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A Critical Study of the Novel 'Ba'da al-Ghurûb' (After the Sunset) by Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah

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Abstract

Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah, one of the distinguished novel writers, was born and brought up in Egypt in the middle of the twentieth century. In the 1940s and 60s he brought vitality in the style of Arabic novel. In fact, his novel Ba'da al-Ghurûb (After the Sunset, 1949 A.D) is thrived as a romantic novel, by which he draws a picture of love that ran between two lovers. Unfortunately they could not unite each other due to the customs of their society that allows only the system of arrange marriage. The novel shows that Amira a beloved of Abdul Aziz (i.e. a hero of the novel) got married to a person according to the choice of her father; which brought a pathetic condition to the life of her lover Abdul Aziz. But this marriage socially arranged was not of the satisfaction of Amira, because her present husband could not perceive her mind and desire. Finally, Amira was bound to think of switching over to her earlier lover; but her last wish did not come true.

Key words: *Arabic Novel, Romantic genre, Socio-realistic novel, fiancé, constrain*

Introduction: Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah (20th March 1913 - 30th June 1970)¹ was one of the most influential Arabic fiction writers, who was born and brought up in Egypt in the middle of the twentieth century.² In fact, he was a contemporary to the great novelist Naguib Mahfouz. Other famous writers of his time were Dr. Taha Husain, Mahmud Taimur, Taufiq al-Hakim, Muhammad Fareed Abu Hadid, Dr. Muhammad Kamil Husain, Dr. Husain Fauzi, Yahya Haqqi, Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad, etc.³ Moreover, he along with Yusuf al-Sebayi and Ihsan Abdul Quddus wrote novels which are Romantic in nature. Through this type of novels they got familiarity to the great extent in their time. There was an utmost demand of their novels and people used to read them with a great zeal and desire. In this connection, Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah initially got much response to the people of Egypt than Naguib Mahfouz. He wrote twenty nine books, among them thirteen novels, nine short-stories and three books on criticism. He was awarded Arabic language Academy Prize for his contribution to the Arabic fiction literature.

Description: It is imperative to know that Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah used to write in different styles of literary genres and accordingly was successful there. During his early part of life, he wrote romantic fictions and published six novels. Later he started to write in mixed genres especially in one novel, in which the romantic and realistic trends can be noticed. Finally he turned writing purely on realism. His first socio-realistic novel 'Laqita' (1945) got great fame and reputation among the common people. It was transferred into the Arabic film in the name 'Laila al-Gharam' (Love Night). His other socio-realistic novels are *al-Jannah al-'Adra* (the Virgin Garden), *al-Shams al-Kharif*, *al-Bait al-Samit*, and short stories like, *Hafatul Jarima*, *al-Nafizatu'l-Gharbiyya* etc. Moreover, he wrote romantic fictions like 'Ba'da al-Ghurub (1949 AD), *Shajaratul Al-Lablab*, *al-Wishah al-Abyad*, etc. His novel *Ba'da al-Ghurub* was selected as one of the hundred best Arabic novels that got 64th position as well. Most of his fictions are based on love theme.

It has been observed that he deviated from romantic fictions and involved in writing pure realistic novels. In this connection, we find his novels *Li-al-Zaman al-Baqia* and *Qissa lam Tatimm*. Alongside, he also wrote a historical novel *al-Bahith 'anil-Haqiqqa* (Searching for the Truth).⁴

Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah emerges as an eminent social writer who advocates different issues and problems of society. It is aware of the fact that during his lifetime the political situation of

Egypt was against the common people. They were suffering from the ruling system of that time. There were many irregularities in the society where the incidents of rape, injustice to farmers, and unfair land distribution system etc. Moreover, he advocates women's liberation for establishing equality between men and women. He tried his best to extinct all the social evils that found in the villages and the cities of Egypt; he clearly made endeavor to expose the social corruption and hypocrisy, oppression and domination and the situations full of social injustice.

As the themes of his writings are concerned, there is a precise description of humanitarian feelings: they are sadness, love, women, suspicion, death, freedom etc.

As a sincere writer, Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah was very much sincere to use standard Arabic and tried his level best to remain away from the usage of colloquial language. In this line, he was greatly influenced by Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti. It has been observed from the contents of the writings of Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah that he is aptly successful to portray the miserable conditions prevailed in the Arab societies. In fact, there is usage of rhetorical language in the multifarious styles of his writings.

Here mention may be made that Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah was basically a romantic novelist. During the middle of the twentieth century three novelists thrived in the literary scenario of Egypt, who also demonstrated their excellence in this field of romantic novels. In this connection, Mustafa Mahmud Badawi says in his book as follows:

"The end of the 1940 marks the affirmation of a trend in the novel centered on love and at times remote from contemporary reality which is associated especially with the names of Yusuf al- Siba'i , Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah and Ihsan Abd al- Quddus. ...".⁵

The title of the novel consists of two words i.e. '*Ba'da and al-Ghurûb*' and '*Ba'da*' is a preposition means 'after' and '*al-Ghurûb*' is a verbal noun that comes from the root 'Gharb' means setting of the Sun. Here the compound term '*Ba'da al-Ghurûb*' denotes that the two lives faced a desperate life although they had an intimate relation in respect of love affairs.

It cannot be gainsaid that the hero of the novel, Abdul Aziz was fascinated with his beloved 'Amira' and determined to get marry her. But, it was not allowed by her father, Fareed Bek who gave her marriage with Sami Bek, a son of his cousin. In fact, the marriage was of the fixation that they did in their childhood age. In fine, Amira became victim of unhappiness of her life, since her husband Sami Bek was not in a position to understand her as a sweet partner of life. As a result of which, Amira tried to review her marriage and wanted to meet her earlier lover Abdul Aziz; but it gave no result to her ultimate desire.

As far as Characterization of this novel is concerned, we find three types of characters, they are as follows:

1. Principal character
2. Secondary character
3. Passing character (co-character)

The Principal characters of this novel are –'Abdul Aziz', who is the hero of this novel, demonstrated as a simple character fell in love with a girl where he started his work; in fact, his beloved 'Amira' is the heroine of the novel, and she belongs to a reputed family.

The secondary characters are namely 'Sami Bek', a young law graduate and a man of very simple in character with whom 'Amira' was given to marriage, although she did not choose him. 'Fareed Bek' was the father of the heroine Amira. He was a man who still follows the tradition and custom of the past. Moreover, he gave her daughter Amira to marriage with the son of his own family.

As far as the sub characters are concerned, they are namely 'Zainab', a girl who meets with Abdul Aziz and tried her best to fall in his love, but the hero did not adopt her. 'Swaleh' was the closest friend of Abdul Aziz and it was he who provided sufficient data to his friend about Amira. 'Laila' was another daughter of 'Fareed Bek'. 'Hamid' is also a character found in the novel.

Discussion: This novel consists of fifteen chapters; Abdul Aziz, the hero of the novel *Ba'da al-Ghurûb*, was a hard worker man having great fondness of literature, but due to his family circumstances he was forced to change his life after completion of his graduation as a Bachelor in Agriculture. He had a poor family background. The economic condition of his family was worse. So, he took the responsibility of his family and started looking for a work, and finally he got a job as an observer of the cultivation under 'Fareed Bek' in his farm. His salary was only ten pound in a month which he accepted as he had no other way to find any job. 'Fareed Bek' had a beautiful daughter. The

hero 'Abdul Aziz' fell in love with his daughter 'Amira'. But, there was a great difference between him and his beloved. In fact, Amira belonged to a prosperous and elite class of family. On the other hand, her lover Abdul Aziz was a poor fellow. So, initially he could not dare to give her proposal to get marry. On the other hand, the father of Amira all of a sudden decided to give her marriage with his cousin 'Sami Bek'. He was a lawyer established in his profession, but unfortunately he did not have a good personality belonging to hot temper in behavior and incapable of thinking better future. So, in comparison to Sami Bek, Abdul Aziz was far better than him, especially when Abdul Aziz faced an interview with "Fareed Bek" he encouraged him as a good candidate as appeared in his first step of literary struggle; accordingly Fareed Bek selected him to work in his farm with heart and soul. Later on Abdul Aziz became astonished at the decision of Fareed Bek being a father of his beloved girl, as and when Fareed Bek changed his attitude in matters of his daughter that she has to get marry to her cousin brother. Subsequently she also altered her attitude and continued dealing with him only in a way that they did not have any relationship before. Under such pathetic situation, Abdul Aziz continued working in his way as a regular worker and at the end; he became the owner of an area, and also achieved his old dream to become a prominent writer. The novel ends with the meeting between him and Amira after a long period of their relationship; at that moment she was bound to reveal to him the secret that tortured him for a long time. Her marriage with her cousin brother was according to the desire of her father while he was in the dying condition. It was not to disobey the command of her father even after his death; in fact, it was he who lived all his life for her. On the other hand, her husband ignored her desire and zeal even after the death of her mother. This was the condition ran fighting between them. Thus she disclosed the truth to her earlier lover.

Literature Review: The present novel (*Ba'da al-Ghurûb*) of Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah has been endowed with a good allegory of entitlement. The Main Hero of the novel Abdul Aziz is shown beautifully having excellent personality; and the Heroine Amira a beloved of the former has tried to tackle the situation that appeared with the will of her father ignoring her own desire of love affairs. But the destiny was not in her favor; it turned to the situation of beyond her imagination. Although she wants to switch over to her earlier sweet memory; finds no time as to the needs of hour. Because her lover Abdul Aziz settled his position in the society without caring the bell of making any better half of life. The novelist signifies the whole drama of their life with the caption of the novel "Ba'da al-Ghurûb" in a panoramic scenery of literature.

The story of the novel depicts an emotional crisis in the life of a young graduate of the Agricultural College. After completion of his study he tried his best in search of a work. Finally, he was recruited as a supervisor in an agricultural farm that belonged to 'Fareed Bek' who, along with his daughter Amira, used to visit their old village in the occasion needed and stayed there a few days of weekend period. Usually they return to the city of Cairo in view of inspection of the farm; of which supervisor is the hero of the novel. Thus Abdul Aziz happened to see the daughter of the Farm owner Fareed Bek. In fact, Abdul Aziz was fascinated by the beauty of Amira and naturally fell in love with her. But he could not express his desire before the princess Amira due to his poor economic background and as only an official of the farm. During that time, a female servant whose name was Zainab tried to fall in love with him but he rejected her outright. In the meantime, Abdul Aziz came to know that the father of Amira desires to marry his daughter princess Amira to this cousin's son Sami Bek. After hearing the news Abdul Aziz became sorrowful. In this connection, he tried to know the feeling of princess Amira about his prospective fiancé with the help of his friend Swalih who lives in Cairo to observe her motif about this marriage. Finally, the result came to light that princess Amira does not love her cousin. Moreover, she promised that she would discuss the matter with her father, but she delayed for her hesitation and waiting; during which her father was on the verge of his death and gave blessing with his two eyes of her marriage to her cousin. Thus, Amira finds herself compelled to fulfill her father's desire and left her lover Abdul Aziz and finally separation took place between them.

It must be admitted that the novel bears a romantic story depicting a series of sacrifices fabricated and far from the reality of life. The father sacrifices the future of his daughter in order to fulfill the promise that he did with the sons of his brother, and the girl was bound to obey the order of her father which she promised before him while he was on the verge of death. Another character Zainab by name sacrifices her love for the happiness of her husband and subsequently acts as a messenger between the lovers of this novel. In such a way Swalih by name sacrifices for the sake of his friend to

keep eyes on the house of princess Amira, which was located in the suburbs of city and passed some days to observe and know the depth of relation between Amira and her cousin.

Here an attempt has been made to reveal the mode of expression in the novel that goes across the two lovers in the moment of keeping compliance with the message of heart that take place in the conversation between Abdul Aziz and Amira as follows:

Abdul Aziz says:

-Trust me (Amira); I am neither a treacherous nor a liar while I say: verily you are possessor of a young heart which has touched the fingers of love for its amusing. Today I came to know the love and understood the pleasure of distress in it.⁶

- I have been transferred from one situation to the other.

- This is the law of nature we have given.

- So, I would like to know the main hurdle, will you give me permission?

Amira replied:

-The main problem is that I am fiancée.⁷ Hearing this Abdul Aziz became astonished:

-Then I saw her perplexedly and I opened my mouth but did not say anything, then I say silently after a little while:

-It is a joke ... Yes, a joke from the destiny. How it is and I don't hear about it?

It appears from the novel that the rich people always think to give marriage their daughter with a rich man. In this connection, they do not consider the desire of the daughter or the son; they simply follow the tradition and social custom prevailing in the society. They do not think whether the couple will be happy or not. The story shows that Fareed Bek, a well-to-do person did not think about the desire of his daughter and forced her to get marry with his cousin's son. The story also depicts that there were a consensus between the families that the girl will be married to that boy in their childhood age. They do not regard the feeling of love of their sons and daughters. Under such circumstances, generally two guardians come to compliance with their choice only.

As far as the style of the novel is concerned, it is full of artistic construction of expression and the proper sequences of moods have been maintained as to the incidents contained in a concise manner.

Conclusion: In fact, Muhammad Abdul Halim Abdullah is an outstanding writer especially in the genre of Arabic Novel, by which Arabic literature has got a distinct position in the literary scenario of the world. The writer has been successful in portraying the emotions of love with a true picture of life especially in the novel entitled *Ba'da al-Ghurub* (After Sun-set). In this novel he aptly demonstrates the contemporary pictures of the society constrained with the social customs and religious restrictions that which is not favorable to the romance of so called lovers and beloveds.

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