CHAPTER 1

Introduction

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction:

The present research work entitled: "Thoughts and Ideologies of Mikhail Nu‘aima, the Mahjar Poet in the development of Modern Arabic Poetry; A critical study" bears immense importance and great significance in the realm of modern Arabic poetry.

At the beginning of twentieth century Arabic poetry was remote from the main stream of the modern world poetry. Through countless experiments and struggles for modernization, Arabic poetry could able to overcome her esthetic, semantic and technical conventions of the past.

The Mahjar literature in the Americas is a new dimension in modern Arabic literature and its significant contribution was in poetry. Mikhail Nu‘aima, an iconoclast and outstanding poet, played a major role in the development of Mahjar literature in North America in general and modern Arabic poetry in particular. Therefore, the work is an in-depth study into the philosophy of his life, highlighting his thoughts and Ideologies in the development of Modern Arabic Poetry. Nu‘aima was an Arab- Christian writer being nurtured and bred up in the Christian Culture. He was virtually motivated by the Russian and European literatures and American ‘Transcendentalism’ and thereby, he was not in close contact with the ancient Arabic literary heritage and the fundamentals of Arabic language and literature. On the contrary, he was fully westernized in thoughts
and belief, and his works made the Mahjar literature revitalized creating a new chapter in the development of modern Arabic literature to a great extent.

The first chapter, "Al- Nahda (Renaissance) and its meaning in modern Arabic Literature" deals with the description of Nahda movement – where versatile factors like Napoleonic expedition, Arabic printing press, western cultural as well as the Christian Maronites' influence, Muhammad Ali's endeavour for westernization, the movement of translation, publishing the Arabic periodicals etc. are drawn for discussion.

In the second chapter, a discussion as well as explanation on (a) the Mahjar poets, (b) Reasons for their Migration (c) and the exponents of Mahjar poetry along with their thoughts and ideologies all these have been made.

In the third chapter mention has been made on the outstanding Mahjar poets of North America as well as South America highlighting their literary activities in respect of poetry thereon. Moreover, the Mahjar Romanticism is also brought into discussion so far.

In the fourth chapter, a detailed description has been made on 'Nu’aima’s life and works', ‘his thoughts and ideologies.’ He has been presented as a critic, a poet, a prophet, a mystic, a philosopher, a thinker and a humanitarian. And ‘the impact of his work on the development of Modern Arabic poetry'- all these have been thoroughly discussed.
The fifth is the concluding chapter where the summary of the thesis has been developed with special reference to Mikhail Nu’aima as a poet, a critic, a philosopher, a thinker, and a great innovator of modern Arabic literature in general and Mahjar poetry in particular.

The Bibliography follows the fifth chapter arranging the data and materials under different heads in alphabetical order.

Finally, a list of appendix showing pictures and photographs of Nu’aima and others, a list of glossary explaining the technical terms written in the thesis and a list of index have been added.
1.1. Al-Nahda (Renaissance) and its meaning:

Al-Nahda (Renaissance), translated in English as 'renaissance' or 'revival', is a term first used by Jurji Zaydan and others to describe the process of Arabic literary and cultural renewal which occurred the second half of the nineteenth, and early years of the twentieth, centuries. The 'revival' was associated with a number of interrelated factors, both political and intellectual: on a political level, they included the progressive enfeeblement of the Ottoman Empire and the growth of European influence in the Middle-East, and, on an intellectual level, the consequent attempts by Muslim and other Arab intellectuals to reassess the relationship between Europe and the Arab Muslim world and to redefine the place of Islam within a modern society.¹

In political terms, these various currents had an important outcome in the growth of Arab nationalism in its various forms; in literary terms, their outcome was the substitution of Western genres – novel, short story, drama etc. – for traditional Arab forms as the main (though not the sole) vehicles for literary expression in prose, within a corresponding shift away from traditional themes and formal conventions in poetry.²

Geographically, the countries mainly associated with the nahda, at least in its early phases, are Egypt and greater Syria (including Lebanon). However, the cultural background and consequent contribution of these two areas to the movement differed considerably. For Egypt, Napoleon's invasion of 1798 A.D. has traditionally been held to mark the beginning of modern cultural
development, and although the significance of this date for the socio-economic
development of the country has become focal point for some of the liveliest
debates in Middle Eastern history, its status as a cultural turning-point remains
difficult to ignore. From then until the British occupation beginning in 1881-2,
Egypt was effectively an autonomous country, and the reigns of Muḥammad ʿAlī
(1805-48) and Ismāʿīl (1863-79) in particular saw important developments
which, while often not involving cultural objectives as such, had important cultural
and literary side-effects: these included the dispatch of Egyptians to the West to
study, a more widespread European presence in Egypt itself, the spread of
Western-style education, the growth in the number of translations and
adaptations from Western languages, and the progressive substitution of Arabic
for Turkish as the language of administration. In Syria and Lebanon, the
presence of indigenous Christian communities with long-standing links to the
West implied a different starting point, and their relationship with the Ottoman
Empire remained a more complex one for most of the nineteenth century.
Paradoxically, the civil disturbances arising from the periodic inter-communal
strife in Lebanon themselves made a positive contribution to the movement, as
émigrés sought sanctuary not only in the Mahjar but also in Egypt, where they
helped to stimulate the search for new forms of literary expression; their
contribution was particularly important in the fields of the theatre and the press.3

The development of new literary forms and sensibilities implied by 
(Renaissance) in the second half of the nineteenth century coincided with the
growth of a wider reading public, itself the product of changes in educational patterns. In this context, the Arabic press was playing an increasingly important role, both politically and culturally, not only helping to forge a new sense of national consciousness, but also providing a training ground for young writers—a role it has continued to play to the present day. Associated with these developments where changes in the Arabic language itself, involving the evolution of a modern, less involved, prose style and a vocabulary capable of dealing with modern concepts in a manner accessible to a wide reading public.

Largely for economic reasons, the essay and article remained the dominant prose form of this period; but for longer narrative, Jurjì Zaydân and other writers were increasingly beginning to turn to Western forms. In this respect Muhammad al-Muwaylîhî’s حديث عيسى ابن هشام (serialized between 1898 and 1902) occupies a pivotal position, as perhaps the last great Arabic masterpiece in المقالة (maqâma) form.

A decade or so later, Muhammad Hussain Haykal’s زينب (‘Zaynab’-1913) holds the distinction of being the first Western-style Egyptian novel with a contemporary Egyptian setting; by the time of Tawfiq al-Hakim’s عودة الروح – (‘Awdat al-rûh’-1933) the adaptation of Western fictional techniques to an Arab environment was effectively complete. A similar timescale holds roughly good for the theatre, where the early efforts of Mârûn al-Naqqâsh and others in Syria and Lebanon, and of ʿYaqûb Şanû in Egypt in the 1870s, failed to bear fruit in the establishment of an Arabic dramatic tradition of literary value; most troupes
continued to rely heavily on musical and melodramatic productions, and on adaptations of Western plays in which faithfulness to the original counted for little, if anything. Only with the plays of Ibrāhīm Ramzī, Anṯūn Yazbak and Muḥammad Taymūr around the time of World War I do we see significant steps being taken to create a genuinely Arab, or Egyptian, theatre.⁴

In poetry, traditionally regarded by the Arabs as the most highly-prized literary form, the same factors led initially not to any radical change in poetic structure but rather to a more gradual development in sensibility, accompanied by a conscious attempt to revitalize contemporary poetry by reaching back to the great models of the classical Arabic heritage. The resulting neo-classical movement found its first great poetic exponent in Maḥmūd Sāmī al-Barūḍī and was subsequently developed most notably in Egypt and Iraq. It was not until the rise of the Romantic movement, however, fore-shadowed in the work of the Syro-Egyptian Khalil Muṭrān, that Arabic poetry began in earnest to free itself from its traditionally rigid metrical and rhyme structure.⁵

It is difficult to determine for a fixed “end-date” of al-nahḍa (Renaissance). By the 1920s at latest most of the initial problems involved in adapting Western literary forms for use in an Arab context had been tackled, and the groundwork laid for the future development of modern Arabic literature as well as the Māḥjar in the Americas in the remainder of the twentieth century. In fact, the (al-nahḍa) movement was the direct Western cultural influence on modern Arabic literature and thereby it bounced well in its development. At the
same time, on the political level, many Arab countries like Iraq, Egypt, Syria and others found themselves under Western occupation, with their hopes of liberty dashed. Though, the subsequent development of Arabic literature has continued to witness a close relationship between Arab- Western political and intellectual currents, but in a different overall context.
1.2. Arabic Poetry from *Al-Nahda (Renaissance)* to Mahjarites:

Before going to discuss on the Mahjarites, it would be adequate to have a study about the *nahda* (النهضة) and how it worked:

Literary historians are agreed that the Ottoman period of Arabic literature which begins with the Ottoman conquest of Syria in 1516 and Egypt in 1517 and is conveniently thought to end with Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798, marks in fact the nadir (bleak period) of Arab culture.⁶

The Ottoman Turks imposed their rule over most of Arab world such as they conquered Algiers in 1516, Tripoli in 1555, Tunis in 1574, and they established their rule in Iraq in 1639 and subsequently in Yemen and Hejaz. Only the central Arabia (Nejd) and Morocco remained independent of the Ottomans. In fact, albeit nominally, the Ottoman influence had to be felt in their conquered Arab lands until early in the 20th century.⁷

The 'Nadir' period (1516-1798) came to an end with the invasion of Napoleon Bonaparte in Egypt in 1798 that made Arabic culture rudely awakened. He brought with him a group of experts, scientists and scholars to carry out scientific and literary research. Bonaparte could able to reorganize Egypt by forming the French controlled govt. therein. He had brought with him from the Vatican an Arabic language press, the very first Arabic printing press to enter Egypt, for the publication of French proclamations in Arabic.⁸
Mohammad Ali established the people's press in Arabic in 1821 known as البلاط (al-Bulaq). It remained the only press in Egypt for forty years and was followed by the Coptic press. مطبعة المعارف (Matba' al-Ma'arif) was started in 1867 and مطبعات وادي النيل (Matba' at Wadi al-Nile) in 1896.

Recovering the Arabic letters and establishing the printing press in Arabic heralded the movement generally known in Arabic as التهذبة (Al-Nahda) and some time الإبعاث (al-Inbi'ath), meaning 'Renaissance', began to be felt first in Lebanon, Syria and Egypt and from there it spread gradually and in varying degrees to the rest of the Arab world. It is here mentionable that the Syrian-Arabic press did not contribute directly to the development of Arabic literature until well into the 19th century. But, Egypt played an outstanding role in the Nahda movement, had to wait nearly a century for its first Arabic press, introduced by the Napoleonic expedition.

The Arab renaissance came into being like the European renaissance of the 15th century is characterized by a return to classical literature whose masterpieces served as models for new writers. The Arab renaissance is further characterized by an interest in European literature.

From the beginning of the 19th century two currents flow in to the making of التهذبة (i.e. Renaissance or, the Nahda):
1. Arab stream

2. European stream

The Arabic stream was represented by al-Azhar which preserved the Islamic and Arab literary heritage in the darkest days of decline and was the only source of learning in Egypt. The torch was carried forward by traditional scholarship in the Levant too. The base for the renaissance was provided by the artistic potential of the Arabs, known for their wit, keen powers of observation and imagination; their ability to preserve the salient features of their language and yet absorb new trends.¹²

European influence expressed itself through printing which was introduced into the Arab world by Christian missionaries in 1702 in Aleppo, Syria. It is here noteworthy that the first Arabic press was established at Fano, Italy. There, the Gospels were among the earliest books to be printed in Arabic in 1514. In mid-16th century the Fano press was transferred to Istanbul, where it printed Turkish books in Arabic characters.¹³

The printing press like the American Malta press (1834), the Catholic press (1844), the St. George’s press (1848), the Beirut press (1848) and others flourished around the Arab world by the influence of Western patrons had a vital contributions in modernizing the Arabic literature in general and the Arabic poetry in particular.
The history of modern Arabic poetry could be divided into three main periods: the first from 1834-1914, which may be termed the age of translation and Adaptation as well as neo-classicism; the second is the inter war period, which may be described as the age of Romanticism and Nationalism; the third is from the end of world war II to the present day; it embraces a wide variety of schools, approaches and styles, but may conveniently be called the Age of conflicting Ideologies. Here, the discussion will confine within the first two periods (i.e. from 1834 to 1914 and the inter war period).

The year 1834 is an outstanding landmark, because it marks the publication of al- Tahtawi's account of his trip to France, *إجلاس الإبريز إلى تلخيص باريس* (*Takhlis al-ibriz ila talkhis Bariz*). The book contains specimens of translations of French verse, perhaps the first to be undertaken in Arabic. Although they are of an indifferent quality and are much more adaptations than translations, nevertheless, they are important in so far as they signal the very beginning of the process of introduction to, and assimilation of, western literature.

In his account al- Tahtawi narrates that during his mission in Paris he works by Racine, Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu, amongst other things. It is true that his major literary translation of Fenelon's *Telemaque* was to appear much later (1867); nevertheless, it was during his stay in Paris that he studied the art of translation, what he called *فن الترجمة* (*Fann-al-tarjamah*), and according to him he translated twelve works (obviously technological and historical rather than literary). After his return he occupied the position of head of the newly created
'Translation Bureau' which produced a large number of distinguished translators of literature. In 1835 the anonymous translation of 'Robinson Crusoe' was published in Malta. Inspired by the French national anthem, al-Tahtawi composed many patriotic songs which became popular with the troops. This type of poetry was unknown in Arabic before and is one of the earliest cases of direct borrowing of European forms.

Another prominent translator in Egypt was Muhammad 'Uthman al-Jalal (1829-1898), who rendered La Fontaine's fables in Arabic verse (al-'Uyun-al-Yuaqiz) and Moliere's comedies, including 'Tartuffe' which he called Al-Shaykh Matluf. 'Uthman al-Jalal also translated some works of Racine and Bernadine de St. Pierre's 'Paul et Virginie'.

In the Levant Najib Tarrad (1809-1911), Bashara Shadid and Tanius 'Abduh (d. 1926) translated and popularized many French works and with their efforts European cultural influences started making an impact on Arab minds.

The translations were first intended to amuse the readers who liked love stories and adventures and were not particular about the quality. Some writers started translating without an adequate knowledge of the original language. The most glaring example was the rendering of 'Les Miserable's' by Hafiz Ibrahim, who did not know French. The Arab writers tried to overcome this problem by making a distinction between الترجمة 'tarjamah' (literal translation of a foreign text) and ترليب 'ta'rib (producing an Arabic version of the original). Al-Manfaluti, for
example, adapted 'Paul et Virgine' of Bernadine de St. Pierre and called it (al-Fadila).19

The most important result of the translations was the impetus they gave to the birth and development of literary genres that were not prevalent in classical Arabic. Thus, Arabic poetry grew up directly or indirectly as a result of the translations and has become an integral part of modern Arabic literature.

The Arab renaissance in poetry was an outcome of the contribution of the men of letters of the Levant and Egypt. Here, it would be more suitable to highlight the contributions done by them.

In the Levant, the court of the Shihabi Prince Bashir II was the meeting place of the famous poets like – Nikhula Yusuf al-Turk (1763-1828), Butrus Ibrahim Karama (1774-1861), Amin al-Jundi (1814-1878) and Nasif al-Yazigi (1800-1871). Al-Yazigi was a famous court poet who played an important role in reviving the classical idioms. His book مجمع البحرين 'Majma' al-Bahrain' (The conjunction of the two Seas) written in al-Hariri and al-Hamdhani's maqama style shows his mastery over the Arabic language. He also wrote important books on the Arabic language and grammar.20

Sulaiman al-Bustani (1856-1925) translated Homer’s إيلادة (Iliad) with a preface noted for its literary value. The Iliad was the first introduction of epic verse into Arabic and the translation is a masterpiece. Sulaiman al-Bustani was also the first to employ methods of modern literary criticism in Arabic.21
Ibrahim al- Yazigi (1847- 1906) was a well known poet and reformer. He tried his best to form a secular Pan- Arab movement based on culture and language rather than on religion. His poem, ‘Arise ye Arabs and Awake’ earned him lasting fame.22

Mahmud Sami al- Barudi (1838-1901) was the remarkable pioneer of neo- classicism who made an important departure in the study and writing poetry. He got much inspiration from the classical poets and maintained the strong framework of the Arabic قصيدة (qasida) but filled it with his own personality and ideas. His artistic mission was to revive the classical style of poetry. The language used by al- Barudi to express national and patriotic fervour endears him to the lovers of poetry even today. His verses have a musical quality which gives them a permanent appeal.23

Ismail Sabri (1853- 1923) was a noted neo- classical poet. He himself devoted to poetry and the company of poets as well as the musicians. He followed the idealism of the Egyptian Sufi poets al- Baha’ Zuhair (d. 1258) and Ibn al- Farid (d. 1235), who wrote symbolically of love and women and their appeal to the mind. Sabri’s flair for musical words, his selection of beautiful expressions laced with mild pleasantry and sarcasm enabled him to reach the climax of idealistic poetry unequalled by his generation of poets.24

Khalil al- Khury (1836- 1907) of Levant founded the first Lebanese newspaper حديقة الأخبار (Hadiqat al- Akhbar) in 1858.25 It was the first unofficial
newspaper of the Arab countries. He was one of the earliest exponents of neo-
classicism. His all anthologies such as "زهر الربى" "الشاديات", "العصر الجديد", "التفاحات" were published in Beirut and these poems were composed till the year 1884 A.D.²⁶

Ayesha Taymuria (1840-1902) of Egypt was inclined towards poetry from her childhood. She used to study the Arabic anthologies of different poets. She had the wedding knot with Muhammad Tawfiq Bek al-Islambulee in 1854.

She had the mastery over Turkish, Arabic and Persian languages and hence, she had (Diwans) entitled:

1) شكوكه : It is her Turkish Diwan, published in 'al-Astanah.'

2) حيلة الطراز : Her Arabic Diwan, published in Egypt several times.

3) نتائج الأحوال : An anthology about literature, published in Egypt.

She lost her only daughter توجيدة (Tuheeda) when she attained the age of eighteen. At this, she mourned her being aggrieved in her Diwan الشكوكه (al-Shakufa).²⁷ She will be remembered forever for her valuable contributions to the development of modern Arabic poetry.

It is not surprising that the period between the two world wars was the age of Romanticism and Nationalism. The Great War heralded the ending of Ottoman powers and establishing the western influences in the Arab world. This is the period in which Arab countries tried to shake off foreign domain and attain freedom and the nationalist feeling erupted in Egypt (1919), Iraq (1920) and Syria.
(1925). The process of westernization was keenly felt therein. Mohammad Ali Pasha, Muhammad Abduh, Ismail Pasha, Jamal Uddin Afghani and others were the forerunners in this field.

During this period several iconoclastic works of literary criticism appeared such as the Egyptian al-Aqqad and al-Mazini’s الديوان (al-Diwan) (1921), the Mahjari Mikhail Nu’aima’s الغزيل (Al-Ghirbal) (1923) and the Tunisian al-Shabbi’s الخيال الشعري عند العرب “al-Khayal al-Shiri ind al-Arab” (The Arab poetic imagination, 1929). The Arab poets turned their attention towards European Romanticism, which was a literature of revolt.28

Romanticism is a product of a society which is at odds with itself and in which the individual questions or the personal dilemmas are to be realized with the relevance of traditional values. Since the traditional Arab conception of literature shares many of the fundamental assumptions of European classicism, it was understandable that when the desire to break with their past and enter the modern world was professedly anti-classical, the assumptions and ideals which seemed to them to fulfill adequately their own needs. It must be emphasized that the Arab Romantics, whether in the Arab east or in the Americas, were not simply imitating western postures. The utmost sense of individuality, the agonizing feeling of social and cultural change, the political malaise, the occasional awareness of loss of direction and of being strangers in an unfamiliar universe are for the facts of Arab existence to some extent. On the other hand, the Arab Romantics never remained as mere dreamers inhabiting into an ivory
tower rather many of them were politically committed nationalists, and they were keenly aware of the ills of their society.\textsuperscript{29}

When the British occupied Syria executing the massacres of 1860 and the forces of Mohammad Ali Pasha were driven away, then many Syrians immigrated to Egypt either for fear of more massacres or expecting the material gain therein. The result was that they played an active part in the Arabic cultural renaissance, especially through their activities in the field of journalism. The later generations of Syrians who immigrated to far America and they contributed one of the most interesting chapters in modern Arabic poetry.

The process of Westernization was only the skin-deep without touching the cultural life of the society because the western patterns in education were drastically imposed upon them and thereby, the political influence of the west was growing very fast. Soon Egypt came under the sway of British. As a result nationalism emerged speedily into the Arab minds. They opposed the west and the western cultural values which ruled the Arab world during the eighteenth century and thereby there occurred an ultimate conflict against the western culture. Out of this conflict between East and west modern Arabic literature was born.\textsuperscript{30}

The neo-classical movement which dominated the political creativity from the last decade of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century through to the 1920s, and has never really
died out; rather it played a vital role in modernizing the Arabic poetry that may be brought into a brief account as under:

Neo-classical poets, the greatest among them was أحمد شوقي بك (Ahmad Shauqi Bek), naturally went back to their roots to beautify their poetry from the vast wealth of classical Arabic literature. But, at that time, the urgent need for poetry was to acquire a new vigour and terseness of expression. Moreover, the psychological situations of Arab authors at home were in harmony along with the involvement of classical references. This is the period which leads the age of protest, dissent and unrest. Poets were not yet intellectually conscious of modern ideas of revolution, social struggle, establishing justice and protecting the individual right. When these ideas did begin to enter into the Arab consciousness, then they introduced themselves with the culture of stable and well-ordered universe i.e. they came under the civilized cultural contact with the European and western countries.

During this period the Arab world was sunk into the evils coming from the outside such as colonialism, the encroachment of foreign cultures and the interests of capitalists and thereby, the new-classical poets could able to adopt the well-defined ethical, philosophical and aesthetic principles of their world. Their real achievement was to deliver the languid and moribund (dying) verse of the 19th century from its immense weakness and to enforce it with new strength of diction and form and thereby the modern Arabic poetry could able to secure a deep-root and robust foundation and following this trends the next generation of
avant-garde poets could able to launch fruitful operation in developing the modern Arabic poetry. The task shouldered by the neo-classical poets should therefore be seen as a big step forward towards achieving modernity.\textsuperscript{31}

The drawbacks of neo-classicism are to be observed in its sometimes excessive leaning towards rationality, objectivity and externality, its dependence on rhetorical expressions and high tones, its rigidity of form and vision, and its inability to face the winds of change.\textsuperscript{32}

The urge for change took hold of the younger generation of poets and critics that rose to fame in the first two decades of this century. The first real impetus for a genuine break with neo-classicism came from the Arab poets who have immigrated to North America. Their leader, Jibjran Khalil Jibran (1883-1931) was the single most important influence on Arabic poetry and literature during the first half of 20\textsuperscript{th} century. He was helped in North America by such distinguished poets as Iliya Abu Madi (1890-1957), and the poet-critic Mikhail Nu'alma (1889-1988), whose critical writings, with their iconoclastic intentions and their invigorating insights into new poetic methods, which helped greatly in uprooting the blind attachment of a select Arab audience to neo-classical rigidity and traditionalism.\textsuperscript{33}

At the same time, the Egyptian school, known later as the 'Diwan group', joined forces in the battle against neo-classicism, creating a vital link with the North American group in the early twenties. The Diwan group, through its
vociferous attacks on the neo-classical school (and on all fossilized elements in poetry) aimed at revolutionizing the stable and well-ordered world of the neo-classical poets, and emphasized the subjective elements of experience (i.e. the experience pertaining to the mental and spiritual elements).

As a result of persistent criticism by these two groups, combined with the example of Jibran’s writings and those of the Mahjar groups in particular, a Romantic current was released that was backed by a deep need for new freedom in both art and life. By the late twenties, Romanticism had become a major trend in poetry. Like Mikhail Nu’aima several poets rose to fame on a pan-Arabic scale. Their various experiments helped to stir up a deep change in poetic method, style, mood, tone, imagery and language. However, among them the central influence was Jibran, and following his footsteps Mikhail Nu’aima could able to render the wonderful job in the field of poetry in modernizing the Arabic literature. This is in brief an account of modern Arabic poetry from al-Nahda to Mahjarites.

Cont.....
Reference


2 Ibid.


8 Ibid, P. 4


15 Ibid.


17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.


21 Ibid, P. 15.


23 Ibid, PP. 20, 23.


32 Ibid, P. 137.

