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Contribution of Mahmood Taimur to the Development of Arabic Short Story: An analytical Study

Dr. Abu Tahir Mahmood

Asst. Prof. (Deptt. of Arabic) Nabin Chandra College, Badarpur, Karimganj, India

Abstract

Mahmood Taimur is considered as one of the pioneers of Arabic short story. He was largely influenced by Mikhail 'l Nu'ima, Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti and Jibran Khalil Jibran. Taimur occupies an eminent place in the development of Arabic short story as Najib Mahfouz in the case of Arabic novel and Taufiq al-Hakim in drama. He was able to present different types of stories such as Realism, Romanticism, Social and Historical. He was well-versed in these types of stories. Taimur was particularly influenced by the works of Maupassant, Tolstoy, Turgenev and Chekhov. Later a large number of writers, playwrights and novelists were influenced by his literary styles, techniques and principles. Taimur's conscious desire to root the short story in Egyptian literary life led him to use all that he observed of rural life in his summer visit to the country, and all that he had grasped from that world of traditional intellectuals who surrounded his father. However his works broadened and delicate the artistic and conceptual qualities of the Arabic short story, his concentration on characterization, especially hopeless, injured and defeated figures, was a step forward in the development of this genre. There are aspects in his diverse persona which demand scholarly debate and close scrutiny and require an objective assessment. In this brief article efforts will be made to bring to throw light on his all-around personality in an objective manner and coherent style.

Keywords: *Najib Mahfouz, Taufiq al- Hakim, Maupassant, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Chekhov, Herman Melville, Edger Allen Poe, Nikolai Gogol.*

Introduction: Short story is a prose narrative shorter than a novel. It is a piece of fictional writing usually in less than 5000 words that contains its basic elements: characters, setting, design, clash, resolution, climax, protagonist, dialogues, and antagonists.

It is a short work of prose fiction that can be read at one sitting within one or two hours and is limited to a single effect to which every data is subordinate. Short stories have their origins in oral-story-telling traditions and the prose anecdotes, a swiftly-sketched condition that rapidly comes to its points. With the rise of the absolutely realistic novel, the short story worked out as a miniature version, with some of its first perfectly independent examples in the tales of E.T.A Hoffman. Other noteworthy short story writers of nineteenth century are Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Edger Allen Poe, Nikolai Gogol, Guy De Maupassant, Boleslaw Pros and Anton Chekov. Short stories were a staple of early 19th century magazines and often led to fame novel-length projects for their authors.

Short stories tend to be less complex than novels. Usually a short story focuses on only one incident, has a single plot, a single setting, a small number of characters, and covers a short period of time.

With the development of the printing press in the 19th century, the Arabic short story first appeared in 1870 in daily newspaper and weekly magazines. By the end of the 19th century, Egyptian, Lebanese and Syrian newspapers and magazines increased the publication of short stories and sections of original or translated novels, influenced by the western world and the view of the human struggle in the world.

The Arabic short story can be classified in three different periods. These are "The Embryonic Stage" (19th century 1914), "The Trial Stage" (1914 to 1925) and "The Formative Stage" (1925 to the present).

The Formative Stage was opened by Mahmood Taimur, where a new narrative style emerged emphasizing the development and psychological analysis of the characters in the stories with a more realistic approach. In the 1960s, the short story achieved a distinguished level of grounding in specific artistic characteristics including an insistence on being short in length, encompassing a short time frame, having critical and deep details, written in prose language, having a minimum number of characters, and conveying an ambiguous ending which leaves the reader to his own imagination and interpretation.

Mahmood Taimur, the first great Arab short story writer, belonged to an erudite family which possessed the largest single collection of books and rare manuscripts in Egypt.

The collections of Taimur's short stories started in formative stage. His services to literature are widely recognized. Taimur's illness was an important factor in his intellectual development. He had become hard of hearing.

Objective: The main objective of the study is to find out how the short story developed in the hands of Mahmood Taimur and how his contemporary Egyptian society is highlighted in his short story.

Methodology: The study is mainly based on primary and secondary data. **Mahmood Taimur** was born in a noble family of Cairo in Egypt in 1894 and grew up in intellectual surroundings where his father Ahmad Taimur Pasha was an educated person who contributed for the development of Arabic language and literature. He left behind a gigantic library for the research scholars. His elder brother Muhammad Taimur was a prominent person in Arabic literature and had made a marvelous contribution in different fields in prose i.e. short story, novel and drama. In addition to this, his aunt A'isha Taimur was also a poetess. Taimur started his early education in a lower primary school and then in an agricultural school of Cairo. For higher studies he travelled frequently to Europe especially to Switzerland. Here he absorbed the literary trends of Europe besides studying 19th century Russian literature.

Taimur wrote in different branches of literature i.e. short story, novel and travelogue. His work was produced over a period of fifty years and collected in twenty volumes. Among his humorous plays '*al-Mukhba*' and '*al-Athlal*' are the most famous. His historical plays include '*al-Hawa al-Khalid*' and '*al-Yaum al-Khamr*' etc.

Among his novels '*Nida al-Majhool*' (1939 A.D), '*Salwa fi Mahabb al-Rih*' (1944 A.D), '*Kilyubatra fi Khan al-Khalili*' (1946 A.) and '*Ila al-Liqa Ayyuha al-Hubb*' (1959 A.D) are famous.

Taimur's travelogues '*Abu al-Hawl*' and '*Shams wa Lail*' are important. His famous essays are: '*Mulamihun wa Ghusunun*', '*Al-Nabi wa al-Insan*', '*Shifa al-Ruh*', '*Itr wa Dhukanun*' etc. are noteworthy.

In the field of short story Mahmood Taimur contributed largely for its development, and gave a vital shape to this genre of literature. The most famous works are: '*Al-Shaikh Juma*', '*Amm Mitwalli*', '*Al-Shaikh Sayyid al-Abith*', '*Rajab Afandi*', '*Al-Athlal*', '*Abu Ali al-Fannan*', '*Al-Shaikh 'afa Allah*', '*Qalibun Ghaniyatun*', '*Firaun al-Saghir*', '*Shifaun Ghalitatun*', '*Ehsan Lilla*', '*Kullu 'Aam Antum Bekhair*', '*Abu al-Shawarib*' and '*Ana al-Qatil wa Qisasun Ukhra*' and so on.

For his great literary contributions Taimur was awarded a number of Prizes such as prize from the Language Academy of Egypt in the year 1947 A.D, State Prize for Literature 'Fuad' in the year 1950 A.D, and the Prize 'Wasif Ali' in 1951 A.D.

Mahmood Taimur wrote a large number of stories covering a period of fifty years and collected in twenty volumes. It is he who contributed largely for the development of this branch of literature, and his stories highlight the human society in general and Egyptian society in particular. Like other reformist writer in around the world Mahmood Taimur came forward to eradicate the burning problems prevailed in the society, he specially dealt with family problems in his short stories.

The short stories of Mahmood Taimur can be divided into two distinct categories on the basis of;

- i) Social elements in respect of sexual, emotional and familial issues.
- ii) Social elements in respect of mental and psychological issues.

The social elements in respect of sexual, emotional and familial issues have also divided into four distinct these are:

- a) Problems of wife's treachery with her husband and its destructive influence on the society.
- b) Deviance of women, their characters and its bad influence on people.

- c) Problems of caste and class difference in marriage among the bridegroom and its perilous influence on human society.
- d) Problems of marital and familial life and its destructive influence on social life.

Taimur wrote a number of stories such as '*Ila al- Saarq*', '*Abun wa Ibnun*' and '*AbithAbith*' etc, highlighting the differences between 'upper caste and lower caste' and 'upper class and lower class' that are still prevailing in the society from the beginning of human civilization, which are major hindrances for the lovers and may have destructive effects on the society.

Some of Taimur's short stories such as '*Neda al-Ruh*' and '*Zawjan wa Dhurataan*' etc dwell upon the problems related to familial and conjugal life and their subsequent ill effect on personal and social life.

The social elements in respect of mental and psychological issues are also divided into three categories:

- a) Problems of illiteracy, backwardness, wrong notion of religion and its bad influence on society.
- b) Problems of blind belief in Peer, Aulia and its destructive influence on society.
- c) Problems of superstitions belief like phantoms, devils, spirits and its influence on society.

The Arab society in general was under reign of illiteracy and backwardness before the modern renaissance, and is due to illiteracy which causes a large numbers of problems created in the society which described in his short stories '*al- Shaikh Juma*' and '*Alhaj Shalabi*' are important.

The problems which are shown due to blind belief in Peer, Aulia and its destructive influence on society are described in his short stories '*Amm Mitawalli*' and '*Waliullah*'.

The problems which are created due to belief in superstitious things and its bad impact on society are lime lighted in his famous short stories '*al-Saitan*' and '*Ifrit*'.

After describing the above mentioned problems in his short stories, Taimur tried to present some suggestions to overcome these problems:

People should be literate so that they perform their duty perfectly. The people whether man or woman should avoid such kind of evil deeds, and co-operate each other for peace and harmony of the society, make the people conscious about the modern education so that they avoid the superstitious things. There should be a well recognized organization through which people can solve their arising issues peacefully and the people should be ready for sacrifice their demands for the others.

Taimur's writing style is mainly descriptive. He uses simple but precise vocabulary and conveys in short sentences detailed sketches of natural scenes. He avoids all ambiguous and complex constructions. The open sky, morning dew, singing birds and whistling ponds are delightfully portrayed by him.

After a long journey in literary field and valuable contribution for the development of Arabic literature especially in the field of short story he breathed his last on 25th August 1973 A.D at the age of eighty.

Conclusion: While compiling this article on the aforementioned writer my earnest endeavour was to highlight the representation of the contemporary society and its problems by the author in his writings especially in the short stories. His writings represent the culmination, in both form and content, of the work of previous writers and of his contemporaries. He was also the major figure of the New School, a versatile literary group which played a decisive role in developing the modern Arabic short stories, extending its reading public and shaping the characteristics of the new sensibility of that period. He came forward for the improvement of socio cultural life of his contemporary society. He discovered a large number of prevailing social problems and presented valuable suggestions to overcome these problems.

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