



Contribution of Ilya Abu Madi to the development of Mahjar Poetry : A Study

Ilya Abu Madi was really the exponent of Mahjar literature. He left no stone unturned for the development of Mahjar literature. The idea of liberating influence upon modern Arabic poetry by introducing a new concept was exercised by Ilya Abu Madi. Searching for a quieter and more subdued tone they turned away from rhetoric and declamation. Ilya Abu Madi poets concentrated on subjective experience of man in relation to nature and introduced biblical themes and images into metres and stanza. Moreover, she composed free verses with light rhythm.

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Introuction :

Like many other world literatures, Arabic literature has also undergone some significant developments outside its geographical territory. Many of the revolutionary writers across the world have been forced to leave their homeland and settle them down a host country temporarily or permanently. Although these immigrant writers left their motherland, they did not leave their own distinct identity and belongings to their mother tongue. Migration literally means movement of people from one place to another for various reasons like socio-political, socio-cultural, socio-religious and tourism etc. When a migration is carried out in large number it is dubbed as exodus. Migration for the purpose of livelihood generally takes place from a weak economy to a relatively stronger economy. Migration influences both the immigrants as well as the local inhabitants. Apart from demographic changes, migration results in cross-cultural interactions. Generally what happens is that in a new environment the immigrant community finds it helpless. They naturally strive hard to earn their livelihood and make their presence visible. The immigrant community makes a significant contribution to the enrichment of art and literature. Historically, migration had long been a part of life of the Arabs in general and of Lebanese people in particular. Lebanese people are known for their adventurous life.

A glance on Mahjar Literature :

The term mahjar (plural mahajir) is derived from the Arabic word hijrah means emigration. The literal meaning of mahjar is the place of emigration, retreat, refuge or sanctuary; emigration; settlement, colony.⁽¹⁾ The term mahjar denotes a school or a literary movement, developed by the Arab

emigrants in North and South America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They were predominantly Christians who migrated to America due to socio-political and socio-economic unrest that prevailed in their own country Lebanon. The Lebanese emigrants engaged themselves in literary activities along with their struggle for livelihood. Some of them started working as journalists to raise their voice. By means of literature they tried to play the role of a pressure group which encouraged the freedom fighting movements against the Ottoman dictatorship in their homeland. The Lebanese emigrants founded two literary societies viz. Al-Rabitah al-Qalamiyah (The Pen League) in North America and Al-Usbah al-Andalusiya (The Literary Society) in South America. Long Fellow, Walt Whitman and Edgar Alan were greatly influenced by the literary activities of Mahjar writers. Despite large influence of the western literature on Mahjar School, it was equally influenced by the earlier modern Arabic literary schools like the 'Neo Classical School' pioneered by Mahmud Sami al-Barudi and nurtured and developed upon by Ahmad Shawqi and Hafiz Ibrahim, the Diwan School of Abdur Rahman Shukri and Ibrahim Abdul Qadir al-Mazini and the Apollo School of Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi. Actually, the Mahjar, the new school of Arabic literature is a hybrid form both of English and Arabic literature.

Short biography of Ilya Abu Madi and his contribution to Mahjar literature :

Ilya Abu Madi is considered as one of greatest thinkers, philosophers, litterateurs of Mahjar literature. He occupied a unique place among the contemporary Arab poets. He was one of the prolific gifted poets of Mahjar literature. He is regarded the purest Mahjar poet.⁽²⁾ He was born in

Muhaidatha, Lebanon, in 1889. Abu Madi immigrated to Alexandria in 1900 where he started business for his uncle as a tobacconist. But he was very much interested in Arabic language and literature. So, at his leisure time he used to learn Arabic language and as a result he started composing poetry. Even before his leaving to United States of America in 1911, he published his first volume of poetry entitled *Tadhkar al-Madi*. He migrated to America in 1911 and settled in Cincinnati as a merchant. He moved to New York in 1916 and joined the group of Arab writers especially one who wrote for *Al-Funun*. He played an active role as a poet and journalist.⁽³⁾ And finally he became the main exponent of Mahjar Poetry Literature.

During his stay in New York, Ilya Abu Madi worked as a journalist and edited some newspapers and magazines. He was the editor of *Al-Majallah al-Arabiyya*, the periodical of Palestine youth, and then he became the editor of *Al-Fatat* and *Mir'tul Gharb*. He found his own periodical *Al-Sameer* in the year 1929, which appeared as a fortnightly until 1939, then became a daily; it continued until 1957 and it was one of the leading Mahjar newspapers in North America.

In 1919 Ilya Abu Madi published his second collection of poetry in New York namely *Al-Diwan al-Thani* with forwarding by Jibran Khalil Jibran. In 1927, he published another volume entitled *Al-Jadawal* followed by *Al-Khamail* in 1940. His last collection of poetry published posthumously namely *Al-Tibr wal-Turab* by Brooklyn, New York. He died in 1957.

Ilya Abu Madi was a ring leader of *Al-Rabitah al-Qalamiyah* i.e. the Pen League. (*Al-Rabitah al-Qalamiyah* was the first Arab-American literary society formed initially by Nasib Arida and Abdul Masih al-Haddad in 1915 and subsequently reformed in 1920 under the leadership of Jibran Khalil Jibran. Mikhail Nu'aima was chosen as the secretary and supported by a group of young writers like William Katzeffli, Ilya Abu Madi, Nasib Arida, Rashid Ayyub, Abdul Masih al-Haddad and Nadra al-Haddad who have been working closely since 1911).⁽⁴⁾ The house of Ilya Abu Madi was the meeting place of Mahjar poets and authors. In 1949, he represented the journalists of Mahjar in the UNESCO conference in Beirut. By then he had become a celebrity not only in Mahjar literature but also all over the Arab world.⁽⁵⁾

Tadhkar al-Madi, the first collection of poetry by Ilya Abu Madi contains nine poems which are rather heavy, moralistic compositions, all strongly didactic in tone. The second collection contains poetic narratives, a type of composition, which still very much in its infancy in Arabic at that time and some of which remind one strongly of the works of Khalil Mutran. The collection also contains of natural description in which the author has frequent recourse to pathetic fallacy. It also contains some love poems which are described as traditional outputs. Besides amatory poetry, there are numerous poems about Syria and Lebanon; many of them are occasional poetry. They open display the usual nostalgia of the emigrant for his homeland, but they are all concerned with political and military crises which broke out during the First World War.

Al-Jadawal is considered as Ilya Abu Madi's peak achievement. His first poem of this collection is all mystery, constant searching, doubt and urgent but unidentified aspiration. His verses, dealing with his restless queries, are the most distinctive of his composition. Ilya Abu Madi, the great poet of moods, gave memorable expression to intense feelings of joy and sorrow. His changing mood from despair hope can best be seen in a narrative or dramatic context in his excellent poem *Al-Masa*.

Many factors helped to shape Ilya Abu Madi's poetic style. A good grounding in grammar and prosody that he acquired in his formative years of Alexandria gave him a solid base for his verse. He is indeed credited with a more thorough grasp of the rules of poetry than any other Mahjar poet.⁽⁶⁾ His beautiful Arabic style is greatly admired by the Arabs. His verses are smooth and his style is purer more Arabic in texture than the rest of the Syro-American poets. In the final analysis, he was never quite able to accept the self-righteous, splendid isolation of the poet's role as expounded by Jibran and others. Ilya Abu Madi's career is fascinating development from unremarkable neo-classical verse to some of the peaks of achievement in romantic poetry. His work also has the extra dimension of imaginative power which on occasion takes it beyond the limits of the romantic experience and lends it a permanent value which transcends the style of his immediate generation.⁽⁷⁾

Characteristics of poetry of Ilya Abu Madi :

The real significance of poetry of Ilya Abu Madi apart from the intrinsic merit is that it developed in an alien environment separated both physically and culturally from its native context and in an atmosphere devoid of literary traditions, socio-political prejudices and pressures. Most of the characteristics of Ilya Abu Madi reappeared inside the Arab world especially in Egypt.⁽⁸⁾

Ilya Abu Madi was romantic, humanistic and mystical as well. At the same time he adopted a new concept of language which was neither sacred nor profane, rather than living medium of expression subject to changes and developments. Consequently they stressed to revive Arabic language and tried to restore simplicity and vitality which was destroyed because of stagnant conservatism. He revolted against the traditional system of Arabic prose and poetry.⁽⁹⁾

Ilya Abu Madi entertained a boundary relationship with both Arabic and English traditions. Their cultural root was the main reason for their nostalgic remembrance of the past. They used to write mainly in Arabic and English was their second language for creative writings. Ilya Abu Madi has shown more the feeling of being a stranger than any other poets like Rashid Ayyub, Nasib Arida and Mikhail Nu'aima. He was influenced by new classical poetry of Mahmud Sami al-Barudi, Ahmad Shawqi and Hafiz Ibrahim and it is highly reflected in his first *Diwan Tadhkar al-Madi* published in 1911. The same year he migrated to the USA and in 1927 he published his second *Diwan Al-Jadawal*, which clearly proved

that without losing the neo-classical virtues he had matured into a romantic poet.

Here are some important characteristics of Ilya Abu Madi :

- (1) Liberation from Classical Rigidity
- (2) Gravity of Individual Personalities
- (3) Inclination towards Humanity
- (4) Nostalgia for the Homeland
- (5) Spiritual Meditation
- (6) Simplicity and Musical Delicacy
- (7) Religious Freedom
- (8) Portrayal and Description

Conclusion :

By above discussion statement can be made that Ilya Abu Madi was really the exponent of Mahjar literature. He left no stone unturned for the development of Mahjar literature. The idea of liberating influence upon modern Arabic poetry by introducing a new concept was exercised by Ilya Abu Madi. Searching for a quieter and more subdued tone they turned away from rhetoric and declamation. Ilya Abu Madi poets concentrated on subjective experience of man in relation to nature and introduced biblical themes and images into metres and stanza. Moreover, she composed free verses with light rhythm.

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- (6) संदर्भ ग्रंथ सूची इस प्रकार दें -

For Books :

- (1) Name of Writer, "Name of Book", Publication, Place of Publication, Year of Publication, Page Number/numbers.

For Journals :

- (2) Name of Writer, "Title of Article", Name of Journal, Volume, Issue, Page Numbers.

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- (8) शोधपत्र की साफ्टकॉपी रिसर्च लिंक के ई-मेल आईडी researchlink@yahoo.co.in पर भेजने के बाद हार्डकॉपी, शोधपत्र के मौलिक होने के घोषणा पत्र के साथ हस्ताक्षर कर 'रिसर्च लिंक' के कार्यालय को प्रेषित करें।

