CHAPTER: 3
Emergence of Mahjar Literature and its Significance.
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'Al Adab'i Mahjar' is the outcome of the Arab emigrants who settled in America during the first half of 20th century.

The turn of the century witnessed the emergence of a "New Look". In Arabic literature, its exponents were the emigrants from the Levant to the Americas. These émigrés who had sought new homes because of social and economic considerations had more than an average shares of young talent and promise in their midst.

'Adab al Mahjar' (Emigrant literature), as it is called, from modest yet impressive beginning flowered to eminence between the two world wars and although it found expression in all genres, its most significant contribution was in poetry.

These literary efforts received support and encouragement more markedly in the twenties, from the pen Association of the Arab writers union (al-Rabita-al- Qalamiyyah) founded in New York in 1920 by emigrant writers, youthful yet masters and veteran in their own right: Jibran Khalil Jibran (1883-1931), Mi Khai'l Nu 'aima (b.1889), Abdul Masih Haddad (1890-1963) and Nasib Arida (1887-1964). Though other Mahjar writers such as Amin Rihani (1876-1940) preferred to stay away from the pen Association, they nevertheless provided inspiration for the enlargement of its literary horizons.

In their new ambience, the émigrés were more receptive to western literary trends than the Arabs back home. A close acquaintance with western literature, especially with the works of American poets: Emerson Longfellow, Poe, Whitman and others, and perfection in more than one western language enabled them to lead the revolt against the conventional style of Arabic prose and poetry, just as their counterparts Shukry, al-Majini and al-Aqqad were doing from the beginning of the century in Egypt.

Reminiscent of the revolt of European romanticists against the classical school, this was a revolt all that was traditional in Arabic prose and poetry and a demand to express life as it is reflecting human emotions.
Eulogy, satire and self-praise, worn out with age had ceased to fit into the concept of modern poetry. Mikha'il Nu 'aima contributed to the revolt by attacking the conservative trend of the Arabs and called for a new evaluation of literature. He deplored the accent on mere tonal effects in poetry and was equally critical of linguistic artifices. He maintained that literature should give preference to the spiritual rather than the material aspect and also delineate the psychological influences which affect human behavior.

Ilia Abu Madi (1889-1957) voiced the same opinion when he said, "you are not one of us if you think the poetry is mere metre and rhyme. These are only external attributes and impediments to get the real core of things"

According to Mahjar poets the scope of poetry should extend to the poet's soul, his emotion and imagination and not revolve around history, society and personalities as was the case with Nahda poets.

In his article "your language and Mine", Jibran expounds: "you have your encyclopedias and dictionaries and I have what my ear selects and memory retains of conversion familiar to man in his grief or happiness ... you pick up the rags of the ferment that is your language and I tear all the old and worn bits with my fingers and throw away all that comes in my way to mountain top".

In the process of simplifying construction all genres Mahjar literature brought about marked changes. In prose the restriction of saj 'and the ornate figures of speech such as the Badi ' were discarded; poetry was no longer bogged down by the meticulous adherence to rhyme and metres and stanzaic forms were preferred. A few free verses with the light rhythm. As early as 1905, Ameen Rihani experimented with prosified poetry in imitation of Walt Whitman. Other poets developed this style further, e.g. Jibran and Yusuf Asad Gharim of Brazil.

Mahjar poetry makes its point simply and with clarity. It seeks to establish a direct contact avoiding the traditional presentation. A formal
covering is regarded as an unnecessary barrier.

A strong feature of Mahjar literature was nostalgia. "The memories of their fatherland of the loved ones they had left behind and of the frustrated dreams and hopes haunted them in their alien surroundings and isolation. Inspite of the money they earned abroad, they found an emptiness around them" it was bitter exile. They regarded themselves as prisoners in strange surroundings with oceans separating them from their people. Most émigrés depicted the malaise of migration with the sorrows it brings such as Rashid Ayyub (1872-1941) in Dhikra Labnan (Remembrance of the Lebanon), Qaisar Maluf in al Hijra (Migration) and Ilyas Farhat (b. 1893) in Hayatu Mashaqqat (A Tough life).7

Love and yearning for the homeland where simplicity and spiritualism were a way of life, and hopes for its political emancipation frequently found expression in Mahjar works. Affluence have attracted them to the west and ironically they were repelled by the means of overloading the values of life in the land of their adoptions, Disillusioned with the seemingly impressive civilization geared towards scientific industrial and material advancement at the cost of human considerations the émigrés highlighted, in sharp contrast, the simple life of Lebanon, its smiling valleys and peaceful villages far removed from the smoke of the mills.8

In الجاوة (the procession) Jibran enumerates the flaws of urban life and ends by migrating to the woods. Al Ghab, the forest that he dreams of, is of course the Lebanon, Nasib Arida dwells at length over Homes which he almost worships.

It is not only the words the Mahjar poets take as a symbol for the Levant, but other references to nature, such as dawn and sunshine which are intended to signify their passionate love for homeland.9

As is evident from their writings, the émigrés were basically human in their attitudes. Reacting to the oppression, discrimination and humiliating treatment they had seen practiced in their homeland they developed an
aversion to all that brought up man's baser instincts, such as the fanaticism, intolerance, authoritarianism, oppression and corruption. They felt that the interest of individuals should not clash with those of society at large. They advocated universal love, compassion and equality stirring stories.

Mahjar poetry is sensitive to suffering the poets complain and sympathize but are firm in their belief and unwavering in their faith. They do not entertain doubts like the 'Abbasid poet al-Marri. Most of them are resigned to philosophic acceptance in the eastern spirit and do not reject the omnipotence of God. Rashid Ayyab in "The Traveller," asks his soul to submit to fate and to be prepared for all eventualities. Nasib Arida is full of sadness about himself, his life and his homeland. But his despair does not lead him to reject faith. In his poems he sees to weep over the lot of humanity and its woes. What is life? He asks to him it is nothing but sighs and tears.

The Mahjar poets added a spiritual dimension to poetry. They introduced Biblical themes and dwelt long on the cosmos and ultimate Questions. Abu Madi's poem, "I do not know" and Fauzi Ma'lufs' (1889-1930) cala Bisat ai Rih) on the carpet of the wind), are beautiful examples of soul searching. A trend is apparent among some Mahjar poets but they take a stand midway between the acceptance of life and ascetism approaching the philosophy of Umar Khayyam and other Persian Sufis.

In spite of many western ideas, Mahjar poetry remained Eastern in spirit. This is discernible to a greater extent in the works of the emigrants of Latin America than those of North America and their verse seems to flow in the more traditional vein in Arabic poetry e.g. Abul Fazl Ayyub, Ilyas Farhat and Rashid al-Khuri.

The authoritarian Arabs on the mainland tended to be critical on Mahjar-Poetry its diction, grammatical license, structural flaws and the deviations from the accepted norms of poetry. Other Arab writers, more tolerant of the liberties taken by the Mahjar poets were greatly impressed by
the innovations in form and content and found their poems inspiring and full of imagination.\textsuperscript{13}

The first major contribution of the emigrants in prose was in Journalism.\textsuperscript{14} Their critical articles and essays were early indications of their originality in approach to literature.

Prose writing in Mahjar literature includes novels, short stories, plays, and literary criticism. The pen Association was noted for its psychological studies, spiritual teachings, and moving short stories and novels. The émigré of South Africa did not reach the high level of their northern counterparts in prose. They concentrated on the poetic genres and distinguished themselves in epic and mythological poems.\textsuperscript{15}

The eminent critic Ismai'll al Adhams evaluates the contribution of the pen Association in the field of prose.

"It created a strong movement in Arabic literature and was successful in presenting the best that has been written in the form of novels, short stories and plays."\textsuperscript{16}

The Mahjar poet and critic Jurj saidah points out that the only play produced by the pen Association was Nu'aimas Father and sons; hence Adham's contention about plays is not borne out.\textsuperscript{17} However what Ismai'll Adham says about short stories and novels holds good. The works of Jibran and Nu'aima by their originality, exquisite delination of character and beautiful expression still seen fresh today. The most eminent prose writer in Mahjar was Amin al-Rihani born in Frayaka, Lebanon; he migrated to New York when he was twelve. The most widely travelled writer of his generation, he sought to carry the message of west to the East. His best books include Muluk al-'Arab (Arab kings in two volumes) Qalb al-Iraq (the heart of Iraq), al-Rihaniiyat (collections of essays in four volumes)\textsuperscript{18} of which the most important are on the Brooklyn Bridge, "Freedom and culture", "literary Revolt" "The sermon of Christ," "Right and law", and the Great civilization.
REFERENCES:

1. Page 7, Modern Arabic literature, by Ismat Mehdi
2. A similar Association was formed in Latin America called al-ushbah al-Andalusiyya (The Andalusian League)
4. Abu Madi, al Jadawil p. 9
6. John A Hayhood, Modern Arabic Literature, p. 10
7. Josephe el Hachime, etc al-Mufid fil Adab al-Arabi, Part II, P 337
8. Suhayl Idns, al Qissa fi Lubnan, p. 94
10. Shawqi Daif, Dirasat fr'I Shi'r al Arabdi al-Muasir, p.272
11. Ibid p. 19
13. Shawqi Daif, Dirasat fr'I shi'r al-Arabvi al-Muasir
14. The first Mahjar newspaper Khawkab Amrika was started in 1888 followed by Jaridat al-Asr (1894) Jaridat al-Ayyam (1897) Janridat al-Huda (1898) and Mirat al-Harb (1899). Between 1875 and 1900 five newspapers were funded in Brazil. The important literary Journals in North America were; al Funun (1913), al sath (1912) al-Samir (1929).In Latin America al-Andalus al- Jadida (in Rio de Janero) al-Sharq (in Sao Paulo)
15. Jurj Saidah, Adabuna wa Udaba'una fil Mahajir al-Amrikiyya,
16. Jurj Saidan, Adabuna wa Udaba'una fil Mahajir al-Amrikiyya, p. 234
17. Ibid p 119