



# Role Of Mahjarites To The Development Of Modern Arabic Literary Movement In The United States: An Analytical Study

Dr. Md. Atowar Rahman

Assistant professor

Department of Arabic

B. N. College, Dhubri, Assam, India

## Introduction

The Mahjar Literature was established at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century by the Arab writers, who emigrated to the North and South America because of socio-political and economic problems from some Arab Countries including Syria, Lebanon etc. They established there progressive merchant colonies in major cities such as- *New York, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paul*. They prospered in commerce but did not forget their homeland and maintained their own cultural identity in the foreign land. They introduced there a new look in Arabic literature. The influence of their literary endeavour touched the nooks and crannies of the Arab World. As a result, they gave birth to the Modern Literary School named "*The School of al- Mahjar*" (i.e. *The Literary School of Liban Emigrants*), a cross product of Arab- American Cultural and Literary values. They specially, brought a new revolution in Arabic poetry.

However, it is not easy for Mahjar literateurs to live among the people who do not know their language, culture and tradition during the early years of their migration. But after a short span of time the Mahjarites coped with all challenges and began the literary activity in the foreign land. These exponents, who were familiar with the Arabic literature and culture very well and they adopted the Western Civilization and Literature of foreign lands. They specially brought a new spirit and revolution by their works to the Modern Arabic literature.

These Lebanese and Syrian exponents had an interest in literature in general and poetry in particular. By co-operating and helping each other in their literary works and ideas, they were able to form a coherent group with common characteristics and some of them had talent to produce work of a quality and originality which played a major role in the development of romantic poetry in Arabic. As a result a new kind of Arabic literature was introduced, known by the Arabs as *Adab al- Mahjar*, a mixed product of Arab-American culture and literature.

## Objectives of the study

- To analyze Mahjarites had a great role to the development of modern Arabic literature in North and South America.
- To examine Al-Mahjar i.e. Arab emigrants has given a hybrid product of Arab- American culture and literature.
- To prove the Arab emigrants established their identity in the foreign lands.

## Discussion

*Al-Mahjar (emigrant)*, the birth of a modern Arabic literary school, which is a derivative of the Arabic verb '*Hajara*' connotes a literary school which evolved among the Syrian Arab emigrants to the United States and Latin America in the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries. They were predominantly Maronite Christians from Lebanese extraction who due to some problems had to migrate to the United States.

Generally, we know migration means movement of people or a group of people from one place to another place due to social, political and economic reasons. However, when it is carried out in large number it is then tagged exodus. Migration is determined or restricted by nature and wealth of a people. No people on earth could be independent of herself or himself without the need of interact with others or benefit from them. So, migration could from rich or poor, powerful and less powerful Nations.

During the end of the nineteenth century Lebanon had fallen under the Islamic empire and the rulership of the Ottomanic Caliph, Sultan Abdul Hamid, who ruled with high-handedness which exposed the citizen to untold hardship and serious sufferings. Due to this, one of the available options for this helpless people was to humbly leave their country seeking asylum in foreign lands. To able to appreciate their sufferings and hardships, various factors leading to their emigration as political, economic and social factors etc.

## Literary Movements of Mahjarites

The literary contribution of Mahjarites was more in poetry, among them a few poets achieved actual eminence. The role played by the Mahjar poets in spreading romantic activities which was very enormous. These poets were left for America historically and culturally in search of political freedom or livelihood. In America they had more freedom for literary experimentation than those of their compatriots who chose to settle in Egypt. They seemed to have been influenced by Western literature and culture. They became close acquainted with Western literature, especially with the works of English poets namely- *Longfellow, Walt Whitman, Emersion and Edgar Alan Poe*. The Mahjar poets, especially those of the United States, exercised a liberating influence upon modern Arabic poetry. They turned away from conventional style of Arabic prose and poetry.

The Mahjarites understood the importance of joint activities in order to develop this literature to cover a wider geographic range and to gather more readers very soon. As such, they united the various literary societies that Mahjar writers established. The main objectives of these new activities in North and South America were to preserve the Arabic language and literature in the new World to bring it to the level which meets the necessities of the Modern World literature as well as to bring innovations in the literature.

The first Arabic literary society "*Al-Rabita al-Qalamiyya*" 'The Pen League' was a Mahjar literary society established in New York in 1920 by Arab Emigrant writers in North America which played a vital role in the literature of the North American Mahjar. It was the biggest Arabic literary society which formed the writers who were characterised with a new way of thinking. Jibran Khalil Jibran was the founder president and the members of the society were Mikhail Nuayma, Ilya Abu Madi, Nasib Arida, Rashid Ayyub, Abdul Masih Haddad and Nedrad Haddad. After the collapse of the literary magazine *Al-Funun*, the twice-weekly paper *al-Sa'ih* newspaper published in 1912 under the guidance of Abdul Masih Haddad. This newspaper spread important messages to the Arabic World from the America and managed to influence lots of writers. All the Mahjar writers and poets published their works and ideas through this newspaper.

*Al-Rabita al-Qalamiyya* one of the most important literary societies established by the Arab emigrant writers was composed of a small and rather select group of advent-garde men of letters who although differing in artistic level and output, all believed in the necessity of change and the introduction of a new conception and attitudes". They were imbued with modernist and anti-traditional ideas and in America they had more freedom for literary experimentation than those of their compatriots who chose to settle in Egypt. They seemed to have been influenced by the latter-day romanticism and transcendentalism of American literature and they were much more anti-traditionalism than those who immigrated to South America.

Jibran Khalil Jibran, played a vital role in the lives of "the Pen Association" in North America because of his intellectual leadership and the strong impact of his rebellious romantic personality on other members of the group. Jibran Khalil Jibran had shown a capacity and taste for intellectual leadership. The Arab Writers in America who met him must have seen in him the embodiment of what a man of letters should be one after another was attracted by his reputation and a clique grew around him. Some important writers who were drawn into his orbit were Mikhail Nu'aima, Abd al-Masih Haddad, Nasib Arida and Iliya Abu Madi.

Moreover, it can be observed that the Mahjar writers developed their creative activities by uniting different societies in order to preserve their native language, ideology and customs to be aware of the political and cultural processes happening in their homeland. Despite the difficulties of living in foreign lands, the main priority for these immigrant writers was to immortalize their origins and not to fall apart from the Arab people. The immigrant Arabs who lived in South America succeeded to establish many societies. '*Al-rabita al-Qalamiyya*' was the first genuine literary school in modern Arabic which played an important role for Arabic literature and to promote this newly conceived idea among the Middle Eastern writers. A similar Association was formed in Latin America called '*Al-Ushbat al-Andalusiya*' (The Andalusian society) founded in the Brazilian city of San Paulo in January 1993. The idea of establishing this society was proposed by the famous writer Shukrullah Al-Jurr and Mishel Naama Maaluf was elected as the first chairman. The literature of Andulisia is formed at the junction of East and West and unites the features of East and West. The Arab called Spain Andalusia.

These groups, apart from carrying out their literary activities served as pressure groups which turned into freedom fighting movements against the Ottomanic dictatorship in their homeland. The literary activities of their new environment greatly influenced these groups of literary men. The literary works in English and

French, especially those of long fellow, Walt Whitman and Edgar Alan were top on the list of Western poets and writers who greatly influenced the thinking pattern of Mahjar literary figures.

### **Mahjarites in the development of Modern Arabic Literature**

It has been undoubtedly said that the members of the Mahjar School were largely influenced by their contact with the Western World and Western Literary works which greatly shaped their approaches to Modern Arabic Literature. However, the members of Al-Rabita placed high premium on Western ideas than the traditional values in Arabic literature. This is reflected in the words of Jibran Khalil Jibran as-

*“If the meaning of beauty of thought requires the breaking of rules, break it. If there is no know word to express your idea, borrow or invent one if syntax stands in the way of needed or useful express, away with the syntax”.*

Moreover, the influence of Western Literature led to their invention and adoption of versified free poetry writing which deviates completely from the classical metric measurement styles of writing Arabic poetry. Modern philosophical thoughts featured prominently and conspicuously in the works of many Mahjar poets and writers. Ilya Abu Madi was famous for his romantic styles as reflected in his Lastu adri (I donot know). Simply of language, theme and style was employed to make Arabic literature more fascinating and easily understandable like other modern literatures. This could be summed up in the following statement:

*“The members of the literary society Al-Rabita al-Qalamiyyah were able to bring about a revolution in Arabic poetry by using simple diction, style and stanzaic form with short metres, expressing them in various was using techniques borrowed from drama and narratives and employing evocative symbols and new images. The members of this society were interested more in realizing the new principal in their own poetry.”*

We have been able to trace out the origin of a branch of Modern Arabic literature that which evolved due to the eventful migration of some Syrian Arabs of Lebanese stock to the United States which took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as a result of tyrannical rulership of the Ottoman ruler, Sultan Abdul Hamid.

### **Impact of Mahjarites**

The emigrant group represents the Arabic literary movement in America, it includes: *Jibran Khalil Jibran (1883-1931)*, *Mikhail Nu'aymah (b.1889)*, *Iliya Abu Madi (1899-1957)*, *Khalil Mutran(1872-1948)*, *Amin al-Rayhani*, *Abdul Masih al-Haddad (1890-1963)* and *Nasib 'Arida(1887-1964)*, nevertheless they provided inspiration for the enlargement of its literary horizons. These emigrant writers, youthful masters and veterans were more receptive to Western cultural and literary trends than the Arab back home. A close acquaintance with the Western literature, especially with the works of American poets as mentioned above and perfection in more than one Western language enabled them to lead the revolt against the conventional style of both Arabic prose and poetry, just as their counterparts *Shukrī, al-Mazini and al-Aqqād*.

The Mahjar poets, who immigrated to America and formed such a distinct school of writing that they deserved separate treatment. In addition to this, they exercised a profound influence upon their contemporaries in the Arab lands, an influence which can be clearly seen not only in the works of minor poets. The Mahjar poets both historically and culturally are an extension of Lebanese and Syrian poetry.

They although fell under the influence of Western Romantic poetry, directly or otherwise their social, political, cultural and economic background in their homeland helped to some extent to shape their later output.

After their emigration to America in the early of the twentieth century, their influences of literary revival in Egypt should not be overlooking. The majority of Mahjar writers basically came from the Lebanon and Syria and most of them were Christians. They often less bound by the Arabic literary tradition, which was always considered a part of Muslim and the Arab heritage. It is surprising that the writers of the mahjar were more open to literary innovation and were more inclined towards literary experiments than their colleagues in Arab countries, where the importance of literary tradition weighed more heavily.

Although, it is difficult to express exact opinion for Arabic poetry in Mahjar, no one can deny its past achievement or the extent of its influence on the rest of Arabic poetry. In fact, it can safely be said that the whole generation of romantic poets who reached their maturity in the inter-war period came directly or indirectly under their pervasive influence. By introducing a new conception of poetry, by adding a spiritual dimension to it, so to speak by turning away of poetry from rhetoric and declamation, by concentrating on the more subjective experience of main in relation to nature and ultimate questions, by introducing biblical themes and images into their poetry, by their preference for short metres and stanzaic forms, the Mahjar poets, especially of the United States, exercised a liberating influence upon modern Arabic poetry. Nonetheless, it would be difficult to exaggerate the significance of the role they played in the development of modern Arabic literature, and of the subtle influence they exercised in shaping modern Arab sensibility. Without their seminal minds the course of modern Arabic would in many ways have been difficult.

### **Conclusion**

In the present study, we have traced out the role of Mahjarites in the development of Modern Arabic literature is quite appreciative, which evolved due to the eventful migration of some Syrian Arabs of Lebanese stock to the United State which took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The final result of these cultural contacts gave birth to a hybrid culture; Arab-American culture which was able to strike a balance between the two great cultures. In short, the scholars of Arabic literature analysis the success of the Arab Mahjar writers in different ways like- it was related with their close contact with the Western literature and the success was accomplished because of the works which were written in a unique and original way, different from the traditional one.

## References

1. Badawi. M. M., Modern Arabic Literature, Cambridge University Press, 1992.
2. Hasan, Muhammad Abdul Ghani, Ash-Shai-ul Arabi fi-l Mahjar, Cairo, 1995.
3. Jihad Fadal, Al-Adab-ul Hadith fi Lubnan, Beirut, 1996.
4. Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature, vol-1, London, 1998.
5. Mahdi, Ismat, Modern Arabic Literature, Hyderabad, 1983.
6. Jayyusi, S.K., Trends and Movements of Modern Arabic Poetry, Leiden, 1977.
7. Badawi. M. M., Modern Arabic Literature and West, London, 1985.
8. Badawi, M.M., A Critical Introduction to Arabic Poetry Literature, Cambridge University Press, London-1975.
9. Brugman. J., An Introduction to the History of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt, Vol-X, Leiden E. J. Brill, 1984.
10. Badawi M.M., An Anthology of Modern Arabic Verse.

