



Socio-Political thoughts as reflected in the poetry of Ma'aruf al-Rusafi

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Abstract:

Literature is one of the richest cultural resources a nation possesses. It reflects like a mirror in which a full image of the political and social conditions of a society is reflected. Socio-political circumstance is one of the phenomena that have had a harsh impact on the Middle East region. Due to the brutal treatment of the rulers many classes of the people within the oppressed nations have risen against the oppressors. Among the Arab freedom fighters we can refer to the remarkable struggle of such poet al-Rusafi. During the twentieth century, Arabic literature has been directly influenced by the political and social events and developments in the Middle East region. Al-Rusafi have entered this battlefield with pen and poems and opened a new chapter in the book of struggle against tyrannical rulers. The rulers of Iraq refer to any accessible tool to inspire people make false promises, deceitful agreements, suppress public education and awareness, attempt to obliterate the indigenous identity and national pride and history of the oppressed nation. They introduced dummy parliament, appoint puppet politicians as members of the parliament and as ministers. Al-Rusafi slandered these tyrannical rulers' tools and measures and fought the rulers each in his own distinctive manners. Al-Rusafi through his writings fight against the rulers as warning the people and inspiring them to defend the governments by condemning and exposing the useless and imposed governments agreements by reminding the people of their glorious national history, by attacking the dummy parliaments and the puppet members and ministers, by calling the people to unity and admonishing them against public discord and exposing their deception. Poets were no exception to this rule. Al-Rusafi have entered this battlefield with pen and poems and opened a new chapter in the book of struggle against tyrannical rulers

Keywords: Arabic poetry, social poetry, political poetry and Ma'aruf al-Rusafi.

Maaruf al-Rusafi (1875-1945) was a prolific poet and activist and a single study can't be adequately deal with his personality and intellectual contributions to the field of Arabic literature. Maaruf Abd al-Ghani Mahmud is popularly known as al-Rusafi. Al-Rusafi was a prominent Modern Arabic poet. His poetic composition deals with the contemporary social problems, national freedom and Iraqi politics. His poetry was a complete record of intellectual developments, social changes, economic problems and political events of contemporary Iraq. Al-Rusafi paid great attention to the content of his poetry. His poetry

contains different kind of themes such as *social, political, descriptive, panegyric, satirical, nasib and fakhr*. His Diwan contains eleven chapters: *الكونيات، والإجتماعيات، والفلسفيات، والوصفيات، والحريقيات، والمراثي، والنسانيات، المقطعات، والحرييات، والسياسيات، والتاريخيات* and where he included three hundred and fifty poems. But the most important chapters of his Diwan were the social and political poetry.

Al-Rusafi was the most distinguished poet who spoke out frankly. In the beginning of his career he published national poems against Ottoman in the Egyptian papers, al-Mu'ayyad and al-Muqtataf. These poems reached the Mahjar because they were so frank and gave voice to such free ideas and nationalistic feelings. The Arabic paper there al-Manazir of Naum Labki stated that al-Rusafi was pseudonym for some great Arabic poet. His poems al-Sijn fi Baghdad, al-Yatim Fi al-Eid, Iqaz al-Ruqud, Ruqayyatal-Sari, Ala-al-Saltana and Tambih al-Niyam exemplify these qualities.

During the rule of the Young Turks, he was also the principal Arabic poet who strongly attacked their unjust and tyrannical policies. During the twenties, his frank poems against the king of Iraq, Parliament, the Government, Ministers and the British authorities were distinguished by their bold and frank manner. He spoke frankly not only in the political field also his social advocacies were unusually outspoken at a time when Iraq, like all other Muslim countries was based on religion and religious leaders and conservatives controlled society. He made most dangerous demands, such as for the emancipation of women, socialism and religious reform, when most of his contemporary poets were devoting their poetry to the praise of their rulers, to the glorification of the Prophet (PBUH) and al-Husayn, as well as personal Hija and wasf.

Through his social poetry, al-Rusafi pointed out the importance of national unity, social activity, charitable work and the freedom of women. Through his poetry, he mentioned earlier glory of the Muslims and the Arabs in order to motivate the Iraqi people to regain past glory. Through his literary works, al-Rusafi demanded individual freedom for each country.

From the verses of “في سبيل حرية الفكر”

أحريتي إني اتخذتك قبلة
أوجه وجهي كل يوم لها عشرا
وأمسك منها الركن مستلما له
وفي ركنها استبدلت بالحجر الحجرا

O my freedom, I made you my Qibla; I turn my face to you ten times in a day.

And I hold your corner; instead of the stone I have reason. (Al-Rusafi, 2012:88)

Al-Rusafi deeply involved himself in the social, economic and political affairs of his time. He was the Arabic poet who mostly discussed the social issues as well as advocated political reform of his own country. Al-Rusafi believed that art has a noble goal; he regarded the ideal poet as one who guides his nation towards intellectual enhancement, not a poet who seeks an artistic goal.

Verses from the poem “الصديق المضاع”

وما الشعر الا أن يكون نصيحة
وليس سري القوم من كان شاعرا
فعلمهم كيف التقديم في العلا
والتشيط كسلانا وتنهض ثاوبا
ولكن سري القوم من كان هاديا
ومن أي طرق بينغون المعاليا

Poetry should be an advice, stimulating the indolent one and awakening the conservative one.

The master of a nation is not one, who is a poet, but one who is a guide.

Who teaches them how may they progress upwards on which road they should seek glory! (Al-Rusafi, 2012:183)

Al-Rusafi strongly advocated for freedom of thought through his literary works, as because freedom of thought is the basic of all kinds of freedom such as national freedom, political freedom, freedom of publication, freedom of liberty and so on. He believed that it had a positive role in the awakening of the people to fight for the cause of their rights. According to al-Rusafi, a country without freedom of thought is an unproductive country. In his poem, he expressed about the goal of freedom “*قي سبيل حرية الفكر*”

إذا كان في الأوطان للناس غاية
فحرية الأفكار غايتها الكبرى

If people in the countries have a goal, freedom of thought is their greatest goal. (Al-Rusafi, 2012:88)

The words of Rusafi’s poetry flow like a water of stream. The salient feature of his poetry is that his feelings are so deep, clear and accurate explanation of what passes within his soul and conscience. Maaruf al-Rusafi lived in a period of history, when the people of Iraq witnessed a lot of political and social events and variations. Rusafi were witnessed the three different political periods in his life. First political period was the Ottoman rule and the tyranny and dictatorship of its rulers. Second political period was World War I and Sharif Hussein’s insurgence against the Ottoman, and afterwards the occupation of Iraq by the British. Third political period was the period of viceroyalty. Maaruf al-Rusafi has portrayed the events of these three periods in his *Diwan*.

Maaruf al-Rusafi opposed identical political and social problems and conflicts. Some of weakness of Iraqi people including the existence of authoritarian regimes in Iraq, the existence of political weakness and backwardness, various social problems such as poverty, the existence of different classes of oppressed and poor people in the society. Al-Rusafi was very desirous of encouraging the people to stand against the rulers for their socio-political equity. The method of the poet in the majority of his poems is that, after representing the underdeveloped status of the country, he would rebuke the common people and encourage them to rise in defiance of their social condition. Rusafi’s tone is sometimes grateful and at other times tearful and mournful. Rusafi firmly believe that by shaking of ignorance and promoting public awareness, he can deliver nations from their miserable condition.

Constantly, Rusafi looks at the chaotic situation of his country with a critical eye and portray the realities of that society. Then he undertakes to warn the masses and awaken them to their condition. It seems that he consider public ignorance as the main case of foreign involvement in the affairs of his country. Consequently, in many of his poems, he encourages the people to acquire knowledge and awareness and rise against the authority. He try to advise the oppressed people of the sordid condition of their country, hoping that he can encourage them to stand against the social unjust. Here briefly explain a few portion from al-Rusafi’s poetry in which he has both presented the realities of the society and has boldly warned the people.

In the ode “إلى الأمة العربية” (To the Arab Nation) which is loaded with his sincere sentiments, al-Rusafi illustrates the social condition of his country. This poem is filled with the sigh and lamentations of this sympathetic poet. It begins with the following lines:

هو الليل يغريه الأسى فيطول
ويرخي وما غير الهموم سدول

“It is night and misery tempts dark to last long,

Thus gloom lingers on dropping curtains of sorrow” (Al-Rusafi, 2012:579)

In the next lines of the ode, al-Rusafi refers to the ignorance and poverty that have overwhelm the country and suggests that people should take action, sharpen up their blunted mettle and sense of honor, and begin with a scientific movement, so as to blow a fresh spirit into this trying experience, and save the country from its oppressed state:

بلاد بها جهل وفقير كلاهما
أكل شروب للحياة قتل

I saw a land where ignorance and poverty,
Do nothing but eat, drink and slay life, (Al-Rusafi, 2012:581)

ألا نهضة علمية عربية
فتتبعش أرواح بها وعقول؟

O Arabs! Rise and launch a scientific movement,
So that souls and minds would flourish therein. (Al-Rusafi, 2012:581)

In 1930, when al-Rusafi was a member of the parliament in Iraq, he opposed an Iraqi British agreement and stood against it, because his conscience could not abide silent while an agreement disadvantageous to the Iraqi nation was in the process of conclusion. This opinion was one of the main reasons for his poverty which sustained until his death. According to al-Rusafi, all of those agreements were artificial and false. In an ode entitled “Upon Issuing Agreements” he bluntly opposed one of the agreements which eclipsed and restricted people’s freedom.

In many of his poems, al-Rusafi rebukes those people who remain silent and persist in their ignorance, while English colonialism and oppression still pervade. For example, in the ode “Freedom in the Colonizers’ politics,” al-Rusafi puts the definition of freedom, in ironic terms, in the mouth of the colonizers. Thus, free individuals are those who do not talk, they are in such a deep sleep and refuse to wake up, they are far from progress and lag behind, they are kept in ignorance and do not show any eagerness for learning, they have no political understanding, they are naive to such an extent that when they are told their land is going to be divided by the foreigners, they would thank the almighty and chant a happy song. In this poem, the poet tells the utter truth in an ironic manner. He inculcates his audience with the bitter truths and forces them to ponder.

يا قوم لا تتكلموا
ناموا ولا تستيقظوا

“O people! Do not speak
Sleep and do not wake up
certainly, speech is prohibited
Verily those who sleep win (Al-Rusafi, 2012:649)

يا قوم سوف تقسم
وترنحوا، وترنموا

O people! Even if you are told that
Then you shall pray and thank God
your country will be divided
you shall swing while you chant.” (Al-Rusafi, 2012:650)

Conclusion: From the above discussion about Ma’aruf al-Rusafi and his contributions to the Arabic literature in the field of socio-political thoughts, I can reach at a conclusion that Ma’aruf al-Rusafi was a prolific humanitarian poet. Al-Rusafi deeply involved himself in the social, economic and political affairs of his time. He was the Arabic poet who mostly discussed the social issues as well as advocated political reform of his own country. Through his social poetry, al-Rusafi pointed out the importance of national unity, social activity, charitable work and the freedom of women. Al-Rusafi refers to the ignorance and poverty that have overwhelm the country and suggests that people should take action, sharpen up their blunted mettle and sense of honor, and begin with a scientific movement, so as to blow a fresh spirit into this trying experience, and save the country from its oppressed state.

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