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The Portrayal of ‘Humanity’ in the Fiction of Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah: A Discussion

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Abstract

In the present day world ‘humanity’ is the utmost necessary issue to establish in every society; for which many litterateurs used to make efforts to bring the same into the consistence of their writings. In this connection, the Egyptian fiction writer Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah also shared his views through his novels; he made portrayal of various issues related to the humanity in particular for showing the moral values in the society. He inquired of the human beings why they are negligent in matters of humanity. In his novels he made depictions of the society in such a way that the humanitarian activities are about to be nullified and subsequently people are oppressed by the dominating sections. In this connection, we find some of his novels that related to the issues of humanity; they are: ‘al-Bahith ‘an al-Haqîqah (Searching for the Truth), al-Jannah al-‘Adhra (the Virgin Garden), Laqîta (A Foundling Girl). Moreover, in his short-stories like Hâfa al-Jarîma (the Edge of Crime) and al-Nâfidha al-Gharbiyyah (The Western Window); all these novels are concerned with the values of humanity in the greater society of the world.

Key Words: Arabic Novel, humanity, fiancé, society, penniless.

Introduction: Muhammad ‘Abd al-Halîm ‘Abd Allâh (1913 – 1970), one of the most influential Arabic fiction writers, was born and brought up in Egypt in the middle of the twentieth century.¹ He was born in a village named ‘Kafr Bulin’ in 1913 AD, a centre place of ‘Kom Hamada’ of coastal Beheira Delta of Egypt.² In his early age he memorized some parts of the Holy Qur’ân from the village school. He completed his primary education from the religious institutions of Alexandria and also from *Madrassa al-Mua’llimîn* of Cairo. He received his graduation from *Darul Ulum*, Cairo in the year 1937 AD. Later on, he was appointed to the position of an editor for the Arabic language Academy. From his schooling period, he had profound interest in writing fictions in Arabic language. Altogether he wrote twenty nine books; they are fourteen novels, twelve short-stories and three books on criticism. He was awarded Arabic language Academy Prize for his contribution to the Arabic fiction literature. His novel *Ba’da al-Ghurûb* (1949 A.D.) was selected for getting the 64th position among the best hundred Arabic novels. He obtained the State Prize for his novel *Shams al-Kharif* in 1953. As a well-wisher of the society, he tried his level best to educate his villagers, for which he established a school in 1957 A.D. Moreover, he was an active member of the Association of Arab Union. He travelled over most of the Arab countries in his lifetime and participated in the various seminars as well. He visited Europe in 1954 and stayed in France for three months. During those days he studied French language and got the degree of *Cours de Vacances*.³ He was one of the new romanticists in the genre of Arabic novels and his name and fame spread in the world with a culminated position. But, the destiny took him away as and when he succumbed to the death in a fatal accident that took place in 1970 A.D.

Here it is worth mentioning that the great historian Hanna Fakhûrî mentions in his book *Al-Jami’ fi-Tarikh al-Adab al-Arabi (al-‘Asr al-Hadîth)* about some prominent and reputed fiction writers of Modern Arabic Literature as follows:

"The Arabic fiction developed step by step and reached its final stage of perfection during the 19th century by the distinguished writers. They are: Mahmud Taimur, Tawfiq al-Hakîm, Tawfiq Awwad, Naguib Mahfouz, Muhammad 'Abd al- Halîm 'Abd Allâh, Taha Husain, Ibrahim 'Abd al-Qâdir al-Mazinî, and 'Abd al-Hamid al-Sahhar and so on..."⁴

Humanitarian grounds in the Novel of Muhammad 'Abd al-Halîm 'Abd Allâh: Famous Orientalist Jordan Mono says; "The humanitarian grounds are the fixed attributes in the fiction of Muhammad 'Abd al- Halîm 'Abd Allâh. He is a man who writes for the world and also for the human beings so that humanity can enhance them."⁵

• **Defense against oppression:** In his historical novel *al-Bahith 'an al-Haqîqah* (1966) it has been observed that people of the leading section usually behaved the common human beings like the servants or the shepherds very rudely. If they are found neglected in protecting their animals or doing any other works, they used to take serious action against them. Even the common people are physically tortured by the so-called elite group of people. The hero of the novel 'Salman' and his father were the fire worshiper from the village of 'Jai', in the city of Isfahan during the period of Persian Emperor. His father was a leader of the community in that region. He was a very cruel man who often showed cruelty towards the poor people. On the other hand, his son 'Salman' was opposite to his father. He did not tolerate any injustice from his father. He protected the tortured people from injustice and extended his helping hand to them. In this connection an example can be showed from the novel. One day 'Salman' came from outside to his house and asked his mother about his father. Then his mother told him that he might have gone to the field of cultivation. After hearing this news he proceeded to the field and found his father in a state of torturing the shepherd. Then he came in front of his father and protested him against the oppression and told him:

"O my father! (What are you doing?) Then his father stopped from whipping the shepherd. Have you come? Oh my lovely son!

Solman told him while his eyes were shedding tears copiously: "You are wrong ... it doesn't suit you ...All these poor fellows are same as I am... you have whipped them bitterly".

Then he asked his father about the oppression:

Why are you whipping?

His father replied loudly:

Today three pigs died because of him ...then 'Salman' asked him: what will happen if he dies? Pointing to the (the Shepherd).

Then his father replied:

He is out of the number, oh my son ...⁶

Here, it appears from this scene of the novel that as a human being the miserable section of people are deprived of the sympathy and the right to live in such a discriminating society. In this respect, the hero of the novel came forward and defended the shepherd with a bold step. He is seen to equalize all the human beings no matter whatever he or she professionally does.

• **The value of self- dignity:** In another short-story entitled *Kullu Shaiyyin 'alâ mâ Euramu* (Everything is as desired) of *al-Nâfidha al-Gharbiyyah*, the author has depicted "a story of an old man who used to earn his livelihood by collecting firewood. Later on, due to rheumatism in his back side of his shoulder he could not go to his daily works. Then he started stealing money but one day he was caught by people and handed him over to the police. The scene was sorrowful because while he was chasing towards the police station his one hand was over the painful shoulder and the other one over his stolen bag. While his own son observed it he became ashamed of. Thereafter, his father thought that: "hungriness is better than stealing and the nobility is precious then the gold; and the gentle man can emerge out from everywhere as a gentleman without any stain although he was put in the prison."⁷

In another short-story book of Muhammad 'Abd al- Halîm 'Abd Allâh entitled *'Alwan min al-Saa 'dah'* where there is story named *al-Rakhis al-Ghali* shows moral and ethical values. The writer has portrayed a picture of a beautiful woman who had four sons. But her husband, a rural poor man, was unexpectedly died. After her husband's demise, she started living along with her own children. After a few days, she became penniless that made difficulty to continue her life. Then, she approached to one of her neighbors and collected ten pounds from him as a debt. But her neighbor was a dishonest in character. Due to her fair complexion she became a victim of that dishonest person who tried to

seduce her chastity. One day he came to her house with a view to collect money but his intention was to seduce her. But, the widow denied fulfilling his lust. Since then his relation with her was cut off. Thereafter, he attempted again for the same intention but she rejected him completely. The widow prefers to live with her morality and followed the theory of ethical value like: "It is good to live with hungry but not ill means" and violation of this chastity is an insult of her dignity. She stands by her moral value and refused to do any unethical activities. Thus, she fought for the self dignity and morality.⁸

• **Social Bias and Contradiction:** Muhammad 'Abd al- Halim 'Abd Allâh also put forwarded his views about the biased society and its various contradictions. Here we may give examples from his two other novels *Al-Jannah al-'Adhra* (The Virgin Garden), and *Laqîta* (A Foundling Girl):

In the novel *al-Jannah al-'Adhra*, the novelist has described the bias society where the rich people always try to dominate over the poor section of the people. They showed discrimination in their property. 'Hammuda', a protagonist in the novel, was such kind of man who applied his authority over his small step-brother 'Reda' and also his step-mother 'Buhayya'. He deprived them of their parental inheritance. Afterwards they had to face many problems in their life. But, Reda and his mother Buhayya did not frustrate and vowed to fight until they get back their property. Thereafter they reached the court to get justice. But they were failed initially to get the same, because Hammuda paid a heavy amount to the lawyer as a bribe. That is why, the lawyer did not eager to continue the case rather he thought to demolish the case also. In this story it reveals that how the mighty people oppress inhumanly to the poor people of the society.⁹

Similarly, in the novel *Laqîta* (A Foundling Girl) it is seen that 'Laila', the heroine was a miserable girl from the lower section of people but her fiancé 'Jamal' was a doctor by profession from the higher class of people. They fell in love each other and planned to get marry but the father of Jamal was from the elite class. He did not support his marriage ceremony with a girl of lower class. He therefore tried to know the background of her family first, and then he could allow him to marry. Actually, he got feared from the society and its people. But 'Jamal' denounced his father's step and got ready to marry her. In this connection an example can be given as follows:

Jamal's father asked him:

"I will not contradict to anything till her status is not found low; if there is a differentiation between the bride and bridegroom then there will be a pit between them. Therefore I should see her home before conducting marriage."¹⁰

After hearing this demand, Laila became bewildered at once she told 'Jamal':

"Verily there is a class variation, oh doctor!"¹¹

• **Sympathetic attitudes:** In the novel *Laqîta* (1947) the heroine Laila by name used to work as a nurse in the hospital of "doctor Kaf..." One day, 'Syed al-Amin', a spiritual person visited the hospital for treatment. Laila was entrusted for his treatment until his recovery. He was satisfied at her treatment; in return he blessed her and admonished for her entire life. She got opportunity to express before him about her distress and agony of her life. Then he told her as follows:

- Are you foundling? People have oppressed you very much!

In response to this Laila said:

- My father and mother firstly made oppression on me!

Then the old man (*shaykh*) told her:

- Don't oppress yourself; because you are vicissitudes of fate that you know.

Moreover, he gives advices to her as follows:

Smile for the life and laugh for the existence, and enter in your heart and refrain from every sort of pessimism, and design the world with happiness, then the world will be happy around you.

You are the first linkage in the chain of lineage, so be the precious connection and who says to you "where is your lineage?" Say to him: where is your character? If you are equal to each other in the character, then he will not remain with pedigree ...you have not begotten yourself and he has not begotten himself.¹²

• **Irresponsibility:** In the short story of *Hâfa al- Jarîma* (the Edge of Crime) a good number of humanitarian scenes have been endowed. The story entitled: '*al-Tazkira al- Khadra*' (the Green Ticket) reveals various sentimental and emotional issues related to the humanity.

A young boy wanted to travel Alexandria with an elderly man 'al-Haj Ismail' for the first time. The boy thought that if he would go with this man he would not face any difficulty in his journey. But during the journey the man lost his humanity and morality. They had many luggages in their journey. After getting down the train they had to carry their luggage. But they could not carry the same easily. Thereafter some porters came close to the al-Haj Ismail but he did not give them any chance. Instead of this he ordered the boy to carry the heavy burden on his shoulder and he himself took the light bag with his hand and started journey. His shoulder was about to get fractured because of the excessive burden. His elder son met him and greeted very respectfully but did not give any importance to the boy. Thereafter, both of them started a conversation between them. The boy understood that it was against his favor. Afterwards, there prevailed a silence between 'al-Haj Ismail' and his son. They planned that they would not take him to their house as a guest. Simultaneously, his son managed a car and boarded the entire luggage and went away. 'Al-Haj Ismail' was waiting for a man to whom he would entrust the boy and could be free. Finally, he made a deal with the help of an unknown man and paid him enough money and boarded on an auto rickshaw and went away. In that situation he found himself fully helpless and his eyes were shedding tears.

- You are like my brother...You will be with me until you finish your examination.

He replied him shamefully:

- Thank you... But my father handed me over to him.

Then he told trickily:

-in his house there are many guests. As far as our house is concerned it is spacious enough.

Thereafter they took a tram car to reach their house... While they were going travelling to the Alexandria he asked him:

Has al-Haj Ismail given my money to you?

Your money?! No.

Do you know his address? No. he even did not tell me his address. ¹³

Moreover, he did not fulfill his responsibility of the boy to give him shelter in his house. Instead of this, he handed the boy to an unknown person in his journey and deserted the boy in his helpless condition.

Conclusion: Here it may be concluded that that Muhammad 'Abd al- Halim 'Abd Allâh was a writer of great excellence who portrayed in his fictions the value of humanity for the society he lived. In addition, he made portrayal of various illegal and unethical pictures that appeared in his contemporary society along with a discussion in his writings about the situation that took place in the society. He denounced those people who were involved in these illegal activities and he did not like their saliency rather expressed his views and opinions boldly. He advocates human beings to be honest, polite, noble, generous and kind and also gives much more importance of self-dignity and self-respect of the people in their contemporary society.

End Notes:

- ¹. Matti Musa, *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*, Second Edition, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. U.S.A 1997, p.278.
- ². Dr. Shaban Arafat, *Ruyatul Waqiyyi fi al-Qissa al-Misriyya al-Qasira bain Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah wa Mahmud Taimur*, *Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyya, al-Qahira, Maktabat al- Adab*, 2008.p.10.
- ³. Dr. Yusuf Naufal , *Fann al-Qissa inda Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah , al-Sharika al-Misriyya al-Alamiyya li al-Nashar-Lunjman*, Ist Edition 1996, p. 61.
- ⁴. Hanna Fakhuri: *'al-Jamie fi Tarikh al-Adab al-Arabi (al-Asr al-Hadith)*, Dar al-Jeel, Beirut-Lebanon, 2005AD, p.28.
- ⁵. Dr. Yusuf Naufal , *Fann al-Qissa inda Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah , al-Sharika al-Misriyya al-Alamiyya li al-Nashar-Lunjman*, Ist Edition 1996, p. 61.
- ⁶. Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah, *'al-Bahith 'an al-Haqiqa*, *Dar Misr li-al- Tibaa Said Jauda al-Sahhar wa Sharikah* .p. 12.
- ⁷. Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah, *al-Nafiza al-Gharbiyya*, *Dar Misr li-al- Tibaa Said Jauda al-Sahhar wa Sharikah*. p.12

- ⁸. Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah , *Alwan min al-Saa'dah*, Dar Misr li-al- Tibaa Said Jauda al-Sahhar wa Sharikah, p.136.
- ⁹. Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah, *al- Jannah al-Adara* , Dar Misr li-al- Tibaa Said Jauda al-Sahhar wa Sharikah, p.150.
- ¹⁰. Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah: *Laqita*, 'Dar Misr li-al-Tiba'a Sa'id Jauda al-Sahhar wa Shuraka', p.183.
- ¹¹. Ibid, p.180.
- ¹². Ibid, p.81-82
- ¹³. Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah, *Hâfa al-Jarîma.*, Dar Misr li-al- Tibaa Said Jauda al-Sahhar wa Sharikah, p.25-26.

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6. Abdullah, Muhammad Abdul Halim, '*Laqîta*', 'Dar Misr li-al-Tiba'a Sa'id Jauda al-Sahhar wa Shuraka'
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9. Abdullah, Muhammad Abdul Halim, *Alwan min al-Saa'dah*, Dar Misr li-al- Tibaa Said Jauda al-Sahhar wa Sharikah.
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