

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **QABBANI–HIS LIFE AND WORKS**

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#### **2.1 The Poet – Qabbani Qabbani:**

Qabbani one of the Arab world's most famous poet, was born in a middle class merchant's family in Maadant Al Shaham (Damascus, Syria) on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1923. The great pioneering Arab playwright Abu Khalil Qabbani was his grandfather. At the time of his birth, Damascus was passing through the Syrian revolution. Trying to emphasize this contrast, he has mentioned in his book "My Story with Poetry" *"...water was my mother and fire was my father..."* He compares his beautiful birthplace with the calm and placid water, and he uses the metaphor of 'fire' to highlight the Syrian revolution, against French Colonization, and also to denote the vigour of men.

Having done his schooling in Damascus, he moved on to obtain his degrees in Arts and Philosophy as well as a degree in law from the University of Syria in 1945. He chose the diplomatic career and served in this capacity for around 20 years. He served in the Syrian embassies in Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, Britain, China and Spain. After his resignation in 1966, he moved to Beirut, where he founded a publishing company '*Manshurat Qabbani Qabbani*'. Qabbani had joined the diplomatic career with the intention of becoming a ruler. But when he was not able to fulfill his aim, he took to poetry to achieve his goals. Qabbani began writing poetry at the age of 17 and his first work, "The Brunette Had Told

Me”, was published in 1944, a year before he graduated with a degree in law. His literary works consist of two dozen volumes of poetry and regular articles in the Arabic newspaper ‘al-Hayat’.

## **2.2 Syria of His Times:**

On the political front throughout Qabbani’s life, Syria was torn by wars with the French and the Israeli. As mentioned earlier, at the time of his birth, Damascus witnessed rebellions against French colonization. The period 1923 – 1944 is the most important period in the History of Syria. During this period, Syria witnessed the great Arab-Syrian revolution (in 1925). The occupation of Syria and Lebanon in 1941, the general elections where *Shokri-Al-Qouty* became the leader, and finally the Independence of Syria in 1946 are some of the major events of his youthful days. It was as a result of the impact of violence and *dissidence* in 1945, that forced the French to leave the country. The period which followed these two events (1940-1950), was marked by both the huge political conflicts in the region as also a resistance to the French and British colonization.

On the social front, despite the turbulence caused at the political level, the social life continued smoothly. The people followed all their customs and traditions as before, without restrictions. Qabbani captures this aspect of the social life of Damascus in his collection **Qalat li Alsamra** (1944) wherein he talks about the custom of marriage, where the family of a young man between 20-30 years would go out in search of a suitable bride for him. Only after judging an eligible lady under all circumstances will the family make a final choice.

## **2.3 Influence on Qabbani's Poetry:**

Qabbani's first work **Qalat li al Samra** was published when he was 21. Most of his poetry deals with the experiences of women in the traditional Muslim society. The suicide of his sister *Wasaal* who was unwilling to marry a man she did not love, had a profound effect on *Qabbani* and it colored his works. Looking at his works one cannot help but wonder whether it was his sister's suicide for the sake of love, which induced *Qabbani* to write about love in its myriad ways to the best of his abilities, or else, were his writings redemptory of the deprivation of his sister and a revenge for her against the society refusing love. In his first four collections **Qasaid min Qabbani Qabbani (a poem from Qabbani)** he expressed resentment against male chauvinism in the Arab society. While his famous work **khubzun wa Hashesh wa Qamar** (Bread, Hashish and Moon) was a harsh attack on the weak impoverished Arab people that lived in a haze of drug-induced fantasies.

## **2.3 Themes of Qabbani's Work:**

The themes of Qabbani's works are : (a) Qabbani and women, (b) "*Place*" as an important element of Qabbani's poetry, (c) "Narcissism" in Qabbani's poetry, (d) Qabbani's concept of freedom, (e) Qabbani's treatment of love themes in his poetry and (f) Qabbani and the political conditions of his times.

### **2.3.1 Qabbani and Women:**

Most of Qabbani's poetry captures his experiences of women. He often wrote from a woman's point of view and advocated social freedom for women. If

we consider the poet playing a game of cards using poetry as a medium, we find that he toyed with the 'feminism' card for nearly 70 years. Yet, it was indistinct and limited as there were many aspects left untouched. First four collections of his poems 'Qasaid Min Qabbani' (1966) were filled with verses on the beauty and desirability of women. Qabbani's poetry put lots of ideas for women on paper. As one female Arab reader put it – "... reading his poetry was traveling to something new..." On reading his poetry one cannot help but wonder what he wanted to exactly convey to the Arab women.

Unlike the Jordanian poet *Mustafa* Wahib al-Tal who shared many similarities with Qabbani's poetic language and style, he neither knew women closely nor was he closely associated with women. Yet he was able to write so profoundly on women oriented topics that too from women's point view. But one contradiction in his work was that though he often claimed to write about women oriented topics, he catered only to the aristocratic class. The aristocratic women by virtue of being wealthy and holding position had enough luxury and freedom and they didn't require any poet like him to write about.

#### **2.3.1.1 Qabbani's View on the Position of Women in the Arabic Society**

Qabbani considers the man-woman relationship in the Arab world akin to the relationship between a landlord and tenant. Just as the tenant gets some facilities by paying the rent, similarly man-woman share their physical and emotional needs by starting a relationship, paying bride money and staying together etc. The poet is critical of the male dominated Arab society, which focuses on repression and oppression of women. The latter do not have any

freedom in life and their entire life is spent shuttling from their father's dominance to their husband's (from one place to another).

Like most sociologists, Qabbani views the downfall of the Arab woman to the political factor. He says: *"The absence of democracy is the basic defeat of the Arab society. What fits in political conditions fits in love. As long as we are ill politically, we are emotionally, intellectually and sexually ill."* Qabbani even considers the Arab sexual behavior as male dominated. A woman is permanently restrained from emotional and sexual expression. He raises an important question when he asks, *'How would we listen to a woman's voice if a man prefers her dumb?'* He did not equate the outward appearances of women's dressing, driving a car or going to a university with the concept of feminine freedom. He realizes that when a woman's freedom in the Arab world is lost.

Through his writings, Qabbani summarized his personal point of view on changing a woman's position in the Arab society, *"...first a man has to change, he has to be freed first (from his intellectual and ideological bond) only then a free woman would be the outcome"*. (Al-Nabalsi, 1988, p433)

He says some where else: *"If you deal with woman as a rose, you get her perfume if you deal with woman as sacrifice, blood flows in your clothes; if you deal with her as a bond woman (a slave), she falls and you fall with her. There is no free woman until there is a free man."*

There is an Arabic proverb to this effect which goes as follows: *"Give me a free man and take a free woman"*.

### 2.3.1.2 Qabbani's Reasons for His Total Engagement with Women Related Matters In the Arab World:

Qabbani treats poetry like a game of cards and in this game woman is his 'ace card'. He considers women and poetry to be two sides of the same coin and they complement each other perfectly. According to Qabbani life is a long journey and a woman is like one of the stations on the way where her needs are replenished.

He is a man in need of a woman. The poet cannot live without the presence of a woman for *"the woman forced her presence on the poet, made him confused and deleted his history"* to begin his writing again. A woman ignites the poet's craving for writing. The poet feels that one who loves a woman loves the nation and one who loves a beautiful face loves the world.

Qabbani's concept of women moved from one level to another as time passed – his concept of woman in the 40's was not the same as in the 70's. In the 40's, his woman was a deer, rose or butterfly, innocent and beautiful. The woman in the 50's was like a land for whose possession he fought and which brought about sorrow, anxiety, and nightmares. whereas in the 70's, woman turned into dust coated oil painting – something which is fixed like an oil painting – which has life but can't move.

Like Omar bin Abi Rabayath, Qabbani did not restrict his poetry to just one woman; he was in fact a woman's poet and an owner of **love poetry shop**. His women were not individuals, they were a group which can be sound together into

a women's catalogue. And this effort took him nearly 40 years. Some of his ideas regarding women can be understood from the following lines:

*"In short I wrote (Women history)."*

*"The idea of (repentance of women's poetry) does not exist."*

*"My poetry file is full of all women matters."*

*"My women were not important."*

*"I wrote for all the world's women"*

*"My conflicts with some women, women is my friend."*

*"Women are a world, and then is white, black, red and grey."*

*"Women who made a break in my life of glass are not countable on the fingers."*

*"Many of the women went out of my life just as they entered." (Trans. By A R)*

Qabbani considers the possibility of falling in love as connected to destiny. He says love is an emotion which cannot be programmed or planned. An individual can live his/her entire life without getting the lover of his/her choice. In his quest of a beloved, the poet is not searching for a beauty but an ordinary woman. His woman had to possess certain characteristics: - She had to have purity with him in terms of ideas, origin (land / position), emotions etc. [He seems to live in his childhood in his behavior, acts and writing. Childhood is a key to his personality and art.] Moreover he expects the woman who loved him should consider him and his art, his poetry and his glory etc. as complimentary to each other and accept or reject both. Thus, all these were the reasons for his obsession with women – oriented topics.



#### 2.4.2 “Place” – as an important element in Qabbani’s poetry

One important observation that can be made on going through Qabbani’s works is that he ignored the ‘*human element*’, when he preferred the *place* over and above the human element and time. Even in his biography, he was not much concerned with the human aspect as he was concerned with the place.

The Syrian capital remained a powerful presence in his poems, most notably in **al-Sham Rahat al-Yasmein** (*The Jasmine scent of Damascus*). He talked about the significance of Damascus, its beauty bordered by Oasis on all sides except on the west. He talks about the house where he was born. This is considered as the key to Qabbani’s poetry and without talking about this house, the picture will be incomplete. Qabbani has made a beautiful comparison of his house where he says: “Do you know what it means for a man staying in a bottle of crude fragrance? Our house was like a bottle, I am trying to use a simile, but believe me with this simile I am not oppressing the bottle but I am oppressing our house.”

He captures the aesthetic beauty of one of the old houses in one of the oldest cities of the world by describing the water, the grape vines, the migrant pigeons and the freedom enjoyed by them etc. The house for him was the world in whole, a friend, an Oasis, summer and winter. He challenges that in this place he would be able to do everything in detail. In one of his works he describes his first school. Thus “*place*” left a clear fingerprint on his poetry.

### 2.4.3 Narcissism in Qabbani's poetry

"Narcissism" is considered as breaking outward to emphasize the inward or the self, according to the psychologist, Hans Zakhs: *"a leader preserves his narcissist (traits) to use others to accomplish his leadership in the future to enhance his personality."* Qabbani's obsession with narcissism was there right since his childhood which made him break into the outward to emphasize his inner self. According to *Khreshto Najam* the narcissist streak in the poet made him ask his friend to take his photos in various poses. The narcissism of Qabbani since his childhood belonged to what is called *"Auto Fetishism"*.

In his autobiography **Qalat li al Samra**, we find this narcissist tendency where he has emphasized his love for himself but ignored all others connected with him. The narcissist streak of Qabbani reflects his relationship with his parents. In his autobiography, he has portrayed his father as a saint but that is to emphasize the masculine quality of his father which he himself had imbibed. He talked about his father and his grandfather Abu khalil Qabbani for the former shaped his political and social interest and the latter helped to develop his artistic sensibilities. Thus they combined to shape Qabbani's personality. However, he ignored the rest around him like his mother, brother, sister, friends, schoolmates, relatives etc. Even during the heights of the Arab-Syrian revolutions, his poems were more narcissistic than political.

### 2.4.4 Qabbani's Concept of Freedom:

For a long time the concept of freedom was vague for Arab thinkers. Everybody interpreted freedom in his own way. While the whole Arab world

talked about practicing freedom; the thinkers, writers and poets still discussed the concept of Arab freedom. That is why the Arab world took long to claim freedom and that is why the Arab world remained plunged in darkness. Qabbani felt that we should all agree on a primary definition of freedom. In his book **Al kataba um al Anqlabi** (writing is a revolutionary work); Qabbani explained the concept of freedom as follows: *"the first belief of freedom is an individual movement inside a group circle. This group could be a family, community, association, school or country. This means freedom is a geometric line within a circle."*

Freedom always has two sides – while one side concerns us the other side concerns others. But if an individual tries to think of his individual freedom and forgets others, he loses the basic meaning of freedom. But just as a sea is limited by its shores and winds by mountains, a man is limited by his responsibilities. However, freedom is a civilized product and it cannot be shared by anyone who wishes to misuse it. Freedom does not allow harming or injuring someone. Freedom has moral, intellectual, cultural and national control. It is not enough that we are born free but we should actually deserve our freedom. A free person cannot do anything as he pleases for he has to think of the others who would be affected by it. Like a writer is not supposed to use words which would stir the negative emotions of his readers writing is an honor concordant between the writer's conscience and the readers. And one who breaches this trust or betrays it will end up losing the relationship.

Qabbani advocated the concept of freedom through his works. Through his collection '**Qalat li Alsamra**', led youth to cross to the other side of the road where freedom awaited them. He advocated social freedom for the Arab woman

and was always concerned about how we could find freedom or how could an Arab woman be free. Even in one of his works, where he describes the beauty of the old Damascus houses, he captures the movements of the migrant pigeons who enjoy unlimited freedom to move as they want. Thus the concept of freedom was a prominent aspect of his works.

#### **2.4.5 Qabbani's treatment of love themes in his poetry**

'Love' which he constantly dealt with was one of the favorite themes of Qabbani. According to him, "I am born into a family whose occupation is love." In his house also 'love is born naturally as it is born in any Arab family.' Describing the emotion of love in any Arab family, the poet says:

"At the age of 11 – became lovers, at the age of 12 – became tired, at the age of 13 - became lovers, at the age of 14 – again became tired." So an Arab child as young as 15 is very experienced and worldly-wise in the matters of love, emphasizing this further, he gives examples of his own family when he says:

"My grandfather was like this, my father also, my brother also – all fell in love in the first big eyes they saw; they fall easily and come out easily."

For the poet, love is like a huge maze which arouses his curiosity. He is constantly in need of love. The idea of love was not static. It constantly kept on developing and improving. A good example of this can be seen in his final collection **Maat Raslat Hubb** (Hundred love letters) *where* he tried to portray love as an "*aesthetic crystal*" – something pure and valuable. Qabbani is another owner of **Love Poetry Shop**. He understood the importance of love in a poet's

life in a way what *Al-Mutnabi* could not understand. In his practice of this love game he became closer to *Omar bin Abi Rabayah* – a poet who was considered the owner of **Mecca's Shop for Love Poetry**. However in his works, Qabbani never talks about just one woman but all women in general. The poet wants his beloveds to be like lightning which appears and disappears within the fraction of a second.

#### **2.4.5.1 Classification of Qabbani's love poetry**

Love poetry in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was divided into sensual and modest, as was the case in the previous centuries. Just as *Omar Bin Abi Rabiya* played the role of the sensual love poet in the Al Umayyad period (661-750), Qabbani was the torch- bearer of love poetry in the modern period and the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Qabbani revived the Arabic love poetry prevalent in the Abbaside period (750-1571) and brought it to such a level that it became worthy of being quoted in communications, letters and presented as gifts.

As the pre-Islamic, al Umayyad, al- Abbaside and Andalusia reflected that period and the social life through their poetry, Qabbani's poetry reflects his time and the economic growth the Arab world achieved due to its petroleum exports. One good example of how the poet captures his period through his work can be seen below:

*"Fates intended me  
to love you in sulphur and halite society  
And write poetry in this Metallic sky  
Where the summer sun is stonily axe  
And daytime is a depression train*

*Fates intend your eyes to know writing*

*In deserts have no.....*

*Palm tree.....*

*Or moon.....*

*Or alphabet..*

*Fates intend my lady*

*We meet in pre- Islam”*

*(‘ala’amal alshaariah alkamelah, P. 233 Trans. by A R)*

What distinguished Qabbani from other sensual love poets was that he never talked about one woman. He says:

“Let me confess, I seldom fall in love ..... Five times may be during thirty years” (Qasati ma’a alsha’r) [*My story with poetry* (1931)]

Through his poetry, qabbani had the courage to say what he wants which is regarded in many ways as a quality absent in sensual poetry with respect to modern Arabic poetry (e.g. **Tufult Nahd**). One of distinguishing features of Arabic love poetry was the spontaneity of words which was simple, unprompted and so touched the heart of the reader easily. This quality can be found even in his works- a few lines of which are quoted below:

*“Twenty thousand women I loved*

*Twenty thousand women I experienced*

*When I met you my lover*

*I felt I just began.”*

*(Qabbani –katab alsha’ar, love book)*

*You still ask me the date of my birth*

*Write this down  
And now you know, my birthday  
Occurred when you began to love me  
(on Entering the Sea. p. 14)*

As was the case with all sensual love poets, Qabbani used common language, simple style and vocabulary so that he could be accessible to a wider circle of readers. Given below is an example of how he expresses his love for his beloved in a simple yet lucid style.

*“Don’t worry my beautiful  
You are always in my words and may grow older in my verses you  
as you go, but never on my pages”  
(“On entering the sea – pg. – 3)*

#### **2.4.6 Qabbani and the political conditions of his times**

The period “between” 1940 to 1950 was a period of huge political conflicts in the Arab world. Whereas, there were revolutions and rebellions against the British and French colonization on one hand, Syria was also reeling under the effects of the Second World War on the other. The literature and Arts of the day concentrated on this political turbulence in the country.

The Arab – Syrian revolution did not only influence the poets in Damascus but the poetry of the whole Arab world in general. Damascus witnessed the most of the political, national and religious poetry during 1925 (Beginning of the Great Syrian Revolution) and 1946 (Syria’s Independence). During this period there were many Arab literary resistances in Syria against the war which can be

witnessed through works like "*Kher al deen al zarī*", "*Khalil Murdum*", "*Bashrat al khowri*" "*Shafez Jabry*" etc.

Even Qabbani, to a great extent, was influenced by the political situation of his country. He believed that the defeat of Arabs by Israel was a shameful event and blames the Arab rulers for their unrealistic leadership through a stinging criticism which is explicit in **Ala Hamish dafter al naksah** "Marginal notes on the book of defeat" (1967). In his later years his poems included a strong strain of anti-authoritarianism. One couplet in particular

*"O sultan, my master  
if my clothes are ripped and torn it is because  
Your dogs with claws are allowed to tear me."*

is often quoted by Arabs as a kind of gospel (short hand) for their frustration of life under dictatorship. Still he never explicitly criticized his country, or its long reigning leader – President Hafez al-Assad. For this, the people loved him and he was hailed across Syria as a national hero.

#### **2.4.6 .1 Qabbani as a Political Poet**

When Qabbani began his poetic career he chose to write on love themes and women oriented topics (Feminist Poetry). As we have seen earlier, even the severe actions on the political front in Syria and the Arab world in general did not waver him from his set themes. However, the year 1967 saw his initiation into 'Political Poetry'.



#### 2.4.6.2 Political Poetry

Political poetry is a highly sensitive issue in nature and it can only be discussed or read in whispers and not openly. Unlike a politician's hollow speeches, this poetry is very contemplative. It is not a comment or a report of the daily political events taking place around us. It actually tells you what is going to happen – that is, it predicts the future. In this regard, a political poet is different from an historian. According to an old Arabic saying "*The function of a political poet is to comment on what will happen.*" Whereas, an historian is in fact a chronicler of the events, that take place, political poetry is not something that can be mugged up but requires intellect and insight to be comprehensible.

#### 2.4.6 .3 Qabbani's Entry into Political Poetry

Qabbani stepped into the genre of political poetry with his book **Ala Hamish Dafter al Nakasah** (1967). It was a period when the poets, politicians and ideologists took advantage of the June defeat. Everyone took that event as an excuse to touch the Arab raw nerve. Politicians took this opportunity to avoid responsibility for their wrong political strategies which led to their failure in June' 1967 and used this as a means to lay blame on the people instead. They went around saying: "*We warned you but you don't listen*".

Meanwhile, the ideologues took advantage of this opportunity by hitting the people for the failure through their speeches. They went around spreading their ideologies and reminding the people of what had happened and what had

not happened. The poets, on the other hand were even cleverer. They used the June defeat as a theme to enter into the political genre of poetry. Since it was a current event in 1967 and had touched the life of the people intensely, the poets ensured a wider readership by commenting on it thus no one was concerned with how this defeat was actually affecting the common Arab men and what could be done to relieve them of the pain of loss and defeat. Everyone – the poets, politicians and ideologues were mere opportunists who took maximum advantage of the occasion they got to chastise the people – by hitting on their Achilles” heel. The June defeat served as an entry card for all these categories of people to enter the broken soul of the common Arab. Even Qabbani was not to be left behind and as a poet; he got a golden entry card to touch the Arab soul.

#### **2.4.6 .4 Qabbani’s Tactical and Strategical Approach in His Political Poetry**

Since Qabbani’s initiation into poetry, the poet “... *had planned to sleep in a woman’s eye, which was safer than sleeping between barbed wires.*”

He is the poet who said with full conviction that, “*The clever one does not fall in a political well in our countries*”, he added later that “*whereas the kingdom of love remains the happiest kingdom.*” For a poet who spent a quarter of a century sleeping in a woman’s eyes, to leave it to enter a political arena was indeed difficult. The period between “1978-80” was witness to the greatest political and military conflict in Lebanon between the Palestinian resisters and their enemies. The Israeli occupation of Lebanon in 1982 was an expected event for Qabbani who by then used to keep abreast of all the political events in the Arab world.

On June 1985, Qabbani declared to the Arab media through an interview to the Middle East newspapers that he wants to be out of the small bottle where he had been kept by the Arab media. This '**bottle**' is a metaphor for women and his love poetry. To this he further continued: *"I have since long resigned from my work as a night guard on a woman's doorstep and now am giving my military duty or service for the nation. I can't meet my lover except during vacations."*

The question that arises is that did Qabbani leave his work as a night guard on a woman's door when he said so in 1979 *"Woman is one of the stops in my long journey, one port, which supplies me, my one day's need as a traveler"*. The answer is that he did not mean what he said. The earlier declaration where he compared himself to a night guard has been explained by some critics as "tactical". This shows that he made these declarations only to get out of difficult or tricky situations. But once he got out of such situations, he reverted back to his old ways. That is the 'Political Mask' that he used was just to gain more readers for politics and political tensions were in vogue at that time. So whenever it was required he took cover behind his political mask but once out of it he went back to his original themes in poetry - women and love. This tactical approach on the part of Qabbani can be seen from the statements he made. In 1979 he said: "I never stopped changing my skin, I am always living very carefully and fear the outcome." (Women in My poetry and My Life, Beirut, 1981):

"I am trying to change my voice everyday and my skin every hour" (Monir al akesh).

"I consider myself responsible for a woman till death." [Qabbani's Death]

The first two statements by Qabbani seemed more political than poetic for only a politician can change his voice. It seemed more like the voice of an opportunist who tried to take advantage of every opportunity he came across. As a poet, contradiction was a part and parcel of his attitude and poetry.(p. 476)? From what he said above, it can be made out that he was in fact unaware of what he was saying. His political declarations, media statements etc. are testimonies to his contradictory attitudes.

#### **2.4.6 .5 ‘Sadism’ Qabbani’s poetry**

**‘Sadism’** as per the Oxford dictionary is a form of sexual perversion characterized by the enjoyment of inflicting pain or suffering on others. **”Masochism** is a form of special sexual perversion characterized by gratification derived from one’s own pain or humiliation. Both these terms combine to form what is known as “Sado- Masochism”. Qabbani’s political poetry leaves us with a confirmed impression that he was a sadist in terms of his political poetry, just as he was a narcissist in his feminist poetry. One example of sadism in his poetry is as below:

... If we lost the war, no surprise

Because we enter the war

With whatever the Eastern have of oratory talents

by prides which could not kill a fly

Because we enter the war

With Drum and Rebec...

He used the whip of sadism but in a very clever way as can be seen below:

*Dimashaq ya kanz ahlami, wa marwahati*

*Ashku al'urabata , am ashku laki al'araba*

*Admati siat huziran duhurahum*

*Fa admanuha, wa basau kafa min daraba*

*Man jaraba alkai , la yansa mauaja'ha*

*Wa man raa alsum, la yashqa Kaman sharaba*

... Damascus my dreams treasure

Shall I complain to you, Arabism or Arabs?

June's whips bled their back

Became addicted and thankful

Burnt one will not forget the pain

To see poison not as to drink... (Trans. by A R).

**Marsom Bi-Aqalat Khalid bil Al-waleed** (Planned dismissal of Khalid bin Al-waleed), gives an example of both sadism and masochism.

"They stole our time

They stole Fatamih alzahara from prophet's house

O' Salah Aldeen,

They sold the first copy of Quran

The sold the sadness in Ali's eye

They sold the seven rivers in Damascus and Jasmine

O' Salah Aldeen,

They sold all of us and you in auction

They stole from us, the Arabic ambition,

They isolated Khaled after Damascus' victory, (*Trans. by A R*).

They accused him of victory crime is there a time, victory became a restriction on us my son?

They broke Omar's sword

They sold the horses

They sold the stars and the trees' leaves

They aborted us before pregnancy

They gave us drugs

To prevent history to be known to children

Thy gave us inoculums

To prevent Damascus to become Baghdad

They gave us drink

To make us humans without attitudes

Then gave us keys of the states

And named us kings for groups.

(Al-Nabalsi, 1988, Page 811,812,813 Trans. by A R)

All the verbs used in the poem like 'stole', 'isolated', 'broke', 'aborted', 'sold', 'accused' etc. are used like whips – used by sadists or masochists to flog or whip themselves and others. The whip of a poet is not a whip in the literal sense. It emanates from the poet's pen in the form of harsh and critical words which are more painful. He uses it to punish himself as well as his readers. Another example of sadism in his poetry can be seen below:

Spain

Weeping bridge,

Earth and sky

Cry from the hollow of its body  
The guitar sound  
Death and birth of Spain (on Entering the Sea)

Here the memory of Spain creates pain in the Arab world. It has been a source of sorrow especially for the Eastern Arabs. Through his poetry, he is refreshing the memory of his readers and causes them pain. Thus, it is an example of sadism in his poetry. Both in feminist and political poetry, he was a sexual poet, which was an accepted scientific fact. In linguistics terms Arabic Language in which he wrote is a sexual language. According to psycholinguists, the sexual behavior developed the metaphor capabilities in the Arabic language.

#### **2.4.6.6 The Nature of Political Poetry**

Political poetry does not leave behind a lasting impression on readers because such poetry does not touch a reader's soul. It has certain characteristics like: direct news style, minimum use of symbols and Limited scope for use. Some patterns of political poetry can be seen in Qabbani's poems as given below:

... My Sadness Nation  
Transmitted me in a moment  
From a poet who writes by love and yearning  
To a poet who writes by knife... (Trans. by A R)

"Beirut, mistress of the world,  
City of first love, first promise  
Where I wrote my poems and concealed  
Them in velvet bags-  
We now confess Beirut,

That we loved you like nomads  
And made love to you in their fashion.  
You were our pleasure woman  
Night long we took refuge in your bed  
And in the morning scattered....” (Trans. by A R).

All of his poetry includes these patterns which show the impact it has when it first touches you and the repetition of the political meaning. Another example of such repetition is given below:

“When ideas, when thought itself,  
Flattens out in a city,  
And curves like a horse shoe  
When any rifle picked up by  
A coward can crush a man  
When an entire city becomes  
A trap and its people turn into mice.” (On Entering the Sea)

The reader of Qabbani's poetry will realize that his political poetry conveyed a sense of defeat. Word like 'flattens out', 'crush', 'a trap', 'people turning into mice' etc. conveys a sense of hopelessness. This could be an important cue to understand his political poetry, because real political poetry does not convey 'defeat'. It in fact tries to rise from its ashes like a phoenix. It in fact is poetry of the future and talks about hope. Sometimes his political poetry took shape of a political propaganda – it came as a direct prose without any artistic content. We can understand this from the lines given below:

“Blessedness for you  
In your hands our borders became



Papers  
A thousand thanks  
In your hands our countries became  
A whore woman  
A Thousand thanks".      (*Trans. A R*)

The above lines sound like a piece of conversation with its matter of fact style. Political poetry is always concerned with the future and not with the past – what is coming and not what came. Whereas, Qabbani's case was different for he was concerned with the past, present and future. Let's examine a few lines given below:

"It was a beautiful wedding ...  
And Palestine was receiving people in its national dress  
Journalists were taking their pictures  
All horses were raising their high necks  
It was the most beautiful wedding the city saw.  
It was a beautiful wedding.  
And Palestine was between Ocean and Gulf,  
Searching for a vacant room      (*Trans. by A R*)

We notice in the above lines how Qabbani used verbs like 'was', 'were' etc. with great care. It was because poets do not use these types of verbs for they belong to prose and not poetry. He always tried to portray the difference between his poetry and the Palestinian resistance poetry very clearly and visibly. His poetry was totally opposite of the poetry of the Palestinians, Lebanese and Egyptians etc. An example of this can be seen below:

"When the newspapers become mere

Funeral notices,  
Everything dies,  
Everything is without life –the water, the plants  
Voice and colour  
Trees migrate, leaving their roots  
Geography is wrested  
From its place, place escapes  
And we see the end of man.”        (*On Entering the Sea*)

Political poetry was never the chief concern of Qabbani. Just as he never wrote for any one woman in his feminist poetry, he never examined just one issue in his political poetry. He explored new issues every time just to keep his readers riveted to his work. In this regard, we can compare him to a fashion designer who constantly brings in newer designs to stay in the competitive fashion world. This point has been emphasized by him when he said: “...*I am trying to change my voice everyday and my skin every hour.*” The reader of his political poetry comes with an impression that the poet has a national pride and is proud of all his readers who are from his country.

One question which arises is that like his feminist poetry, why his political poetry catered to the affluent, aristocratic class of society. A real political poet is a poet who portrays the poverty, illiteracy and vices of his nation and not just depicts the good side. As a political poet – did Qabbani also write for the underprivileged people of his society or did he write for the more refined and cultured people, is a question left to be answered. Qabbani's poetry was perhaps meant for entertaining a particular class of society rather than inciting or troubling

it. That was perhaps the reason why he was never arrested or questioned like other political poets in the Arab world.

All these things do not mean that Qabbani is a quisling political poet or is lying. He was a political poetic voice better than the political saloon's poets or those who speak at cheap oratory festivals. If other poets were individuals or individuals' poets – Qabbani distinguished from them by belonging to one class of society, which is somewhat a forward step for an Arab poet.

## **2.5 A shift in Qabbani's themes in his poetry**

Since the beginning of Qabbani's career up to the 1967 war only a few poems with socio-political themes were written by the poet. his collection **Qalat li Alsamra** in 1944 dealt with a different theme from what the poets wrote in his times. When Qabbani began writing poetry, he focused his attention on women oriented topics and the concept of love. As mentioned earlier, the period between "1940 and 1950" saw lots of activities of the political front in the Arab world. And all the Arab poets who lived during this period (1920-1950) wrote on political and national themes.

Poets like *Mustafa Wahbi Al Tal*, *Hasni Alkalani*, *Saiyed Aaqal*, *Meachal Trad* etc. who were Qabbani's contemporaries dealt with romantic and emotional matters of ordinary Arab citizens. But at the end of the day they wrote about the tensions of the nation and society while Qabbani was totally different. He was a poet out of time, out of place – someone other worldly. He was not at all touched by the history of a nation which resisted the most powerful military action in the area and which paid a huge price to gain its independence. Though during this

period Qabbani brought out four collections like **Qalat li alsamra** (1944), **Tufult Nahd** (Bosom's Infancy, 1948): **Samba** (1949) and **Anti li** (You are mine 1950) – he never mentioned the land or the country. After four years of Syria's independence came the poem **Baladi** "*My country*" which was not a political or a national poem but an ordinary poem. Qabbani was 25 when he wrote this poem; yet it never brought out any of the simmering National tensions. In contrast, there were many poets who were involved in their emotional lives more than Qabbani but even their poems contained political overtones. Among Qabbani's more than 20 poetry collections, the most noted volumes are **Habibati** [My beloved (1960); **Al-rasm-bi-al Kalimat** (Drawing with words (1966) and **Qasa'd hubb Arabiyah** (Arabian love poems (1993).

Qabbani shared many similarities with the Jordanian poet Al-Tal in terms of his themes, language and style; yet while the latter gave something to his country through his poetry the former restrained from that. The reader often wonders what moved him away from these matters. However the Arab defeat by Israel in the six days war perhaps had an impact on Qabbani and his work "**Ala Hamish dafter al naksha**" [Marginal notes on the book] was published in 1967. This saw the shift of themes from '*love*' to '*politics*' dealing mainly with the Arab – Israel conflict. Going through his works one cannot restrain from questioning why he was like this for more than 40 years (1925-1967), when the whole world was so deeply involved in the political turmoil's of the Arab world. And then why was this sudden shift to political poetry? The reader of his biography **Qasati ma' Al sha'r** "*My story with poetry*" shall notice that this had been done with purpose.

## 2.6 The Autobiography of Qabbani

Qabbani wrote his autobiography at an early age (55 yrs) so that scholars, critics and analysts would not size him up according to their whims and fancies. His autobiography was a big block he threw in front of his critics and it left them baffled. He wanted them to understand '*Qabbani – the poet and his works*' from his own viewpoint. In this autobiography he says "*I am a very clear poet and my poetry keys are not magical keys*" (My story with poetry). He says:

*"My poetry keys are my poetry itself, my poems are the only photo-look alike of me and my published books are my real passport."*

He was always scared of critics interpreting him in their own way. And this fear of others made him delete the most important periods of his life – his childhood and youth from his autobiography. The origin of narcissism (about which we discussed earlier) in his poetry or personality is not mentioned in his autobiography. {Here he talks about self-love but ignores himself.}. He talks about his first collection wherein he does not talk about the social, psychological and artistic contents but he provides us with an advertisement of media as below:

**Qalt li Alsamra** had made a huge deep pain in the city body in 1944 which refused to be recognized by its body or its dreams. This was a book against history and historians. It is a small childish trail. It goes beyond (what was) to what (may be) and tries to transfer poetry from a historical stage to the stage of movement.

## 2.7 Contradictions in Qabbani's poetry

In an interview with the *"Al-Anba Kuwait"* newspaper, he was asked *"Is it possible to say that Qabbani is contradictory?"* To which he replied, *"Of course you can say so because the nature of the poet is like the nature of the sea, which changed in each feature, look, shape and the way in which he expressed himself. A poet who does not contradict himself transpired into a limited geometric shape; or like a tree (something fixed and restricted – which can't change its position)"* (*"al – Ambar"* newspaper dated 11<sup>th</sup> Feb, 84 – *Trans. by the A R*).

From this answer we can understand how deftly he was able to escape from a tricky question as to why he is contradictory by answering why he is changeable instead. Changeable does not necessarily mean contradiction for there is a huge difference between both. As per Qabbani: *"The nature of a poet is like the nature of a sea which changes from moment to moment."* When he was asked about "Contradictions" and "Changeability," he found the following differences. Changeable is being transferred from one position to another—from higher to lower, back to front etc. whereas, contradictions are a survival of two positions simultaneously. When change takes place from one position to another – the past position will not in any way be related or influence the present position. Nor will the latter affect the past position in any way.

We can see the examples of contradictions in his poems. Whereas, Qabbani claimed that he writes for all women, he in fact catered to only the aristocratic class. He spoke about giving moral and social freedom to the aristocratic Arab women who in fact did not need his writings to highlight their

situations. The poet calls for a revolution, freedom, and change in the social system while at the same time he himself belonged to a bourgeois class in his childhood and being a diplomat belonged to the aristocratic class in his adulthood. Even his political poetry was rife with contradictory elements.

In the 60's and 70's he attacked the Gulf countries for their political policies, the people, leaders etc. But later on he went to these same people and he tried to make good relations with them in order to build up his readership and increase the sale of his books. But these countries rejected his advances of friendship and goodwill citing political reasons for they were enraged by his earlier attitudes towards them. Another aspect of contradiction seen in his work is that though his poetry is written in simple language, the meaning is quite difficult to understand.

## **2.8 Qabbani's Concept of Language**

Qabbani limited the concept of language and in particular his own language. He began to define language, as he would describe the body of a woman's. He says," language is capturing me totally, siege me from all direction.... until the whole world form takes the shape of comma and full stop. Rose, star, tree, woman's (face, body, and smile), birds' forest, and children tears and freedom fighter's face, language I want to discover their symbols". We cannot understand the world without a common language between us, the world.

When the relation between the poem and the reader breaks off, it creates a linguistic gap. And when the love relation between man and woman ends, this means their communication language is broken off. He said" *I want to confess to*

*you a dangerous secret that I win a woman by a language and lose a woman by another language, and it is difficult for me to have a close relation with a woman without a dialogue, it plays a crucial role in it.*"(Qabbani-what is poetry, 1981, pp. 97-99, trans. by A R).

He talked about the third language, which was an intermediate level between the common language and dictionary language that language began in Umayyad and Abases eras. According to him, when he began to write, there was a language with great potentialities and capabilities, but linguists exclusively used this language and closed the door for the common man. He describes this language (dictionary) as a private property, and linguists benefited from it. To arabize any word or any technical or scientific term takes linguists three years of divination, inquires and thousand cups of tea. Beside this haughty language there was a common language – vital, active and it was a part and parcel of a common man's daily use. All the bridges between these two languages were cut, the dictionary language did not stoop down and the other was not allowed to have a dialogue with it. From this point, he sees that there is a strange linguistic feeling. Between the languages we speak at home, street, café and the language used for academic purposes.

An Arab writes, reads, publishes and lectures in one language and sings, jokes and plays with his children and talks romantically with his lover in other languages. This duality in language divides ideas, feelings and life into two parts. The solution to this strange situation is to consider a third language. The third language should acquire – manner, logic and wisdom from the academic language (Dictionary) and activity, courage and bravery from the Street language



(commonly spoken). Qabbani says, *"By this language, 'the Third Language', we write today, and Arabic poetry uses this language to express itself"*. This language tries to make the Dictionary at the service of life and man and tries its best to make the Arabic lessons in schools as enjoyable as a picnic rather than something torturous. It tries to bring back the lost confidence in our utterance and writings. Qabbani said, *"My poetry belongs to this language"*. Poetic language transcends protocol and belongs to the aristocracy. What Qabbani did was that he convinced poetry to stoop down from its high pedestal to the level of a common man.

### **2.8.1 Qabbani's view of the poetic language**

He says, *"Poetry is a sound, It is a character in Arabic poetry that is stored in a poet's larynx and the receiver's ear. Sound is a destiny of a poem. I can't imagine a silent poem. All arts yield to the Law of Determinism. If there was such a Law, then Movement is the destiny of Dance, Color is the destiny of a Painter and Stone is the destiny of a Sculptor."*

He further says, *"There is nothing called poetic words and unpoetic words, I don't believe in it. Words like dresses do not take its final shape except when we wear it. No word is better than the other. It depends only on their capabilities of understanding us and conveying our true experiences. (Qabbani- what is poetry, pg.99)*

He emphasizes the thin wall between prose and poetry as: *"My big problem, when I write is that the borders between prose and poetry cease. In my political prose, I cannot be only a poet"* (same source pg. 199, and the prose he

writes is closer to poetry. Before exploring Qabbani's poetic language through his poetry, we can summarize his position in the following statements: is it not a dangerous secret to win a woman in one language and lose her in another? Great Leaders in History won many battles by using good and suitable language whereas, many poets lost important position by using bad and unsuitable language. Every human being wants to win a battle and whatever the battle is; he must use a good and suitable language. The third language is not a discovery or an invention of any one but it is an invention of one kind of poetry that is the Love Poetry in general. Love poetry throughout centuries was third language poetry, since it spreads faster than any other poetry and is simple, beautiful and lyrical.

A brief look at the chronology/history of Arabic poetry shows that whenever the poetry of love diminished, it led to the third language losing ground and increased the vagueness and complexity in poetry. Therefore, the third language is not an invention of a particular poet or a historical era but it is a product of one genre of poetry throughout centuries (Love Poetry).

The omission of borders between prose and poetry is not only Qabbani's problem as a love poet but it is a characteristic of most of the love poets throughout centuries in the Arabic poetry.

### **2.8.2 Factors and basic elements which helped in composing Qabbani's poetic language:**

- The poets who influenced Qabbani were Al-Aktal Al-Saqeer – his first master in matching sounds with poetic images, Ali Mohammad Daha, Ibrahim Naji, Salah Labki, Sayad Iqal, Meshal Prad and others.\* pg 123
- The foreign languages that he learnt like French, English and Spanish have a big impact on his poetry. Qabbani – a faithful student of the French poet Jacques Prevert learnt and acquired many linguistic characteristics from him.
- He came in the renewing linguistic tumult in modern Arabic poetry. Qabbani wanted to bring a new trend by reviving love poetry, as it was prevalent earlier in the Umayyad and Abbaside and Andalusia language (Third language).
- Qabbani as a love poet was obliged to address as many number of readers as he could through his poetry. Therefore his position was different from other poets and this obliged him to address people in a language they could understand.

### **2.8.3 Characteristics of Qabbani's poetic language**

- Qabbani's feminist poetry was obscene. Thus he looked at the woman's external character or appearance.

- He used Arabized words.
- He was “a photographer,” poet. He captured various aspects of a woman’s external appearance in different positions like a photographer captures his image through his lens.
- He made repetitive use of decorative words till the poem in his hand transferred from a poem unit into a verse unit and from there into a word unit, until the word become like porcelain frames hanging on the wall of poetry.
- The language of his poetry had multiple levels of meanings.
- His dictionary words were limited, which led to repetition. Some of the critics have claimed that they are not more than two hundred in number (1979,pg.14Munir al-‘Akesb )
- Qabbani’s poetry depends on external figuration of woman, universe and things. He is not the internal contemplating poet but he is the external poet. His experiences are descriptive and not internally contemplating. Thus he can be considered as a photographer not a painter.
- He depends on the sensitive utterances, sharp stimulus in his poetic dictionary to emphasize his position as an external poet. The five senses (namely Vision, touch, smell, taste, and hearing) are the tools of Qabbani as an external photographer in capturing his subject. This art he learnt from “Sayed Iqal” and each poem of his poetry he practiced one of these senses.

- One of Qabbani's merits was that he wrote love poetry partially in the twentieth century language. Some of the features attributed to twentieth century language are:
  - Poetic perceptivity
  - The access of poetry language to media language and the access of media language into the daily language.
  - Freeing poetry from conventional amenities.
  - Use of symbol and legend to avoid any controversies (which he never used).
  - The use of "woman" as symbolized for nation for a political purpose (which Qabbani never used).
  - The access of language of poetic to the language of prose, since some poetry became free from rhyme and meter but full of imagination and allusion (Jabra, Alnar wa Aljwhar P.154 tans. A R).

Qabbani considered *The Book of Love* as the first big change in his poetic language. According to him this collection *was the first trial to exit of the ghost train*. He tried in this collection to write a poem, which can be the final summery of summarization. The second move was in **Ma'at rasalat hubb** (*Hundred-love letter*) which was but, not a final move for him. In this collection, the word became a horse refusing its knight and saddle and run freely in the field of poetry. He discovered, in this collection, the miraculous relation among words and the

collision of words on paper, how alphabets in a poets hand transfer into symphony with thousand sound keys. In brief his hand is always in a hot argil, he finds himself surrounded by a historical and cultural transitions and it is necessary to change his skin and fingers daily. Otherwise, he would get crashed under the "history carriage wheels" (Munir Alakesh-*Question of Poetry*, pg.186)

## 2.9 Influence by Jacques Prevert

Jacques Pervert became famous in French poetry by writing two kinds of poetry, the *Flash* and the '*Les listes*' (list). The flash poem was usually composed of one line, for instance *Stupid challenges*, or of a few brief lines. This line of the poem depends on allusion, pun and homophones. Sometimes, the poem may have no relation between the tittle and its content, like *Secret or Hidden Dinner*, *Great Man* and others which are considered as *Flash* mock poetry. There are *Flash* singing poems concentrating on one symbol word in their tittles and integrated in its various aspects and images closed to enthusiasm facts as in *Alicant*, which depends on relating ideas and images. (*Christian Mortelier-Paroles De Jacques Prevert –Hachette Paris-1979 p.p 27,28*).

Qabbani used this technical skill in his collection **Ma'at Rasalt Hubb**. Qabbani followed a strict system in using number of words, till the poem become a number of lines depending on allusion and homophones, as it was with Prevert. Qabbani says:

I gargle in your small colored memories  
As a bird gargle a song  
As fountain gargling in Spain's house  
In its blue water ...

(Qabbani-al-'Amal al-Kamalah –J2-P.44 trans.by A R)

And he used to end the poem in this way. He says in other place:

Oh if you free from  
The rabbit instinct  
And know  
I am not your hunter  
But your lover  
(ibid -p.466- trans. by A R)

Qabbani says:

When I hear your violet voice  
Through the telephone line  
And wished me good morning  
I transferred into a forest... (ibid: 30)

Each of his poems has a limited number of words, not more than fifteen words and not more than four lines; this is what Qabbani meant when he said about the poetic language. He discovered, through writing **Ma'at Rrasalat hubb**, the miraculous relation among words and their miracles clash with each other on paper and how the alphabets transferred in a poet's hand into a symphony with thousand sound keys. Jacques Prevert's famous example of his **les listes** the poem "the page of writing)

Two and two, four  
Four and four, eight  
Eight and eight, sixteen  
Repeat?

Teacher said:  
Two and two, four  
Four and four, eight  
Eight and eight, sixteen  
But there is the bird singing  
Flying in the sky  
- Child is watching  
Child is listing  
Child is calling  
Save me  
Help me  
Play with me  
O' bird  
So the bird  
Plays with the child  
Two and two, four  
Repeat?  
Teacher says  
Child is playing  
Bird is playing with him  
Four and four, eight  
Eight and eight, sixteen  
Is equal to what?  
Is equal to nothing  
Sixteen and sixteen  
Above all  
Not thirty two



By any mean  
 They all are leaving  
 The child hides the bird  
 In his disk  
 All the children  
 Listing to music  
 Eight and eight. . . (Trans. By the A R)

This poem looks ridiculous at the first reading with many reiterations and words with less meaning. But critics like Crystal Mortily discovered in it what other critics could not. According to him Jacques's world is the child world and the most loved character for him is "child". Jacques in this poem escapes to the child's world... to the sky, bird and singing.... He escaped from the adults and teachers world that teaches a child system but does not allow him to express himself but make him listen and repeat. Jacques wants to portray the world as a static routine through the reiteration of the poring mathematical formulas .The other kind of the *Les Listes* (list), is the kind that concentrates on the counting list, like in his *aristocrat family* poem. He calls for a change in his own way, which consisted in his concentration on reiteration of verbs. His *education* poem is an objection on the universal system of education based on the mathematical monotonous counting. Qabbani used this poetic language but with some action.

## **2.10 Qabbani's style of poetry**

Qabbani's work consisted of simple yet elegant language, which had a lyrical quality to it. Using everyday language of the common man, he created beautiful works of art and was revered by generations of Arabs for his sensual

and romantic verses. He wrote poetry at first in a classic form in free verse – a style which he helped establish in modern Arabic poetry. His clear language, the direct and simple poetic images and the lyrical quality of his poetry enabled it to be set to music, which won the hearts of countless Arabic speakers throughout the Middle East and Africa. In terms of the lyrical quality of his poetry he can be compared to the Romantic Age's best known English poet P. B. Shelly. Most of his poems were sung and have been recorded by Arab greats such as the late Um kalthoum, Abdul Halim Hafiz, Nejat, Fayza Ahmed. Today they are sung by Kazim Al-Sahar and Majada Al-Roumi and others. Praising the poet, Gamal el-Ghitani – the Egyptian novelist and the editor of the weekly news of literature says that Qabbani was *"by any measure a great Arab poet who made a big effort to make his poetry understandable to all people and not only to the elite."* As per the Egyptian novelist Mona Helmi, *"his greatness comes from his ability to put into beautiful words not only the ordinary actions between men and women but also between the ruler and the ruled and the oppressor and the oppressed."* **Baladi** is one good example of Qabbani's simple language capturing poetry artistically.

The period when Qabbani started writing poetry, Syria was weighed down by political tensions. All of his contemporaries concentrated on highlighting the tensions on the political front through their poetry. However, Qabbani refrained from dealing with any of these topics and concentrated on love themes. Thus during this period of political crisis his poetry came as a breath of fresh air. It was, as a reader put it like *"traveling to something new."* The people felt better by reading his poetry – it was soothing and relieved them from their tensions at least

momentarily. Qabbani's poetry was frank, brave and new in terms of its language and style. And as a poet, he had the courage to say what he wanted through his poetry – something which was absent in sensual poetry with respect to modern Arabic poetry. Qabbani's **Tufult Nahd** is a good example of this.

Reading Qabbani's poetry was an experience in itself. His poetry was '*like taking food in a fancy restaurant provided on a plate prohibited to be used at home for a whole year*'. Emphasizing the quality of his poetry we can say that his poetry was a brave poetry in a coward society which touched the raw nerve of the Arab reader's poetic sensibility. Though it was written in a general and simple way, it expressed private matters and can be called a developed poetry in a literate society. The thoughts were not in keeping with Qabbani's surroundings and could be termed as "*smuggled poetry*". And it did open new vistas for women in the Arab world. The works of Qabbani were not meant for the authorities or for the official media. In terms of his work Qabbani was "*a poetic revolutionary more than being a revolutionary poet.*" The revolutionary aspect in Qabbani's poem was not in terms of its content but in terms of his style, and this began to be known as "*Qabbani's style*". Though he took ideas from expelled poets like Sayed 'Aqal and from Andalusia poetry, Qabbani added his own personal touch and developed an exclusive style.

Qabbani was never in a hurry to write poetry but was content to wait for poetry to come to him. According to him, his favorite hobby was to sit in front of a clean paper waiting for ideas to flow through his pen. It was almost like waiting patiently to catch fish. If some times, one wanted to catch beautiful fish one might have to wait for a long period of time. Perhaps, Qabbani realized that good

poetry can be written only if one waits patiently for ideas to be generated and selects the best ideas and developed it.

### **2.11 What the critics have to say about Qabbani's poetry**

Qabbani shared a strange relationship with his critics. He never waited for criticism to come his way but he himself went to the critics without the need of an interpreter or translator. Looking at his attitudes we might want to know "whether Qabbani was afraid of other (critics)." An explanation to this is given in the first lines of his autobiography where he says: *"I want to write my story with poetry before somebody else wrote it. I want to draw my face by my hand, though then no one can draw it better than me. I want to remove the carton by myself before critics cut me and made me as per their wishes before they invent me."*

The difficulty faced by the critics was that they could not separate Qabbani's personality from his poetry because both were complementary to each other. The attitudes of any literary critic towards Qabbani were different from their attitude towards any other poet. One of the reasons for this was that Qabbani blocked many doors on modern Arabic criticism through his two books **Qasati Ma'al shar'** "My story with poetry" and **Ma Hwa Al-Shar'** "What is poetry" and the huge media interviews about modern Arabic poetry that he gave in a span of 40 years. Qabbani's towering personality became a huge obstacle for most of the critics' attitudes towards him. Normally the relationship between the critic and the text is the relation between the explanation and the one who explains, the interpretation and the interpreter, the translation and the translator etc. But as far as analysing Qabbani's work goes, the critic is tied down by his emotions

towards Qabbani's poetry so much so that even Qabbani's enemies can't separate themselves from these emotions before criticising his works.

The critics love for Qabbani did not allow them to judge Qabbani's poetry objectively. Even Qabbani's enemies could not separate themselves from these emotions before criticising his works. The easier his works, the more difficult it became for the critics to assess him. Perhaps if they had undertaken a study of any of Qabbani's other contemporaries, they would not have faced so much trouble. For Arabic criticism to isolate itself from his personality would be possible only after his death because then the critics would be able to study him more objectively without getting emotionally tangled with him. The immense popularity of Qabbani in the Arab literary world can be seen from the way in which he was revered by the media and the public alike. Anything connected with Qabbani became news – his daily life, his media statements, his illness, personal tragedies, shift from Beirut to Cairo and back to Beirut – everything was reported. All his works were eagerly lapped up by his faithful readers and the media. His success and popularity can be measured in terms of how quickly his works turned into best sellers. For example the collection **Qasad'a** "poems" was reprinted 25 times till 1981. This was perhaps a first for any Arab poet. Another aspect of his popularity can be gauged from the fact that his works began to be exchanged as gifts between Arab lovers and as personal love cards – a phenomenon rarely seen in the modern Arab literary world.

What one feels in his poems can be expressed as follows:

- (1) Poem comes to the poet to be written or, in other words, Qabbani was not a poet who wrote a poem but the poem wrote him instead.
- (2) The idea for the poem is first conceived in the mind and it is put down on paper at a much later stage. The final outcome can be compared to a train, which arrives at its final destination after a long journey.

As mentioned earlier, his poetry was full of contradictions. Vagueness was one other quality associated with Qabbani's works. And just like his feminist poetry his political poetry was also vague as far as its meaning was concerned. Though Qabbani's poems had a musical quality to them, they are not very convincing. As far as his love poetry was concerned he used a simple narrative style that was used in the pre-Islamic period. One example of his simple diction, style and vocabulary can be seen below:

"Don't worry most beautiful  
You are always in my words and in my verses  
you may grow older as you grow,  
but never on my pages"  
(On Entering the Sea- pg. 3)

Thus, his immense popularity spread throughout the Arab world and endeared him to the readers because he wrote poetry which the common man could understand and in a language which was simple yet lucid and elegant.