the Pre-Islamic Arabia was a matter of zeal and celebration. Every tribe became proud of his own poet and congratulated them in the occasion of annual function at the fair of ‘Ukaz (سوق المكاط). Friendly tribes also attend the occasion for honoring them, because, a poet in the heathen Arab was the source for keeping records of their noble deeds, cultural activities, reputation and so on.

The origin of Arabic poetry is traditionally traced back to the rhymed prose (سجع). This form of expression was adopted by the Pre-Islamic Arab seers to distinguish it from the common speech and to make their invocations, divination and forecast more resonance, rhythmic, awe-inspiring, and even enigmatic.¹ From the ‘saj’ developed the rajaz (رجز); from the rajaz, other forms of poetry. The rajaz is thus the oldest and simplest poetic form.²

1. Themes of Pre-Islamic Arabic poetry

Pre-Islamic poetry is realistic one. It grew in natural environment and with spontaneity. There are some uncommon words and obscure expressions in Pre-Islamic poetry, which are often hard to understand. However, Arabic poetry composed in later period owes its charms, musical capacity of its language and rhythmic melody to Pre-Islamic poetry. Pre-Islamic poetry excels in literary art, though it is devoid of deep philosophical thinking. It gives true and a clear picture of social, moral and intellectual life of the Arabs.

The themes of Pre-Islamic poetry were divergent with the diversion of mood and attitudes of the Pre-Islamic Arab seers. However, bulk of Pre-Islamic poetry represents some popular themes. They are-
1. Glorification (فخر)
2. Bravery (حماسة)
3. Ghazal feminine love (غزل)
4. Praise (مجد)
5. Elegy (زهاء)
6. Satire (هجاء)
7. Description and (وصف) and
8. Mystical theme regarding unity of God, belief in predestination, secret of creation, the Day of Judgment etc.

Here, in the following pages discussion will be made on the mystical theme of Arabic poetry composed by Pre-Islamic Arabian Poets. Pre-Islamic nomad poets paid less interest on mystical poetry, because most of the poets in this period were professional. Their poetic compositions were depended on monetary reward of kings. Yet, there were some independent poets, who were not under the control of royal command. They pay some attention to the poetry of ‘زهودية’ (piety), they seldom composed a versed purely mystical tune. There is no any Diwan found on Sufi poetry composed during Pre-Islamic period. Biographical dictionaries are of some help to the study on Sufi poetry; that need deep study on the histories of Sufism to find out the plea of mystical thought in the poetry composed by Arabian nomad bards.

2. Source of mystical poetry in Pre-Islamic period

The earliest Arabic poetry was commonly secular. Even minor allusion to Al-Mighty Allah (الله) and in the Day of Judgment and some other quasi-mystical elements are defusing in the Anthologies of Pre-Islamic Arabic poetry compiled during Umayyad and Abbasid period. These are –

1. The Muallaqat (المعلقات): Compiled by Hammad al-Rawiya: (713-72, A.D.)
2. The Mufaddaliyyat (المفضلية): Compiled by Mufaddal al Dabbi (d.786, A.D.)
3. The Hamasa of Abu Tammam (هامسة لأبي تمام): Compiled by Abu Tammam Habib bin Aus (d.850, A.D.)
4. The Hamasa of Buhtari (هامسة بختري): Compiled by Buhtary (d.897, A.D.).
5. The Jamharat al-Asha’ri al-Arab (الجمهرة الأشعار العرب): Compiled by Abu Zayd Mohammed al-Qurashi (d.1000,A.D.) and
3. Some mystic poets in Pre-Islamic period

It has already been discussed that mystical sense is outcome of religion. The religion of Abraham was prevailing among the Pre-Islamic Arabs. Some of the poets of this period were colored with the principles of this religion. Thus, the religious poets expressed the feelings of spiritual elevation through their poetry. Some of them wore woolen garment imitating the custom of Christian monks.

Among them Abid bin al-Abras (d.554, A.D.) was particular. He was senior contemporary of all the Muallaqat poets and had some rival poetic exchange with Imrul Qais. He composed a considerable number of verses playing with secrets of universe and his belief in One God, the source of all good and evil.

There is some plea of mystical thought in the Pre-Islamic prose writings in the form of oration (خطبة). Quss bin Sai’d al-Iyadi (d.600, A.D.) was a Christian bishop of Pre-Islamic Najran and a famous preacher and orator. He believed in one God and called the peoples towards the path of God by his attractive lecture. He delivered speech addressing to the people of Mecca during pilgrimage season at ‘Ukaz’; stating that God has a religion which is dear to Him and which is better than the one you have been following. It is said to have much impressed the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), who was then a Young man:

أيها الناس اسمعوا، وأذا وعيمتم فاتقوا أنه من عاش مات و من مات فات وكل ما هو أت: مطر و بياذ و أرزاق و أقوات واباء..................اقسم قس بالله قسم بالله أو لا حالتنا أن نحن نحن هو أحب الله من دينكم الذي انتم عليه.

"O people listen and consider, remember and benefit by what I say to you. He who lives is bound to die and he who misses all opportunity to reform himself. Everything destined to come must come—rain and plants, food and provision, fathers and mothers, living and dead, union and separation............. Quss takes a true oath that God has a religion which is dear to Him and which is better than the one you have been following".

Love is essence of God and basic foundation of universe which Quss bin Sai’da has depicted in his poem that owes a pure mystical note on love for creature:

وايا للقلب من عواه ادكار وليل القبل نهار
His love has excited my heart to recollect Him.
And the nights followed by day,
The firm and lofty mountains,
The oceans full of waters,
The stars incited by nightly moon,
And daily revolving sun,
Whatever I have mentioned indicates towards God,
All read the rightly guided and believing souls to think of God.6

Here, in view of the above quoted verses it may assume that love is the regulator of Sufi theophany. Everything in this world including man, animal, and nature are sing the praise of God. The poem has the close resemblance with the Qur’anic verse (stars and trees are sung the praise of God). This is the indication which excites the emotion of believers to feel in deep.

Religious thinker as well as poets of Pre-Islamic period, Waraq bin Nawfal of Quraysh and Zayad bin Amr are known as the Hanifs, i.e. followers of the religion of Abraham, rejected idolatry and left their homes in search of true knowledge and spiritual solace. Waraq bin Nawfal called his audiences to worship their only creator. He says,

I have advised the people and told them,
I am the Warner, so no one deceive you.
Do not worship other than your creator.
If you are called upon (to worship other than God), then you say; there is barrier between us.7

He expresses his feelings of wonder regarding the attributes and mercy of God on His creature. His perfect faith in God embellished in a beautiful melody:
Man may cause the mercy of his Lord,  
Even though, he is under the ground of seventy valleys.  
I believe in a God, who grants my prayer,  
And put my faith in deities who can never hear the call.

_Nabigha al-Dhubyani_ (d.604, A.D.) belongs to a noble family of the _banu Dhubyn_. He was called _al-Nabigha_ for his outstanding position as a perfect man and as a renowned poet. The second Caliph 'Umar, who is admired him for a number of good verses. It is reported to have called him the best poet of _Ghatfan_ tribe. A number of verses, in which he fabricated the feeling of renunciation and his full dependence on Almighty God, which bears a witness of mystical note as follows:

\[
\text{I swear By God, the most reliable witness (that I am innocent), Thus leaving no room for you to suspect me.
I am not going to set apart a portion of my food for tomorrow (I am certain) I shall have a fresh quota next day.}
\]

The above quoted verse of _Nabigha_ is the true picture of mystical thinking that represents in the life of every mystic. As, _Uwais al-Qarni_ says, “I wanted greatness, I found it in poverty”. Somebody offered _al-Qarni_ some coins. He refused to accept them saying that he has two dirhams. The donor said, “But how long will that trifling sum serve you?” He replied, “Assure me that I shall of a necessity live longer than this moment and I shall accept your gift”. The man became silent. Therefore, true mystical knowledge lies in the life of poverty. A person having abundant of wealth gives up them and avoids himself from worldly pleasure, may reach the shore of reality.

_Hatim al-Tai_ (d.605, A.D.) is one of the popular figures in the Arab history. His name and fame spread throughout the Islamic world as a symbol of generosity, hospitality, and gallantry. _Ibn al- 'Arabi_ says, “His generosity has a close affinity to his poetry”. His poetry has little appeal of mystical feelings which is burst forth from his act of generosity. He completely depended on God with utmost submission. In respect of his wealth he says,
When portion of my wealth is in the possession of its deserving relative. By praise of Allah, then I feel smooth.

The themes of his poetry have a resemblance with the instruction of the Holy Qur'an regarding feeding to hunger, helping to poor and needy people. He paid ransom for the captive person and his helping hand towards distress person became passion for him, without which, life seemed meaningless. His poetry is the reflection of his virtuous acts. He emphasized on good reputation in life and after death. When daughter of Hatim namely, Saffana became prisoner in the battle of Badr, praying for release, she stood before Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and stated the qualities of her father. Listening to her, Prophet impressed and said that these are the qualities of true believers and released her without ransom. His act of generosity and alms giving to the poor is a quality of a Sufi, whose basic principle is ‘لا مَلَقَى عَنْدِي’ (nothing is in my hand) and this quality is mostly found in the life of Hatim and which is reflected in his poetry.

Pre-Islamic poets did not confine themselves in praise of their own patron and describing of feminine beauty. Some of them were independent poets who expressed their own experiences and feelings of reality, unity of God and the Day of Judgment through their poetry. As Zuhyr bin Abi Salma (d.607, A.D.) declares in the following verse of his Mu'allga:

لا تكتمنَّ الله ما في صدركم
ليخفى و مهما يكتم الله يعلم
يؤخر فيضع في كتاب فيخر
ليوم الحساب أو يعجل فيلل

Don’t hide from Allah, which is in your heart; how long it will be hidden. Whatever you hide from Allah, He knows it.

(In respect of punishment for revocation of Agreement) It will be late then it will be kept in a book of accounts and then it will be preserved for the Day of Judgment or it will be hastened to inflict punishment (in this World).

Here, the poet expresses his complete faith on God and indicates towards the relation of man and God. He states that innermost thinking of man is also in the knowledge of God. His complete reliance on God regarding the violation of social norms and break forth of promise referred to God to take action on the Day of Judgment is a testimony of his faith on One God.

In another verse of his Mu'allga, he expresses his philosophical thought about ever lastingness of soul, which will not die even after the death of body. As he says,
I find death moving at random like a blind camel; it kills those whom it strikes, whereas those whom it misses live for long.

Tongue of youth is his half and another half is his heart; the rest is nothing but flesh and blood.

This idea about soul, described in the above quoted verses is a great significance for the people of contemporary age. Though, the above noted idea of soul has no more significance in regard to mystical poetry of Abbasid period, nevertheless it is a preliminary concept of soul hardly found in the poetry of barber age. His idea of soul has a little resembles with the great mystical philosopher Ibn al-'Arabi who recited in a verse just before his death:

“A bird I am: this body was my case.
But I have flown leaving it as a token”.

Umayya bin Abi al-Salat (d.624, A.D.) was a town poet of Taif. He is the foremost among the Pre-Islamic religious poets and has composed maximum number of verses in praise and glory of God. He had an inquisitive mind and keenly interested in religious inquiry. He came in contact with the monks and priests of Syria and listens to their discourses and exchanged views with them. He used to read some revealed books, after that he hated idols and believed in One God. He shunned wine and worldly pleasure and wore coarse dress of camel’s hair or goat’s hair. His idea about God, life after death and human conduct closely resembles with that of the Qur’an as is shown by his poetry. His poetry is charged with a deep religious thinking’s and earnest consciousness of the glory, might and wisdom of God. His poetry scattered in many Arabic books and the complier of the al Shu’ara al- Nasaraniyya has collected over two hundred and fifty verses of the poet. A majority of them, in which he glorified God and describes His majesty, might, wisdom and His creation. Which, in their systematize behavior bear witness to the existence, such as the sun, the moon, the day and the night, the wind and the cloud, the birds and the trees. His anxiousness of the secret of universe expressed in a beautiful lyric:

الله العالمين وكل عرض وربّ الراسيات من الجبال
بناها وابتنت سبعاً شدادة بلا عمداً بيرين ولا رجال
God of worlds and of every place,
And Lord of High Mountains,
He builds them (mountain) and constructed seven strong holds (skies)
Without any visible pillar or foundation
He leveled and decorated it
With the shining sun and the crescent.

The imagery idea of above quoted poem has the close connection with the Qur'anic verse and Tradition of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH). Here, the poet fabricated his knowledge of cosmos stating that the light of sun is the main source of creation of this universe and existence of universe depends on the light of sun, which is the prime light for existence in Sufi philosophy. A majority of his verse deal with the punishment of the sinners in the hell, while the virtuous will enjoy the pleasure of paradise. His poems contain the descriptions about the throne of God, His veils of light and the obedient Angeles are observing His glory prostrating before Him:

A king seated on the throne of sky .He is watchful. The faces submit before His glory and fully prostrated before Him. He is veiled and surrounded by lamination rivulets of light are shining around Him. No eye is raised to glance at Him. Creatures are behind the curtain of light. The feet of angels are placed under His throne. If God were not there, they would have been weary and perplexed. The angels are standing ready to perform their duties, trembling due to extreme fear.\textsuperscript{16}

Here, the poet gives a perfect picture of imaginal world. His vision of imaginal world has the close resemblance with mystical philosophy that this world is outward manifestation of Hidden Treasure. This world is shadow of Reality. His vision of heavenly bodies and belief on angels are that of the Qur’anic truth. His philosophy on the nature of God is later harmonized by the later Sufis with Qur’an and Tradition of
Prophet also. The above quoted verses give a summery that Allah is Light of the lights; He is self illuminating Light and no eye able to see Him. His philosophy has the close resemblance with the school of illuminative philosophy. The following lines of the Sufi sheik al-Alawi have the close relevance with the poem of Umayya bin Abi al-Salt regarding the Divine Essence:

It is hidden in its own
Outward manifestation wherein it doth appear;
As veil after veil made to cover its glory.\(^{17}\)

He was monist and emphatically declared the unity of God in his poem. The ultimate goal of Sufi is to increase belief in One God by devotional prayer and emotional love to unite with Him. These kinds of ideas are found in the poem of Umayya bin Abi al-Salt. Alleging the true mystical note on the unity of God he says—

\[\text{كل دين يوم القيامة عند الله إلا دين الحنيفية زور}^{18}\]

Every religion is false before Allah in the Day of Judgment except the true Islamic religion.

Here, the poet advocated for monism. Unity of God is an important Sufi doctrine developed by later Sufi community.

His poetry is full of spiritual content which made to remind the philosophy of Imam Ghazzali regarding the nature (ذات) of Allah. That Allah is a light, the light in a lamp and the lamp is in a niche which radiates its light through the universe for which He sees all the creatures. On the other hand His creatures are behind the seventy thousand veils of light and darkness. The creatures are unable to see Him by their physical eyes, but they may perceive His appearance on the Throne through spiritual eyes. Philosophy of Umayya bin Abi al-Salt contained in the above quoted poem may be called perfect mystical.

\[\text{Abu Basir Maimun bin Qayas bin Jindal al-A'sha} \text{ (d.629 A.D.) was a Mu'allaqat poet. Though, he was a professional poet in Pre-Islamic period but he appears acquainted with the fundamentals of Christianity and Judaism. He believed on the powerful God and on the Day of Judgment. In one of his poems, he pleads for the worship of a single God and advocates a code of conduct which closely resembles that one advocated by the Qur'an. He composed a fine ode in praise of Prophet better than Qasida al-Burda of kaa'b bin zuhyr and expected a handsome reward for it from}\]
Prophet, but he was restrained from reaching to him by Quraysh. He says in Qasida al-Madahiya in the praise of Prophet:

Qafflati la ertih laha min kallata
wala min jahi haddi takali Mohammed
mati ma tanaخ عند باب ابن هاشم تراجي و تلقى من فوضله ندى
نبى يرى ما لا يرون و ذكره
اغارلمرى في البلاد وأنجى

Perhaps, I would not have elogy for it being weary and ardent lover if would not have met Mohammed.

Whenever being hopeful, I received his excellent learning,

The door of Ibn Hashim became proud.

Prophet sees in the city which you cannot see
and I deeply penetrated his remembrance in my life and supported (him).

Here, the poet describes the wonder of prophecy being motivated by his learning and acknowledged him as a true guide. Being dominated by pagan spirit he believed the learning of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and placed him in his heart and thus the poet felt spiritual solace.

Nabiga al-ja‘di (d.670, A.D.), his full name is Qays bin ‘Abd Allah bin Udas bin Rabi’a al-Ja’di was a professional poet of Pre-Islamic period. He wrote for monetary reward from the princesses. Nevertheless, he embellished his religious feelings in a small number of poems declaring the unity of God, His power and majesty, His glory and attributes. He glorified the manifestation of attributes of God, which is penetrating into the veil of the outward manifestation of the universe, bears a true picture of mystical feelings that lies in his poem:

الحمد لله لا شريك له
المولى الليل في النهار و في الليل نهارا يفرج انظلها

All praises are due to Allah who has no partner
And anyone who does not proclaim this, wrongs only for himself.
He turns the day into night
And night into day dispelling darkness.20

Here, the poet proclaims the unity of God, who is the ultimate cause of creation and who, is the all and nothing exists except Him. He also describes the motion of heavenly bodies and its functions.
Abu al-Qayas sirma bin Abi Anas, a monotheist of Medina, who led an ascetic life before Islam and worshiped God in his cell. He expressed his religious feelings in a sweet poem which gives a mystical note like the later Sufis who; held that there are differences in the opinions and dogmas among the various religious leaders, Apostles, Avatars as well as Prophets and there are various modes and ways for prayer to God, but the aim of all is the same, that is to satisfy God, the One Real.

For Him the Jews sing in their synagogues and the Christians became deacons (to serve Him) and stand in worship before their Lord at every *x'mas* and in all congratulations. The monk is imprisons himself in a cell to seek his pleasure. You see him suffering miseries while there was a time when he enjoyed a life of pleasure.

The poet declares the absolute unity of God. The content of above quoted verses is that manifestation of God is illuminated in every form whatever and wherever it may be, it depends on the faith of believers in which form he accepts. For, mystic’s God has no definite form; He is equal for all religion and religion of love is the essence of all religion. Therefore, worship of God depends on love which knows no form. Thus, the above quoted verses have supplied perfect mystical picture of the nature of God regarding His relation to man.

The content of the above mentioned verses have the close affinity with thinking of Ibn al-'Arabi. He said that the popular adoration of the Prophet and the saints are nothing, but one of the many forms of belief in which God reveals Himself. The true mystic finds Him in all religions, as he says:

"My heart is capable of every form:
A cloister for the monks, a fane for idols,
A pasture for gazelles, the votary’s ka'ba,
The tables of the torah, the Qur'an.
Love is the faith I hold: Where ever turn
His camel, still the one true faith is mine."
Abu Aqil Labid bin Rabi'a (560-661 A.D.) was a noted Pre-Islamic poet. He embraced Islam with a group of his tribe men. He is the first poet of mu'allqa who memorized the holy Qur'an and composed poem on a definite mystical attitude. His diwan contains dozens of verses which testify his faith in a decent orderly and moral life, his belief in predestination, God almighty and the Day of Judgment. The Prophet is reported to have praised this verse by saying it was the truest saying of Arabs. The celebrated verse is:

لا كل شيء ماخلا الله باطل و كل نعم لا محالة زائل

Behold, everything is unreal save God (who is the sole existence) and no doubt every pleasure is just a passing shadow.

The above quoted verse has the connection with the Qur'anic verse, "Beware! Everything is perishable, and your Lord who is glorious and noble is everlasting" (كل من عليها فان ويبقى وجه ربك ذو الجلال والكريم). The verse shows that the world is phantom or a shadow of a Reality. It is manifestation of Hidden Treasure. This is the key of Sufi theophany. The above line has cast a glance on the Sufi doctrine 'Unity of being' by suggesting that the world is merely an outward aspect of that which in its inward aspect is God. While every phenomenon reveals some attributes of reality, man is the microcosm in which all the Divine attributes are united, and in man alone does God became fully conscious of Himself.

The above quoted Doctrine has the close connection with the Hindu Doctrine of non duality known as Advaita Vedanta, which states that there is only one self who is reflected by manifestation into those multiplicities of beings, persons, and creatures and in existence, and this Divine self: Allah, God, the Real, the absolute, is the hidden identity of all. Therefore, the following verses of Sankara (d.820, A.D.) considered being the summery of the ideas of Vedanta, which has the same mystical tune of the verse of Labeed. The celebrated verse is:

"Brahma is true, the world is false,
The soul is Brahma and nothing else."

From the above discussion it has become clear that the mystical theme in Arabic poetry existed before Islam without the name mysticism. The Religion of Abraham more or less was prevailing among the Pre-Islamic Arabia and some poets of that time designed their thinking with the principles of the religion of Abraham, like
Waraqa bin Naufal, 'Abid bin al-‘Abrās, and Umayya bin Abi al-Salt. They are called ‘Hanifs’, the followers of the religion of Abraham. They left idolatry, and believed in One God and they called the people towards worship of single God. The idea about unity of God, relation of God with man, immortality of soul, manifestation of God, nature of God, phantom nature of universe and other elements of mystical philosophy got expression some of the Pre-Islamic Arabic poetry as already quoted above. Therefore, it may be said that mystical sense in Arabic poetry starts from Pre-Islamic period and continued to the advent of Islam.

References:

1. Fariq, K. A.: History of Arabic Literature, p. 39, Indian institute of Islamic Studies, Delhi-1972
2. Ibid, p. 39
5. Fariq, K. A.: History of Arabic Literature, pp. 35, 36, Indian institute of Islamic Studies, Delhi-1972
12. Mua’lllaqa of Zuhyr bin Abi Salma, verse no. 27, 28.
13. Ibid, verse no. 49,62