

# Arab -American literature and its characteristics

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**Abstract** Arab -American literature is a newly created literature comprised writers from Lebanon and Syria who often wrote in Arabic and collaborated with translation of their works. It is experiencing a renaissance. In this current atmosphere in the United states of enjoying and celebrating literature of culture and immigration, many feelings we have “discovered” the Arab-American voice. The Arab American diaspora tradition goes back to the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continues to thrive today.

**Key Words** :Arab- American literature, Free verse, Natural love, Humanity, Art style

**Introduction** In the first part of nineteenth century the economic and political condition of the Lebanese became very much deplorable, the foreigners like European interfered in their internal affairs. They promulgated among the Lebanese the seeds of divine and dissension to create a different luxurious life style for the foreigners by the help of their administrative power. Their internal predicament caused for their struggle with the ruler to meet up the basic needs and the foreigners had no attention to the affair of the Lebanese people. As time passes the socio-economic condition of the Lebanese became critical and it compelled them to migrate from Lebanon seeking a place to where they could survive. They mainly went out searching their livelihood into three directions:-

The first group of the Lebanese chooses Egypt as their sheltering place which they felt safe and secured from the point of language and weather considering being free evil condition. <sup>1</sup> Second direction of migrants was France sheltering from violence of the Turks although it was supported lengthy for each Lebanese émigrés. Blessing in association of clubs, arising Uthmani reign forced to existence and its control. Third direction was America, Northern and Southern part of the country when Lebanese found direction, expulsion and a mouthful swallow to escape from hungriness and deprivation in their motherland.

## Characteristics of Arab -American literature

There were nine major Characteristics of Arab -American literature

- Free from classical bindings.
- Arts Style and personal nature.
- Nostalgia to the motherland.
- Meditation and imagination.
- Leaning towards humanity.
- Natural love.
- Sensitive song bearing wide interpretation.
- Religious freedom.
- Characterization and depiction.

### I. Free from classical bindings

Historical events and cultural developments had their impact on modern Arabic literature. Before rising the immigrant literature, modern Arabic literature was traditional, it followed the classical style and manners even in words and meanings. In classical literature, it followed specially Abbaside literature (750-1258) and the literature of Zahiliah, both in prose and Poetry. Prose literature was Muqamah where the complex and new words were the admirable creating power of a writer. The pioneers of Arab renaissance in poetry followed the great poets of Abbaside period Mutanabbi, Abu Taman and Jalal Uddin Ibn Rumi etc. Thinking and imaginations were fit to classical feelings. Migrated Arabs were changed mentally with the influence of east and western culture. So they tried to remove them from ancient feelings.<sup>3</sup> When the literary movements of Arab-American arose with their original life style through revolutionary movement, they came to focus of normal and real life from the darkness of superstition with the expectation to be free from all so called blindness of thinking and belief and thus the migrants stood to write

in a new style of word pattern freely and made the save the media of a new life forever.<sup>4</sup> The major personalities of immigrant literature created their new literature like Khalil Gibran, Mikhail Nuaima, Abu Madi, Nasib Arida and Ameen Rihani were notable. They reflected their deep imaginations to the spiritual life of mankind with the echoing song of mental attitude and unveiled the cordial lone in a new beautiful way. Migrants created a liberal literature reformed the old path, destroying the traditional method of writings, subject matter and scope of creating in every portion of literature i.e. story, essay, criticism, prose and poetry etc. Gibran's literature was the first among the eastern Arab, Rihani dazzled in the "Rihaniyat", was the new treasury of Arabs, "Ghirbal" of Nuaima was the first beautiful romantic poetry collection of Abu Madi which pierced Poetry collection of Abu Madi which pierced the eastern hearts. Immigrant literature offered a new life to modern Arabic literature in the world.<sup>5</sup>

## II. Arts style and personal nature

Every émigré had his art style of his own that was a distinct from other personalities. Most of Arab émigrés wrote in deep manner, inclination to their motherland discussing on the subjects of daily life. Happy and sorrow, suffering and guidance, love and hate etc. In short, they explained their broad inner feelings in their writings. Although all of them wrote in a same way but their directions were many. In Egypt, we saw some special feature for all reformers like Dr. Taha Hussain, Tawfiq Al-Hakim, Aqqad, Mazni, Al-Zayyat, Ahmed Ameen etc, in Lebanon and Syria we got the Prominent personalities Ilias Abi Shabka, Saeed Aql, Nazar Qubbani, Maroon Ubuod and Umar Abu Risha etc. From the Arab émigrés Khalil Gibran was the founder of new interpreting style in modern Arabic literature.<sup>6</sup> He dazzled the Arabic world with his sweet dream and new astonished metaphor. His speech was spread out with beautiful words filled in breathing in spite of his rebellious agitating soul. Many émigrés followed his books "Dama Wa-Ibtasama" (A Tear and Smile), "Al-Ajnaha Al-Mutakassara" (Broken wings) indicated to spirits and minds with a new smooth language, symbolic tune and the poetical nice colour. "The madman" (Al-Majnun). "Al-Mawakib" indicated the intelligent with examples. Gibran Khalil reformed different sections of literature; religious and social life with a special nature of writings.

## III .Nostalgia to the motherland

A strong Characteristic of immigrant literature was Nostalgia. Although the migrants migrated to another country but their memories of their homeland surrounding them. They regarded themselves as prisoners in strange surround with ocean separating them from their people love and yearning for the homeland where simplicity and spiritualism were ways of life. Among southern American migrants were mainly notable where the twittering of village Poet Rashid Salim Al-Khoury, hymn of Fauji Maluf , Ilias Farhat, Shafiq Maluf, Neimatu Qazan, George Saiyyah etc. Abu Madi, Rashid Ayyub, Nasib Arida etc. were from northern émigrés New York pen bond.

In the eve of World War I, events were taken place, the immigrant poets called their home brothers and forefathers to their story national Patriotic Poems with enthusiasm. Lebanon was the final issue for the émigré poets, so Mahboob Al Shartuni paid good bye his migrated place and turned to Lebanon permanently

Nasib Arida was full of sadness about himself, his life and his homeland. But his despair did not lead him to reject his faith, in his poems he seemed to weep over the lot of humanity and its woes. What is life? He said to him it was nothing but sighs and tears . Returning minds of Lebanon mystified the migrants to memories of their homeland.<sup>7</sup> They always absorbed to choose the cluster from honourable mountains

## IV Meditation & Imagination

The direction of meditation was not seen in ancient Arabic literature except the writings of Abu-Al-Ala-Al-Muar'ri and Al-Zahawi. It was extended by the Arab émigrés in Northern America who were more inclined to general material life from the southern émigrés. Southern emigrants were busy on national fanaticism and Arabic movement <sup>8</sup>Among the Northern groups of poets Khalil Gibran, Nuaima, Nasib Arida, Abu Madi, and Ameen Rihani were most prominent. Creating meditation was the distinguished works of pen League, New York. Gradually it was entered into modern Arabic literature both prose and poetry. Writers became natural writer as their meditations isolated from natural earth exalted over life and mankind, circulating their imagination in the anonymous world where staying the mankind soul imagined smoothly. It would be wrapped away from the concealing life.<sup>9</sup> The poems of Abu Madi were full of meditations.

"Al-Rihaniyat" of Ameen Rihani was prose illustration, was his poetry creation of meditation. Mikhail Nuaima's quite and screen meditations on death and deliverance showed a Sufis stance in the poem "Al-A'an" (Now). He was happy not because he was the king of heaven or hell but because he wanted to become part of eternity away from the sensory confines of sing and sound, and time and place.

"Tomorrow I shall entrust

The remaining dust to dust

My spirit I shall set free

From the prison of “may be”  
 Death shall I leave to the dead  
 And those who have children bred  
     To the world and religion  
     Evil and goodness I shall leave,  
 My weakness I shall protect with a breast plate that can defect  
     The blows of the angelic hand,  
     And the demon’s touch with stand  
     I cannot feel any fright  
     of the first of Hell alight  
         Those hours will not entice,  
         Assembled in Paradise”.<sup>10</sup>

#### **V .Leaning towards humanity**

Arab-American émigrés had the extreme inclination towards humanity. Their hearts were attached to every existence of the nature, human beings and other creature of the world even they did never through a small worm out of their hearts of lone. They thought of mankind and nature as well together to rescue from suppression, destroy and decay and became passionate at any calamity. Their literature proved their wide thinking with light and sharp wording. The émigrés were totally free from any kind of restriction and tie of customs. Mikhail Nuaima said indicating small worm.

Fauji Maluf considered that humanity was not confined with human being rather it is comprised of all kinds of creature: mankind, animals, plants and other natural beauties. He wanted to create the affection to every genus for its species. According to him humanity is nothing but it is the consciousness and consideration for all. He said that humanity was the awareness of mankind with human being in every respect even he hoped to be conscious and considerate to beasts, plant, minerals and lifeless things too, so that the whole universe would become affectionate to each other to create a network of affection to all for mankind with the string of humanity for making a heavenly universe.<sup>11</sup>

He interpreted that humanity was the inner feelings of mankind in all matter of the necessity and that humanity was keenly linked with each component of the universe. The relation made response on account of possible boundary of all personal human life. In short, Saidah distinguished his definition as freedom, integrity and solidarity socialism. He realized that the humanity started with the ethnic region and staying universal cultures depended on era which was able to draw a sketch in front of the sky with the pointing of land. Men thought with the lights of inhabitant and its neighbour. It opened the door of humanity means the lost of humanity. It was the relation between nationality and humanity of Arab émigrés. Gibran Khalil and Mikhail Nuaima had no fait of narrow mind for homeland and nation. Their thinking was that all human being as a family, the universe from East to West and side to side.

Gibran’s call for religious tolerance and understanding was related to the wider circle of his sympathies, which encompassed all religions and all people, and led him to cosmopolitanism and a citizenship of the world. His statements and his Obiter Dicta on this were well known. One of them was “The whole earth is my home and all mankind is my family”, a statement made early in the last century long before the century witnessed the end of Colonialism, the denunciation of racism, the assertion of human rights, the information revolution, and that of communications and transportation, which have made of the globe a village, or what is now a day’s termed “globalization” in one of its semantic dimensions,

#### **VI .Natural love**

Natural love was mentionable feature of immigrant literature although it is found in classical Arabic Poetry. Imraul Quays, Buhtari, Ibn Rumi, Ibn Al-Mutaz, Ibn Khafaja and Ibn Humaid Al-Saqali and others were famous poets of natural love. Arab émigrés modified the ancient style of writing influenced by western literature. They loved nature, widened these field emotionally with smiling face, as they loved the animal, birds, planets, minerals and movements of human being etc. Riaz Maluf described his feelings indicating water fall,

Khalil Gibran saw the prosperity in woods (Ghab) where he described above two hundred lines in his “Al-Mawakib”, It was a philosophical dialogue in two voice, each following its own meter, The first voice in the meter “Al-Baseet”

was of an old man who had seen the twists and turns of life. The second in Majzu'Al-Ramal was of an innocent youth who seemed to represent nature and was simple and pure unlike the philosopher sage. He recommended a return to nature where simplicity is supreme. Gibran felt the Sanctuary, Solitariness and happiness in woods. He compared human society as being differentiation, tradition and handling mostly based on hypocrisy and self desire. The calm forest life neglected all the diversity and should be the equality and uniformity in all beings and things. Gibran Khalil expected to create the uniformity among various creations through the removal of diversity, hatred unfriendliness, loftiness, greediness and other demerits that stood as obstacle on the way of progress and prosperity. He said that only the woods life could make oneself away from all the mentioned demerits that might be a break on the path of uniformity.<sup>12</sup>

reflected in his stories, meditations, pregnant, whispering of hearts, spirit and his emotion which continued with his unique writings. Like the strong feelings of Gibran Khalil. Abu Madi was near to him in nature. He came under the inexorable way of Gibran's romanticism and was impressed by his ideal of looking up to nature to find the spirit of love and harmony. Abu-Madi preferred short verse mono rhyme and sometimes quatrains, highly imaginative and a deep thinking. His verse was smooth and lucid and his ideas were revealed in clear luminous terms.

### **VII .Sensitive Song bearing wide interpretation**

The Arab renaissance was an outcome of the contribution of the men of letters of important reform movements. Although Barudi, Shawqi, Hafiz, Mitran, Rusafi and others were the earliest exponent of neoclassicism but they could not succeed in full swing. At that moment the permanent émigré poets used poetry as their art of life. They composed poetry without any hard and fast rule of earlier Arab poets. They grasped simplicity, thinness and sensitive song was the pillar of beauty in both prose and poetry literature. The popularity of immigrant literature spreaded away from east to Arab immigrants. Readers wanted the writings of Nuaima. Gibran Khalil and Rihani like the prose of Kawakbi, Mohammed Kurd Ali in Syria and Al-Rafi'ee, Al-Zayyat, Ahmed Ameen in Egypt.

Arab émigrés were free from ancient writings style in their writings influenced on eastern theology, so they created a new widened literature in liberal manner. Most of the poems were composed in smooth singing method in different directions and beautiful imagination

Abu Madi expressed his beautiful imagination and wide interpretation in lucid poem. He resorted to metaphase when he wished to create an atmosphere where the imaginative style was more affective than a factual one. A good grounding in grammar and prosody that he acquired in his formative gave him a solid base for his verse. Nasib Arida Described his extreme anxiety on account of poets.

Here the poet seemed his inner feelings in easy process and used attractive words avoiding complexity. The émigrés stepped with appropriate smooth style of explanation, their object was to get thinking of modern literary requirements instead of obscure words and meaning. Nua'ima's "Nahr Al-Tajammud" Composed on soul, secret conversation and endings where the delicate song, beautiful lines and imagination with distress beauty were seen. Conclusion witnessed that Nuaima was philosopher, poet, he had a deep faith in existence of natural life.

### **VIII. Religious freedom**

Arab émigrés believed in religious freedom and social thought. It was distinguished feature of immigrant literature, both prose and poetry. Therefore, we found the liberal notion and explanation in religious culture, far away from spiritual fanaticism and rigidity. They called the Arab nation as well as the mankind to their homeland or for a new spiritual world-Men were equal in the sight of Judgment, good luck generosity and broad in meaning of humanity in front of God. Variety of religious was not for criticism and opposed other religion. That thinking was influenced by the eastern brotherhood.<sup>13</sup> Ameen Rihani and Khalil Gibran were two founder of free religion concept. Sometimes they wrote on Arab nationalism for awakening the Arab-immigrants mostly their minds widened on all human beings.

We all believe in a monotheistic religion, we all unify God and do not return in the end to anyone else. We are the children of monotheistic religion and Moses, Jesus and Mohammed are but apostles to the One God, apostle of monotheism. Thus, if our God in one, our langue's is one, our county with its plains, mountains and deserts is one, and our political misfortunes are all one, should not the home land also<sup>14</sup>

Khalil Gibran was one of the earliest of Lebanese and Arab figures who called for religious tolerance. He started with a campaign for the reform of the Christian Church in Lebanon, called for the redness of ecclesiastical abuses, and the end of feudalism in the church, which led him to the brink of anti-clericalism and opposition to organized religion. Especially important was his call for Christian -Muslim understanding. He wanted to the length of expressing himself trenchantly in an open letter, addressed to the Muslim community, which was published in two Arab-American journals, titled. "To the Muslims from a Christian poet"

**IX Characterisation and depiction**

Descriptive writings were found in Modern Arabic Literature before immigrant literature. The Subject matter was garden, wine, charmes assembly, human race etc, mental musical description with culture and sympathy. After establishing the Spanish school of Arab émigrés, the development of thin interpretation, mental imagination and traditional description increased by the immigrant writings. They expressed their affection and inner feelings.

Depiction was another characteristic of Arab immigrants. It was the big support of immigrant literature. Arab émigrés welcome the humanity to friendship what mankind in different parts of life. They sketched their thinking in prose and poetry literature. Depiction summoned complete knowledge of life. It existed imagination combined with its separate elements in yearning pleasure way. Somewhat power of imagination had value of poem through the Pictorial representation.

**Conclusion :** In the article it reveals that Lebanese mainly went out searching their livelihood into three directions: (1) Egypt at the time of Mohammad Ali (1769-1849) (2) French (3) Northern and Southern part of America. Antwon Boshalani was the first migrant in 1845 in New York. Lebanon was influenced with the western advancement of literary movement in the way of protestant missionaries British and American especially Beirut in the middle of nineteenth century. They published and translated the religious books into modern Arabia were issued by their establishment. They encouraged the writers and thinkers like Adib Ishaq (1854-1885) Najib Al-Hadad (1867-1899), Ahmed faros Ashshidiyaq (1804-1887), Amir Nasir Al-Uddin (1875-1953) Fuad Ali-Khatib (1880-1957), Rashid Salim Al-Khuri (1887) Ilias Farhat (1893-1976), Ameen Rihani (1876-1940) Gibran Khalil Gibran, Mikhail Nuaima, Iliya Abu Madi, Rashid Ayyub etc. were prominent migrant who contributed many books on knowledge and science by their fruitful writings.

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