

Abul Fath Busti: A Poet Philosopher

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Abstract

Abul Fath Busti, a Ghazvaniv poet of Abbasid era promoted philosophical thoughts in his poetry. He dealt with The Creator, the human being, life, death, spirit, soul, youth and social attitudes etc. He encouraged man to become a useful part of the society by discarding laziness, ignorance and luxurious living style. He not only infused the spirit of hope in his own age but its light is glowing unto the present age.

Once Hazrat Omer asked the people to tell him about the verses composed by their greatest poet. Knowing nothing they said: "Who is he?" He replied "Zuhair". He further explained his opinion saying that Zuhair avoided uttering confused concepts, strange thoughts and attributed genuine qualities to the person he had lauded.(1)

These features of wisdom of pre-Islamic period were used to be followed after the dawn of Islam. Poets like Mutanabbi (d. 965 A.D) and Abu Tamman (d. 846 A.D) established reputation in this sphere of poetry. Both had to face hardships and sufferings in their

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lives and kept traveling for several years. This experience empowered them with immense patience, endurance, and analytical approach. Mutanabbi learnt that a man could not find every thing in his life while he says:

ما كل ما يتمنى المرء يدركه
تأتى الرياح بما لا تشتهي السفن (2)

Man does not achieve all that he wishes to have. Some times, air blows in such a way as disliked by the ships.

Abu Tammam has taught to be patient and determined when one has to face obstacles found during his struggle for high goals. He says:

إذا انخاض على الدهر كلكته
قراه صبراً و عنما منى الكرم (3)

When the world makes its chest to kneel down on me, then it is hosted by me generously alongwith patience and determination.

The second half of the 10th century and the first half of the 11th century made marvelous developments in the spheres of literature and mysticism/sufism. Especially sufism spread to the extend that even poetry could not escape from its effects, particularly from wisdom. Sufi poets expressed their views about life, its joys and sorrows, careful ways of leading it, importance of the time and spirit etc. in symbolic language. They treated death like a bridge connecting friends to one another.

Abul Fath Ali bin Hussain Busti has been considered such a poet

who has colored his poetry with wisdom keeping his sufi spirit in its background.

Abul Fath was born in the year 330 A.H. approximately. He belonged to the city of Bust (Sijistan). Now a days, its ruins are found on Qandhar-Hirat road alongside river Helmand in the south Afghanistan. Bust was once a populated, developed and prosperous city. It was a halting place between Baghdad and Sindh. In 976, Ghazanvid ruler Subuktagin conquered it. After him, his decendants set up a contonment here. Although it was famous for its fertile lands and lovely gardens yet it was a renoued centre of knowledge and literature. Bust has pride in producing one of the greatest scholars of Islam Abu Hatim Muhammad bin Hiyyan (d. 965 A.D) who made scholastic achievements in Hadith, Fiqh, medical science and astronomy. (4)

Abul Fath was an apostel of Ibn-i-Hiyyan. He learned from him Hadith, Fiqh and literature. He was follower of Imam Sha'fai's school of fiqh. He also wrote some panegyricl poems for Imam Sha'fai. (5)

In his youth, he was appointed as secretary of Bai Toz, the Chief of Bust. When Subuktagin of Ghazna conquered the territory of Bust, Abul Fateh made his affiliation to Subuktagin. He kept rendering his services to him till the accession of Sultan Mehmud Ghaznavi to throne. He was again allowed to maintain his office. He made official record of Sultan's conquests which was appreciated very much. Yet,

he was a victim of vicissitudes and exiled to Transoxiana, the land of Turks. During this poor condition, he passed away in 1010 or 1011 A.D. (6)

The writer, poet and historian Abu Mansur al-Thalabi was his contemporary and companion who wrote his biography in his famous encyclopedic work "Yatimatu Al-Dahr Fi Mahasin-i-Ahl al-Asar". Al-Thalabi has praised him too much giving examples of his poetry and prose. Before embarking upon his poetry, here are given some specimen of his beautiful and marvelous prose which is rich in analogy:

“عادات السادات، سادات العادات”

The Customs of lords are lords of the customs.

“الفهم شعاع العقل”

Comprehension is the ray of intelligence

“الانصاف، احسن الاوصاف”

Justice is the prettiest character

“اذا بقى ما فاتك، فلا تأس على ما فاتك”

When there is something which may feed you, then, there is no need to repent on what is lost by you.

“من حسنت اطرافه، حسنت اوصافه” (7)

If one's features became good, then his characteristics also became good.

Abul Fath Busti wrote all types of poetry following the traditions

of earlier poets in context with his own personality, environment circumstances and civilization of his time. He wrote pangyrical and satirical poems. His poetic skills are shown in vainglorious as well as amorous poems. Scolding, wisdom, proverbs, advises etc are also main features of his poetry. He has colored his rhetorical art with wisdom so skilfully that this objective has become a dominant characteristic of most of his work. (8)

Here are elaborated Busti's said features in the following poetical extracts. Abul Fath said:

نذوبُ ولكن لا أتوب
وما غاب من عمرنا لا يوب
ونرجو البقاء منى باطلا
وكيف البقاء لجسم يذوب
نضيف الزمان بأعمارنا
وضيف الزمان أكل شروب (9)

We melt but we don't vow to sin further. The part of our age which has disappeared will not return. We want to have an eternity which is a wrong illusion. Eternity is not destined for a melting body. We are entertaining time with our ages but that guest is extreme fond of drinking and eating (of souls).

These verses indicates the mastery of the poet over using unique metaphor of ice which keeps on melting and human life is also acting in the same manner. Time is a guest who is never satisfied with

whatever he is served, even if human lives are served to it.

Abul Fath has guided how to lead a balanced life. He has maintained to remain grateful to Allah as He bestows upon us His blessings. He assimilates Allah's blessing to an alert woman who spends a long period of her life with somebody when she is treated very well. He describes:

اذا جدد الرحمن عندك نعمة
فجدد لها شكر اليونسك الشكر
واحسن قراها تستقر فانها
نوار ومن اضدادها الجحد والكفر (10)

When The Most Beneficent renews His blessings at your side, then you also must renew your gratefulness so that He would attribute to you the quality of thankfulness. You must deal with it very well so that it wishes to stay with you because it is (like) a self-conceited woman who opposes thanklessness and ungratitude.

The civilization in Abul Fath's age had reached to its peak. People had adopted luxurious living styles. Recreation had taken the shape of obscenity and vagabondness. This situation hurt sensitives of the society who invited fellow human beings to reform their behaviours. Abul Fath would also be seen playing the role of a reformer when he said:

اذ طالبتك النفس يوماً بحاجة
 وكان عليها للقبیح طریق
 فدعها وخالف ما هويت انما
 هو اک عدو والخلاف صديق (11)

If someday your 'self' invites you to accomplish some necessity with the help of an unfair mean, then, withdraw from that opposing her (self's) desire because desire is your enemy and avoiding it is friendly.

Zuhurud Din Ahmad has presented a narration regarding a prayer of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) in the context of comparative views of a sufi and an early follower of the Prophet about suspending or fulfilling desires. The prayer shows a moderate attitude in the perspective of what we had listned from Abul Fath. Thus the Prophet is reported to have prayed: "O God if the thing I desire is according to Thy will then make it a blessing for me, but if it is agaisnt Thy will, then turn this thing out of my heart and my heart from it". (12)

Abul Fath has a heart which is full of love and sympathy for all who indulge in a life full of joy and forget rainy days. He intends to awake them by saying:

ياناعما بسرور عيش زائل
 ستزول عنه طائعا او كارها
 ان الحوادث تنقل الاحرار عن
 اوطانهم والطير عن اوكارها (13)

O man who is enjoying happiness of vanishing life shall have to resign

it by hook or by crook. Misfortune keeps shifting the noble from their homelands and birds from their nests.

Abul Fath's poetry incites to participate also in this life in such a way that one may be declared to settle in the paradise and must avoid such deeds which may drag him to the hell. He encourages man to understand the realities of life so that he can play an active role in the life and make his efforts fruitful. He says:

قدم لنفسك خيراً وانت مالك مالك

Dispatch virtues for your 'self' as you are owner of your wealth.

من قبل ان تتفانى ولون حالك حالك

Before you perish and your colour become fade.

لم تدرك حقا اى المسالك سالك

You are unaware about the paths you are choosing to walk

لجنة ام لنار الى ممالك مالك (14)

(These may be) the path leading to the paradise or the hell (for you), towards the lands of the Lord.

Abul Fath Busti has portrayed death in his poetry in various ways. In an elegy attributed to Amir Subuktagin he alarmed man against glamour of one's holdings and petty things. One must always remember one's destiny because nothing helps him when eve of departure arrives.

توكل على الله في كل ما
 تحاوله واتخذه وكيلًا
 فإظمى قليلا واروى قليلا
 ثم تر ناصر دين الله
 وكان المهيب العظيم الجليل
 أعد الفيل وقاد الخيول
 وصير كل عزيز ذليلا
 أتته الممينة مغتالة
 وسلت عليه حسام صقيل
 فلم يفنى عنه كمامة الرجال
 ولم يجد فيل عليه فيلا (15)

You must have trust in Allah in whatever you have to strive and believe in His adroitness.

O soul! drinking pure water ought not deceive you. You ought to keep yourself thirsty at once and drink your's fill another time. Had you not seen Nasirud Din (Subuktigin) who was dreadful, great and honorable. He possessed elephants, commanded troops and humiliated the powerful. But death assassinated him by way of cheating and drew before him a sharper and smooth sword, then neither his full armour were able to dispense nor his elephants.

Nobody can nullify the value of present as it connects our past to the future, helps us to learn lesson from our mistakes and wrong doings, and at last, prepares us to face challenges of the future.

Abul Fath has exposed very evidence of the present while saying:

وما الدهر الا ماضى فهو فانت
وما سوف ياتى فهو غير مفضل
فحظك مما انت فيه فانه
زمان الفتى من مجمل ومفصل (16)

Time is nothing except what has departed and what is going to arrive but it may not be preferred. You ought to hold only that is possessed by you in present because the time of the youth passes during summing up and extending.

A small number of people take notice of indications given by the time and admit their role as a teacher and adviser. They visit experts to discuss their problems and ignore those notions which must be picked up cleverly. Abul Fath has declared time as the best teacher and advisor which guides man by sending to him its signs like diseases, natural disasters, wars, loss of life, property and money etc.

يا من يشاور فى الامور تهمله
نصحاء نصح الزمان واسعا
فاقبل اشارات الزمان فانه
نعم المؤدب والمشير لمن وعى (17)

O man! your habit is to consult to experienced ones regarding important issues concerning you. (But) you ought to understand points conveyed to you by the time because what an ideal instructor and consultant is the time for such person who is keen to remember.

Abul Fath has admitted that the time causes calamity and adversity in human life; but he advises to bear its hardships because there is no reward for what one likes but what one would be rewarded for that he endures:

تصبر اذا ما ناب كره فرما
يسؤك دهر ثم يؤنس غمه
واجر الفتى فيما يمض فؤاده
ولا اجر فى ما يشتهى ويحبه (18)

Be patient at the hour of some disgust happen to you. It is likely that time displeases to you at once and at another moment you may start liking its meeting with you on alternative days.

A young man's wage is reciprocal to that bearing which annoys his heart. He cannot get prize of what he likes.

Dr. M. Muslehud Din has thrown light on the meaning and importance of 'Sabar' in a logic manner. He explains:

In addition to its meaning of not being hasty, the word 'Sabar' connotes perseverance, constancy, steadfastness, firmness of purpose, self-restraint, endurance of sorrow, pain, and other evils. But it is never used in the sense of despair and disappointment, for Islam is not passivity but active striving with the hope for the better. 'Sabar', thus, means patience perseverance and firmness of purpose which bear good fruits. In proof of the importance of this word, it is enough to say that it has appeared in the Quran more than ninety occasions and the

Caliph Umar is reported to have stated that he had found the best way of life in patience, for patience is the key to success. (19)

Nabigha Zubayni who is considered a great poet of Pre-Islamic period has uttered the following lines:

المرء يامل أن يعيش و طول عيش قد يضره
تفنى بشاشته ويبقى بعد حلوا العيش مره
وتخونه الايام حتى لا يرى شيئا يسره
كم شامت بي ان هلكت وقابل لله درّه (20)

The man hopes that he will live but living long harms him.

His gaiety ends and bitterness of life replaces sweetness of life.

The time deceives him to the extent that he finds nothing to please him

Several people will condemn me after my death and a few will Say:

His virtue was for God.

It looks as if Abul Fath Busti was also weaving the same thought as put by Nabigha in the following verses:

ارى المرء يرجو ان يطول بقاءه
ليدرك ما يهوى بطول بقائه
واية الجدوى فى البقاء وقد وهت
قواه واقوى قلبه من ذكائه
اذما نباحس وكلت بصيرة
فطول بقاء المرء طول شقائه (21)

I find the man hoping that his survival remains long so that all of his wishes may be fulfilled in this way.

But has any value for survival if he loses his physical power and his heart is deprived of intelligence. At the time when senses leave working normally and eye-sight becomes blind, then, the extended survival causes to increase his misery.

Going on a journey again and again irritates many of us, and we dislike to leave our homes where we are provided with necessities of a comfortable life. However, great people are not disgusted by successive journeys as it does not lessen their worth. Abul Fath used the metaphor of the sun which keeps on shedding its light while moving from one position to the other:

لئن تنقلت من دار الى دار
وصرت بعد ثواء رهنا سفار
فالحر حر عزيز النفس حيث ثوى
والشمس فى كل بُرج ذات انوار (22)

If you have to shift from one place to the other and remain a prey of travel after a long dwelling, then, it does not harm you because noble men sustain their liberty and enjoy respect of their 'self' wherever they reside, as the sun emits its light in every position.

In other words, man finds opportunities to progress and gain more knowledge through travels and spreads wisdom and sagacity wherever he arrives during his journeys.

Abul Fath Busti has also wrote a long ode which is famous as al-Qasida al-Nonia and with the following verse:

زيادة المرء في دنياه نقصان وكسبه غير محض الخير خسران

Increase of worldly things is harmful for the man and achieving what lacks the benefit is a deficit for him.

This ode also named as Unwan-al-Hikam (the title of wisdom) has been mentioned by Al-Taaj Al-Subki in his book "Tabaqat Al-Shafia al-Kubra" and by Allama Ahmad bin Ali al-Manini (d.1172 A.H) in his book Al-Fath al-Wahabi Ala Tarikh Abi Nasr al-Utbi where Utbi has been reported praising his companion Abul Fath in these words:

واطول قصائده واشهرها قافيتها النونية
في الامثال، يستهيم في حفظها وروايتها
اهل الادب، ويعنى بها الناس حتى الصبيان
في المكتب، ومطلعها: زيادة المرء في دنياه نقصان(23)

His longest and the most popular ode is Noonia Rhyme about proverbs. The literary persons take interest in remembering and narrating it. People including school going children pay attention to it. Its opening verse is:

زيادة المرء في دنياه نقصان

This ode has been interpreted by Zun al Noon bin Ahmad al-Surmari al-Bukhari (d. 677 A.H), Abu Mansur Al-Thalabi, Mahmud bin Othman Al-Naja'ti (d. 713 A.H.), Abdullah bin Muhammad Al-Naqrah Kar (d. 776, Abdur Rehman al-Omeri al-Mila'ni (d. 708 A.H.) etc.

Conclusion: It is obvious that Abul Fath Busti gave importance to both life and time. He devoted his poetic excellence in

guiding human beings to the right way of leading a balanced life in which stress has been laid on improving present to compensate past mistakes and to prepare oneself for facing challenges. Abul Fath exposes realities of life and death so that one can escape from indulgence in worldly affairs annoying his fellow beings. He teaches how one ought to deal with rulers. He encourages to travel successively which is a source of knowledge. He declares 'Sabar' a great quality which enables the youth to get reward. He advises the wealthy and the powerful to learn a lesson from death of rulers who have to leave everything which they had gathered with their power.

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