

Ameen Rihani and Arab-American literature

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Abstract

Arab-American literature has an important role to play the Arab renaissance in the first half of twentieth century. Ameen Rihani is considered to be the Founding father of Arab-American literature. He inhaled the first molecule of Oxygen on 24th November of 1876 in Lebanon with a variety of glorious parts of his life tide up by 64 years of life. He was a natural lover, traveller, philosopher, optimist, freedom fighter, patriot and reformer. He tried his utmost to establish a uniform of Arab nations which leads him to a wider thinking of globalization, universal peace and prosperity uprooting the civil atoms of all kinds of diverting hatred.

As a Pioneer of revolutionary movement of Arabic literature, Ameen Rihani's contributions were mentionable. In the field of wording, composing and prosody of modern Arabic literature, the new reformation of "prose- poetry". Perhaps most important of all; he was the first consciously to write Prose- Poetry in Arabic, earning himself the Arabic title of "Father of Prose Poetry". Ameen Rihani mostly followed the style of Walt Whitman. His literature is full of philosophical thoughts, political advocacy, love of nature and its existence, social reformation. It is notable that every writer or poet aims to bring all round development of the nation mentally, Politically, Socially and culturally. It means that they try to establish the nation a civilized are with all its wings with the help of their literary worlds wring early, simple, rhymical, narrative, sensitive, comprehensive and piercing manner and in this respect, Ameen Rihani could be entitled as the hers of Arab émigrés.

As a social reformer he talked for freedom that once mind should be at the out sad free from superstition and blind concepts. He should know what is good and better and what is best for the common people throwing away hatred jealousy or envy. His teaching is to be cleaning mind heart and body, clear and honest opinion that is better for the society. Religion should interpreted in broad a wide manner.

The present works "Ameen Rihani and Arab-American literature" is basically projected on the thinking and contribution of Ameen Rihani and impacted with the. Mahjar Literature.

Keywords: Arab-American literature, Prose- Poetry

I. Mahjar Literature:-

Mahjar 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 State 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 19th century and continues to thrive today.

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II. Ameen Rihani

Ameen Rihani is considered by all “the father founder” of Arab-American literature. He was born in a Merownite Christian family on 24th November 1876 in Freike, Lebanon, a few miles to the north east of the country’s capital, Beirut, and died there 64 years later, on 13th September 1940. He spent his years moving between East and West, especially between Lebanon and his second home, New York and travelling in the world. His early English writing mark the beginning of a body of literature that is Arab in its concern, culture and characteristics, English in language, and American in spirit and platform. He was the first Arab to write English essays, poetry, novels, short stories, art critiques and travel chronicles.

III. Statement of the problems

There has always been a tendency of Eastern and Western to scholar to overlook Ameen Rihani’s poetic achievements in favour of his meritoriously paraded prose works. There is no doubt that “Hutuf Al-Awdia” (Hymns of the Valley) a collection of poetry in Arabic and “Al-Rihaniyat” (a collection of essays written in Arabic) alone would be enough to stamp Rihani’s name with letters of gold in Eastern and Western literary anthologies as a modern philosopher, political thinker, and literary critic. It is also true that his English and Arabic prose works exhibit Rihani as a pioneer anti-conventionalist, who devoted his life for the cause of liberty and freedom in Lebanon and the Arab world, as an enthusiastic promoter of East-West cross-cultural understanding. And it seems that the realistic and imaginative depth of Rihani’s prosaic acumen amazed his scholars to the point of deferring them from his prose and poetry, which I believe is amongst his most significant contribution to the world of literature in the Arab world and in the west. The present study is the discussion, analysis and solution of the problems stated as follows:

3.1 Ameen Rihani was also a man who believed passionately in the oneness of the world’s religions and the brotherhood of all nations, devoting his entire life to prompting the cause of East-West understanding. Virtually able to claim dual nationality he assimilated two widely differing cultures to an extent perhaps never achieved before him profound through his grasp of the modern west was, Rihani never lost sight of the rich cultural heritage into which he was born, and which was bequeathed to the world by Arab civilization. As a pioneering futurist he recognized that the issues now facing humanity demand a new set of answers, arising from a new pattern of faith and belief. Rihani gave to dynamic engagement with the world as a path to self-transcendence and social reform.

In this way Rihani’s different thinking may be discussed.

3.2. Perhaps Ameen Rihani was the pioneer poet of prose-poetry of free verse in Arabic literature. He wrote his first free verse poem in 1907 under the remarkable influence of the American poet, Walt Whitman, whose fans and followers spread in America and Europe. He was the first Arab traveler of modern times to discover the heart of Arabia and his writings influenced on the next Arab writers. That is why prose literature is to be discussed.

IV. Hypothesis:

We have carefully formulated the Hypothesis of the present problem, which will properly be tested in order to obtain suitable findings and appropriate solution of the stated problem. It was our tentative proposition that Ameen Rihani's writings pioneered the movement of modern Arabic literature that played a leading role in Mahjar Literature

V. Methodology

We have collected relevant data and authentic literature related to the problem and reviewed them by testing their reliability to get a final result. We relied upon the textual literature and the books written on Ameen Rihani's work and contributions of both primary and secondary nature.

We have discussed the Humanist Vision, Globalization and Peace of Ameen Rihani were the subject of narration which is more effective.

In his analytical methods, he may justifiably be characterized a forerunner of post-modernist, post-structuralists and constitutionalists as a thinker, who questioned all assumptions and pushed reason to its limits.

Humanist Vision, globalization and Peace of Ameen Rihani

Ameen Rihani repeatedly called upon his compatriots to follow his "tri-centric" voice. Summarizing a life commitment to the Arab homeland and culture and to world society, to "Universal humanity." He commended his humanism and "dialectical identity" to his Arab contemporaries. His "universal humanity" is like humanism in the Hegelian sense.¹

Rihani insisted on embracing this identity to counter his feeling of unprotected as a Christian Lebanese in the Arab world and to avoid the loss of well defined as an Arab citizen of the world. Rihani's loyalty to the smaller circle, born of love of Lebanon, his homeland, in one way contradicted his obedience to the greater Arab land and his dedication to serve his people and all mankind. He lived in a world and a time not unlike ever one divided between dominant and dominated, powerful and weak. And as in today's world, some saw the division as demarcating polarities of "civilized" and "uncivilized" and perhaps 'good' and "evil." Rihani happened to belong to both the Arab world and the West. His pride in his Leban-Arabness did not weaken during times of crisis facing his people, his tri-Centrism became more assertive, and his determination to serve the Arab cause as a humanist (from his position as an Arab-American) grew even stronger. He believed that one could not be a humanist without being oneself first. For "No matter how much we let ourselves go in the absolute love of humanity, we cannot forget, if we are fair, the love of our own country" (Al-Watan). Rihani was scarcely twelve years old when he migrated to New York, where he discovered not only the huge gap between the rich and the poor but also the wide division between East and West² The south escape from the city's internal materialism, which dominated every aspect of life, in its cultural diversity. Through an exceptionally vigorous and wide ranging Programme of self-education in Arab and western literatures. Rihani was the first Syrian

Lebanese immigrant to force his own way in the world of intellectuals, country to the expectations of his family and the prevailing norms of his fellow emigrants.

Mahjar poets and writers occupy a unique position in the context of globalization. They are living at the hub of the rapid changes that are taking place in the world today and, at the same time they maintain a deep emotional attachment to their countries of origin. Rihani realized the big gap and difference between the East and the West. From this point of view, Rihani was a pioneer of globalization movement. He did not expect that the East would completely follow the economic, cultural and technological imperative of the West. Views of Rihani on globalization were as a marriage between the culture of East and the West and resulted in an offspring of cultural hybrid.³

Ameen Rihani loved the East and his attraction towards West was also not less than the East. As much as he travelled between East and West, his outlook towards culture was positive and impression was that the culture of one area may be benefited from other area. Rihani's early concept of globalization was born of his ideal of complying the two cultures into a "Universal" one that would embody the best of both. In his "ode to Brooklyn Bridge" Rihani asks the ship sailing in New York harbor:

Take to the East some of the West activity and return to the West with some of the East's idleness.
Take to India a bale of practical American Wisdom and return back to New York with a few seed bags of Indian philosophy⁴

Moreover, in the book of Khalid, he writes "I am a citizen of two worlds – a citizen of the universe..... I am equally devoted both to the material and the spiritual. In fact, Rihani's call for the separation of religion from the state is echoed today by many Lebanese politicians and intellectual who, after seventeen years of civil war, have come to realize that a secular government is the country's only chance to enjoy national unity and sovereignty, a prerequisite for participating in the global agenda

Ameen Rihani wrote on peace for the world. He was affected by the ugly Palestinians-Israeli Conflict, which was a major concern in his writings. Rihani saw the actual problems as political Zionism's goal of establishing a Jewish national home in Palestine. The outside settlers privileged their ethnic and religious identity for their political policy. Thus they made the environment poisonous. The historically peaceful and fruitful co-existence of Arabs and Jews in the region Rihani expressed his free views openly in the East and West, especially in the last thirty years of his life. Rihani would have regarded such agreements as the peace of submission, not of mutual consensus. What Rihani tried to uphold was a fair peace, one where human rights are considered sacred for all of the parties. Rihani's life was not one of comfort and ease. He took on the forces of power the clergy, the rich and the rulers, especially those among them who were lacking in compassion. Often his criticism was harsh; his policy of collision was a reaction to their flagrant misbehaviour, a way to proclaim his indignation. Without hesitation he introduced himself as a peacemaker Neither glory nor fame are my ultimate goal, neither money nor fortune, but my basic goal is to be simple in my words, straight in my Principles and ideas, natural in my behaviour and actions, free in what I love or hate. I have to face what confronts me of difficulties on the roads of life seriously, firmly, patiently, forbearingly, smilingly. I have to oppose corruption and ignorance of people; I have to live straight, truthfully and peacefully. This is my line of conduct, and it is for others to follow or have their own."

Pioneer of Prose-Poetry in Mahjar Literature

In the field of wording, composing and prosody of modern Arabic literature, the new reformation of Ameen Rihani was “prose poetry”. Perhaps most important of all; he was the first consciously to write Prose Poetry in Arabic, earning himself the Arabic title of “Father of Prose Poetry”⁵ Prose poetry was not imaginary but it was new effort stand with some imitation of European poetry. Prose poetry had a distinguish place that period of creating which brought out new idioms of philosophical, knowledge and social. It means of everlasting meaning and good result without following the rules. Ameen Rihani’s example of prose poetry were “Al-thoura”, “Rih Al-Samum,” “Fuad” etc⁶

Ameen Rihani expressed his view in his Al-Rihaniyat--- “This kind of poetry is called if French “Verse Libres,” and in English “Free Verse”— i.e., poetry which is free from regular prosody. This kind of poetry has recently become popular among American and British poets. Shakespeare was the first to liberate English poetry from traditional rhymes, and later Walt Whitman liberated it from regular rhythms.⁷ Rihani wanted to live a worldly and material life where he criticized the precious style of praise and emotion and choose the mentioned poetry like the philosopher Abul Ala-Al-Marri, Ibn Sina, Mutanabbi and Ibn Al-Farid. So he wrote on humanism national or social life which reflected the spiritual oneness and common anxiety of mankind When Ameen Rihani seedling the revolutionary on traditional poetry, the pen league of New York, followed his steps and continued his movement. The chief of the pen league Khalil Gibran was representative, blower of the trumpet and nourishing parson of the soul. , his style was easy in sentence pattern, clear in meaning free from constraint and imitation arranged with peculiarity and spontaneously.

However free verse has its own original rhythm, and indeed, it may have several rhythms. Rihani was different from his friend Khalil Gibran because he continued his struggle his movement of Arab nationalism. He gave solution in the way of essays, writing articles and travelling books, all these movements inspired on tranquility of native land and nation in Eastern Arabic. In that field he contributed his writings and ended his life with travelling and composing who was a real seeker of Arab Unity.

VI. CONCLUSION

Arab-Americans have an important role to play the Arab renaissance in the first half of twentieth century. . In the second phase he is seen back to his native sinking in the ocean of Arabic language and literature and worked out many translations :- Arabic into English and vice versa. Later Ameen Rihani became a true patriot and the seed of Arab nationalism was rooted and grew in his heart throwing out all the diversities differences, enmity of the different Casts, creeds, tribes, sects and religions. He tried his utmost to establish a uniform of Arab nations which leads him to a wider thinking of globalization. In his all works we see his national and global thinking with universal peace and prosperity uprooting the evil atoms of all kinds of diverting hatred.

. Ameen Rihani used poetical style of free verse in Arabic history at first, his style was easy in sentence pattern, clear in meaning free from constraint and imitation arranged with peculiarity and

spontaneously. Ameen Rihani was a natural lover, traveler, philosopher, optimist, freedom fighter, patriot and reformer. Rihani found out through his philosophy a special inner connection of religion, truth, human being and the society as a whole with Almighty and that was his philosophy. He tried his level best to create unity and integrity among the people of his country for its all-round development.

NOTES

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