



**Pratidhwani the Echo**

*A Peer-Reviewed International Journal of Humanities & Social Science*

**ISSN: 2278-5264 (Online) 2321-9319 (Print)**

**Impact Factor: 6.28 (Index Copernicus International)**

Volume-IV, Issue-I, July 2015, Page No. 124-129

Published by Dept. of Bengali, Karimganj College, Karimganj, Assam, India

Website: <http://www.thecho.in>

---

## **Development of Modern Arabic Short Story, Novel and Drama: A Brief Sketch**

**Dr. Abdul Latif Ansary**

*Associate Professor & HOD, Dept. of Arabic, Moirabari College, Assam, India*

### **Abstract**

*Modern Arabic Short story, Novel and Drama-all these three constituents of modern Arabic literature nurtured and developed to the direct influence of European literature. In fact, the Arabs were quite unknown about the modern literary tempo and consequently they adhered to their traditional writing skills. It was only by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the Arabs, influenced by these components (Short story, Novel and Drama) in European literature, attempted this new form in their own language. Thousands of short stories, novels and drama from French, English and Russian were adapted or translated by Arab writers. The Arab short story writers were influenced by Maupassant, Emile Zola and Honore de Balzac of French to a great extent. Arabic novel literature matured by the endless efforts of Muhammad al- Muwailihi, Al- Tahtawi, Farah Antun, Muhammad Husayn Haykal etal all from Arab World. Modern Arabic drama flourished with the ceaseless endeavour of Lebanese Marun al- Naqqash, Nikhula al- Naqqash, Salim al- Naqqash, Khalil al- Yazigi and others.*

*Modern Arabic literature reached at the zenith position of its development with the emergence of Western modern Short story, Novel and Drama into it. Consequently, a new era started in modern Arabic literature called al- Nahda (The Renaissance). After all, these trio-factors (Short story, Novel and Drama), in the nineteen twenties, could able to reached to a position of eminence to vie with the developed world literatures.*

***Keywords: Constituent, Component, Maupassant, Farah Antun, Endeavour, Zenith, Al-Nahda.***

---

**Preface:** With the passes of time Arabic literature traversed its way from pre- Islamic to this day with the high and low periods. It reached its high watermark during the Abbasid period (750-1258) touching its low period following the taking over the Arab lands by the Turks. The period (1517-1800) shows one of the most sterile period in Arabic literature ceased to be creative and in fact was a mere oozing, but the foundation of the language remained unshaken only due to getting extra incentives from the Holy Quran, a key book in keeping the base of classical Arabic alive.

The bleak period was followed by *al- Nahda* (The Renaissance), which is the basis of the spurt in modern Arabic literature. Consequently, various elements had been noticed in the

growth and development of Arabic literature. Western cultural activities were directly imported to the Arab World. As a result, the Arabian life style and their cultural activities boosted to a great extent. The literary atmosphere became hygienic to all paving the way a new departure in the field of modern Arabic Short- story, Novel and Drama which can be outlined as under:

**Epicenter:**

**Short-story:** The short story developed under the influence of Western literature. Though it was a new form with no relation to prose genres of the medieval and later periods, the Arab tradition with its rich repertoire<sup>1</sup> of anecdotes and short narratives gave a big spurt to the development of the short story.

At first thousands of short stories from French, English and Russian were either translated or adapted by Arab writers. Dar al- kutub, Beirut, puts their number at ten thousand before 1914.<sup>2</sup>

The Arab writers were greatly influenced with them, but in a lesser degree. Later on, the Russian realist made a far reaching impact on the Arab writers. The concern of the Russian writers for the humbler sections of society, their simple style and manner of projecting ideas was appreciated and emulated by the Arabs.

The short story is a more condensed literary genre than the novel, and reflects the feelings of the author, his outlook on life and society. It implies brevity, having no place for non- essentials, and a direct, straight forward style. The antiquated devices of *Balagha* (rhetoric) had no place in it and their displacement accelerated with the growth and popularity of the short story.<sup>3</sup>

Salim al Bustani's first story "*Ramya min Ghair Rami*" was published in 1670. From that the short story began to be widely produced. The Cairo magazine '*al Diya*' from its inception in 1897 published one story in every number. It was either a translation or an adoption or an original composition dealing generally with social topics.<sup>4</sup>

Among the early short story writers were al- Manfaluti in Egypt, Jibran Khalil Jibran and Mikha'il Nu'ayma in Mahjar. Al Manfaluti's stories, distinguished by a deep pessimism and melancholy, deal with social evils and the reaction against western habits in Arab society. The Mahjar writers introduced psychological insight for the first time in Arab fiction. Nu'aïma reveals the influence of Russian realism in his story entitled – '*Sanatuh al- Jadida*' (Her new year), 'Jibrans '*Arais al Muruj*' and *al Arwah al- Mutamarrida* are the good collection of Arabic short stories. '*Arais al- Muruj* contains three stories about life and social Problems in the Lebanon, of which the most moving one is '*Murta al Baniyyah*.'

The first great writer of the short story was Muhammad Taymur (1892–1921) of Egypt. His collection entitled '*Ma Tara hul Uyun*' (Things seen), is important being the first serious attempt at introducing realism into Arabic fiction. Other prominent short story writers include *Mahmud Taymur*, *Isa Abid* and *Tahir Lashin* of Egypt, *Mahmud Ahmad* and *Anowar Sha'ul* of Iraq and *Abdul Masih al- Haddad* of America. The greatest of them is Mahmud Taymur. By his short stories Taymur presents different pictures of human life, penetrating deep into their circumstances. He reveals their hidden virtues and vices and shows an understanding of their emotions. His works are a mirror of normal life and

ordinary characters. With the creation of *Taymur*, the short story moved to the highest level of artistic perfection.

The short story has shown a more vigorous development than any other literary genres in Arabic. In the nineteen twenties, it reached to a position of eminence. Later on, the novel took the lead, but the short story regained its position soon after the Second World War.

### **Novel:**

By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Arabs influenced by the novel of European literature, attempted this new form in their language.<sup>5</sup> It was natural that the first attempt at writing the novel would be an extension of the *Maqama*. Muhammad al Muwailihi (1858 - 1930) wrote '*Hadith – Isa – ibn Hisham*' on the model of the *maqama*. Al Muwailihi tried to adapt the *Maqama* to the times by taking his images from the society he lived in. He used his characters and events as instruments of social reforms written in lively picturesque prose with witty dialogues. Al- Muwailihi's book marks the beginning of the modern novel.

The early novel writers were not entirely followed the western models. They selected these models what they felt would be suitable to advise the kings and rulers. They also included sermons to improve the behaviour of the common man, which later on developed into didactic novel.<sup>6</sup> For the first time the didactic novel were written only in outward appearance. The characters were not inter-connected. The didactic novel did not prosper till the first year of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Syrian émigrés had a look over the Egyptians in introducing western literary forms into Arabic. Then they intended to write novel. Their ownership of journals like "*al Hilal*", '*al Jamia*' and news papers like '*al Ahram*' enabled them to publish their novels easily. They wrote detective or romantic stories in serials to increase the circulation of their periodicals.

Among the émigrés, Jurji Zaydan (1861-1924) and Farah Antun (1864-1922) attempted more serious novels than those serialized in the journals. *Antun* wrote didactic or philosophical novels while Zaydan wrote historical series. Farah Antun<sup>7</sup> dealt with problems concerning not only Arab society but also with the whole world in general e.g. capitalism versus communism (His works are important as they present serious ideas). Zaydan emphasized that history should popularize through novels. He was inspired by Alexandre Dumas and Walter Scott to write the historical series. Zaydan wrote twenty-two novels which cover the historical span from pre-Islamic to modern times.

In Levant at least thirteen novelists were writing original social novels between 1865 and 1914. Among them Antun al- saqqal, Marrash, Shukri, Salim al Bustani were most famous.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal (1888-1956) is the first original novelist in Egypt. His famous novel '*Zaynab*' was written in Paris in (1910-1911). It contains beautiful descriptions of the Egyptian countryside and is the first social novel based on the life and habits of Egyptians. '*Zaynab*' is written without having the pale of the traditional *maqama* in it. Its language is simple and approaching every day speech. Haykal thought that the uses of classical Arabic for dialogues between the rural characters were highly artificial. So, he used "*written prose*" for the first time.

The first novel in modern Arabic was produced in a mature, artistic and beautiful form by *Yahya al- Haqqi*. He was Haykal's contemporary. Another outstanding and greatest novelist *Najib Mahfuz* of Egypt wrote eighteen novels in modern Arabic. His novels deal with various aspects of human life such as love, faith, death etc. His famous novel "*New Cairo*" presents a sketch of Egyptians life. Najib's another popular novel "*Midaq Alley*" where he indicates the social injustice of the Egypt and depicts the life styles of the urban lower classes people. With his numerous novels the Arabic novel literature has come into a matured position.

**Drama:** At first drama was unknown to the Arabs. Arab scholars translated literary masterpieces from other languages in early Islamic times, but they had left out drama.

The theatre *Napoleon* had established in Egypt in 1798 to entertain French troops which made no impression on the Arabs, mainly because the performances were not in Arabic. It was too much later when literary and cultural relation between the Arabs and the west developed, from that time drama began to introduce to the Arabs.<sup>8</sup>

The first writer to introduce Arabic drama was the Lebanese – *Ma`run- al- Naqqash* (1817-1855) who in 1848 wrote a musical play entitled '*al Bakhil*' (The Mean Man). He felt that the poetry and prose would appeal to a section of the audience while music would appeal to all. His drama was directly imported from the west. The form of musical plays produced by '*Ma`run-al-Naqqash*' (*mulhina*) which is partially or totally sung, continued to be produced for many decades in the Levant and Egypt.

However, after *Marun*'s attempt to popularize the theatre, the Lebanese gradually started to translate, adapt, and stage plays. The early plays were mainly either translated or adapted. These were written in a combination of classical Arabic with Turkish or in colloquial languages. Pioneers in this field were '*Salim al Naqqash*', *Adib Ishaq*, *Ibrahim al Ahdab*, *Salim al Bustani* and *Khalil al Yazigi*. Egypt turned away many of them. *Salim al- Naqqash* moved with his troupe to Alexandria and the "*Stage*" moved from the Levant to Egypt.<sup>9</sup>

*Yaqub sanu*, established the first Arabic theatre in Egypt. He produced the first play in Arabic in *Ismail's* palace. Sanu's contribution to the Arabic theatre is tremendous. His art was simple and his language was colloquial. He started with great enthusiasm to train his troupes and to compose music for his plays. He wrote thirty two plays including comedies, tragedies and musical plays. Sanu's plays dealt with behavioral patterns of contemporary Egypt and political observations. He succeeded in creating an atmosphere for the theatre and brought it down from the palace to the common man.<sup>10</sup>

The most famous Syrian play writer was *Abu Khalil al Qabbani*, who also built his own theatre in Damascus. *Al Qabbani* had all the elements for producing successful plays. He popularized the theatre by placing his plays on popular folk themes taken from Arab history and "*Alf-Layla-wa-Layla*". *Al Qabbani's* success led others to a healthy competition. Outstanding litterateurs like *Khalil Mutran*, *Najib Haddad* and *Farah Antun* started writing for the theatre.

In 1912, Arabic drama entered the second stage of its development when the Lebanese actor *Jurj Abyad* formed his own troupe in Cairo. He had made a serious study of drama in Paris. *Abyad* produced a series of tragedies including '*King Oedipus*' of Sophocles and

'Othello' of Shakespeare. It is for the first time that the Arabs came to know the art and interpretation of tragedy. Jurj Abyad also produced social plays written by famous Arab play writers such as *Abdur Rahman al-Rashidi*, *Ibrahim Ramzi* and *Muhammad Taymur*. In 1913, Abyad produced Farah Antun's '*Misr al-Jadida-wa -Misr -al- Qadima*'.

Ibrahim Ramzi depicts the historical facts in the form of dialogue '*Abtal al- Mansura*', written in 1915 is considered his best play and depicts a vivid picture of Egyptian leadership during crusades.<sup>11</sup> Muhammad Taymur's "*Al Hawiya*" was a new attempt to introduce realism into drama. These plays are important for their artistic construction, dramatic structure, better expressions and professional production.<sup>12</sup>

However, Arabic drama reached its matured position with the works of *Tawfiq al Hakim* of Egypt.

Al- Hakim wrote profusely mainly on drama and his work have been translated into a number of languages, both western and Eastern. He has two types of drama viz- social and abstract plays. Social plays deal with the situation of society or the lives of individuals while abstract plays are related with the themes of universal based on mythology or religion. It was *Tawfiq al Hakim* who introduced the drama as a serious literary form in Arabic such as the novel and the essay.

**Epilogue:** After a minute study on the topic entitled- "*Development of Modern Arabic short story, novel and drama: A brief sketch*," it is clear that the growth and development of Modern Arabic literature had not transpired on sudden and unpremeditated occurrences; rather, it was the result of experimentation and observation of many decades and centuries in its advancement. Most of al- Nahda writers hailed from Syria, Lebanon, Egypt etal, studied the French, English and Russian literatures profusely and thereby they could able to import their philosophy into Arabic literature as well as their own cultural activities and thereby they became accomplished to bring back the Arabic literature into the platform of world literature. Their short stories, novels and dramas got extra bounce with the assimilation of Western up to date cultural activities and their writings and thereby the modern Arabic short-story, novel and drama entered into a new horizon of its development.

---

#### References:

<sup>1</sup> As cited Mahdi, Ismat; e.g. in *Kitab al- Bukhala: (The Book of Misers)*, *Kitab al- Aghani: (The Book of Songs)*, the *Maqamat* and the celebrated *Arabian Nights: (Alf Layla wa Layla)*.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*; Haqqi, Yahya: *Fajr al- Qissa al- Misriyya*, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Mahdi, Ismat: *Modern Arabic Literature*, Rabi Publishers 289/18, Shantinagar, Hyderabad, 1983, p.38

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>5</sup> Classical Arabic was rich in its repertoire of anecdotes, legends and tales (*qisas*), which were either compiled in compendiums, e.g. *Muruj al- Dhahab (Meadows of Gold)* of Al- Masudi, or in collections of orally transmitted tales, e.g. *Alf Layla wa Layla* or in the form of *maqamat*, e.g. the *Maqamat of Badi al- Zaman al- Hamdhani* and *al- Hariri*.

The novel, “a fictitious narrative in prose, of considerable length showing characters in action, with more or less close adherence to the principle of realism,” developed in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and was not known to the Arabs in their classical literature. Dr.Fatma Mussa Mahmoud, *The Arabic Novel in Egypt*, pp. 7- 11.

<sup>6</sup> Taha Badr, *Abd al- Muhsin: Tatawwur al- Riwaya al- Arabiyya al- Haditha, fi Misr, 1870- 1938*, p. 52.

<sup>7</sup> Foremost among the émigrés was Faraf Antun. He owed complete allegiance to the West. While the Egyptian writers held the view that a revival of Arabic heritage was necessary for progress, Farah Antun dealt with problems concerning the world in general and not with Arab Society only, e.g. capitalism versus communism. His works are important as they present serious ideas but failed to make an immediate impact.

<sup>8</sup> As cited Mahdi, Ismat: *Shawqi Daif, al- Adab al- Arabi al- Mu`asir fi Misr*, p. 212.

<sup>9</sup> Mahdi, Ismat: *Modern Arabic Literature*, Rabi Publishers 289/18, Shantinagar, Hyderabad, 1983, p.41

<sup>10</sup> al- Maqkisi, Anis: *al- Funun al- Adabiyya wa Alamuha, fi al- Nahda al- Arabiyya al- Haditha*, p. 535.

<sup>11</sup> As cited Mahdi, Ismat; Daif, Shawqi: *al- Adab al- Arabi al- Musa`ir fi Misr*, p. 215.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*; Mandur, Muhammad: *Masrah al- Nathri*, p. 22.