

Social Reformations of Jibran Khalil Jibran in the Novel “Al-Ajniha Al-Mutakassira” (The Broken Wings)

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Abstract: *“al-Ajniha al-Mutakassira” is an autobiographical novel authored by the well-known Arabic figure Jibran Khalil Jibran. The novel was first published in 1912. It is regarded as an early experimental work of Khalil Jibran through which he tried his best to reform the Arabic literature and culture. . The book is inspired by painful memories of Jibran’s first love for the girl of his dreams whom he met on coming to Lebanon from the United States. The writing style of the book is simple, spontaneous and almost lyrical, with concise expressions and graceful metaphors. In fact, the book deals with tender sentimentality, sweet melodies and glowing colours of youthful heart-palpitations, together with brilliant sketches of Lebanon’s beautiful nature in different poses and moods.*

I. Introduction:

Jibran Khalil Jibran (January 6, 1883 – April 10, 1931) was a Lebanese-American artist, poet, and writer as well. He held a unique place as the leading representative of Arab American literature. He wrote in two languages- Arabic for Lebanon, Syria and the Arab world; English for the West. Jibran’s literary achievements as well as artistic talents are appreciated all over the world and remain representatives of his legacy. His credit goes to be the immortal Prophet of Lebanon through his book “*The Prophet*” which he considered himself as his greatest achievement. Classism, social disparity and corruption of the cities are the main themes of Jibran’s short stories. He always tried his best to reform the society throughout his writings. Consequently he tried to infuse Eastern mysticism into Western materialism, believing that humanity can best be served by a man who is capable of bestriding the two cultures and acknowledging the virtues of each. He combined prose with the art of painting, sculpting, music and poetry. ¹

II. Description:

Jibran was eighteen years, love opened his eyes with its magic rays and Salma Karamy was the first girl who revealed to him the secrets of love by her beauty and affection. Every young man remembers his first love and tries to recapture those strange hours. Al-Ajniha al-Mutakassira (The Broken Wings) is an outcome of Jibran’s first love.

In 1908, before leaving for Paris, Jibran wrote to his friend Ameen Raihani: “I am intending to publish my book, the Broken Wings next summer. This book is the best I have ever written.”² The autobiographical contents of the novel and the depth of his suffering at tragic end of his first love enabled him to pour all his feelings in this novel. ³

Al-Ajniha al-Mutakassira, is inspired by Jibran’s love for Lebanese girl Hala Dahir, whom he met during his days in Madrasa al-Hikma, the main character of the story. Jibran has recalled Hala Dahir. Remembering her, Jibran has described his ideal of Lebanon women. Salma Karamy is the only daughter of Farris Effandi, a rich old man of Lebanon and he is very close friend of Jibran’s father. When Jibran is introduced to Farris, he invites him to his house. There Jibran meets Salma and since then the two fall in love. But unfortunately Farris forces her beautiful daughter Salma to marry Mansour Bey Galib, the nephew of the local bishop, Bulos Galib. The choice of Bulos falls on Salma due to her father’s wealth, which would guarantee Mansour Bey a good and prosperous fortune and make him an important man.

Bulos Galib is also a powerful man in the local society who controls the locales as he wishes. In fact Mansour is one step ahead than his uncle. He enjoys wine, girls and all evil doings of the society. Kahlil got stuck to Salma’s beauty and calmness and it was “love at first sight”. At last Salma is married to Manour Bey and her father Farris was left alone in his solitary house. After marriage, the wayward husband neglects Salma and spends his days in pursuit of sexual satisfaction. In spite of marriage Salma met Jibran secretly in a temple. After some days the bishop got suspicious and he asks his servant to observe Salma closely, and their meeting become discontinued. To her tragic life is added another sorrow of not having any child even after five years of marriage for which Mansour always used to hate her. Finally she gives birth to a baby boy but unfortunately both mother and child die. Jibran then describes how he fell on Salma’s grave and wept bitterly. At one moment after Selma’s marriage, Khalil proposes Salma to run away with him to get rid of the tortures of

Mansour and Bishop. But she refuses and says – “A BIRD WITH A BROKEN WING CAN’T FLY TOO FAR”.

According to Jibran himself “the Broken Wings” was welcomed as a ‘a wonderful work of art’, ‘perhaps the most beautiful in modern Arabic’ and as ‘a tragedy of subtlest simplicity’⁴

III. Discussion:

So far as the title of the novel “The Broken Wings” is concerned Jibran tried to explain in his letter Marry Haskel:

“I inherited from my mother ninety percent of my character and my disposition.” Through this novel Jibran criticized the religious heads of the East who were unsatisfied with their wealth and struggled to make their families superior. He has compared the Christian Bishops, the Muslim Imams and Brahman Priest with sea reptiles who clutch their prey with numerous tentacles and suck their blood with several mouths.⁵

Here mention may be also made on demerits of the laws of marriage and the customs prevalent in the Arab Society. In the said Novel marriage has been described as a mockery whose management is in the hands of young men and parents. As he says in the Novel:

“Marriage in these days is a mockery whose management is in the hands of young men and parents. In most countries the young men win while the parents lose. The women is looked upon as a commodity, purchased and delivered from one house to another. In time her beauty fades and she becomes like an old piece of furniture left in a dark corner.”⁶

Jibran has tried to portray woman as a member of civilized society in order to decrease her sufferings. He has advocated the freedom of woman. According to his philosophy a woman should be free like man to choose her own spouse and should not be guided by her elders.

So far as his philosophical love is concerned, Jibran delicately paints his feelings when describing the blossoming of his love. He talks about Salma’s exceptional beauty and virtue, his wetness and nobility of spirit. She dwells inside him as a “supreme thought, a beautiful dream, an overpowering emotion.”⁷ For Jibran, true love is supreme way of achieving self-realization and is in the noblest of human attainment. It becomes a spiritual accord that brings him heavenly inspiration.⁸

According to Jibran, true nature of a woman’s soul is a mixture of love and sorrow, affection and sacrifice. Her understanding is unable to overcome the values of her society. Jibran’s narrator also sees himself as a wounded bird, but takes a stronger stance against convention, male chauvinism, and corruption of the Lebanese Society. Jibran sees the women in his native land as victim of a despotic system. For him they are like prisoners of the society and are treated as a commodity to be purchased. In “the Broken Wings” Jibran is not only a story teller but a culture analyst and a reformer also who seeks to correct the faults of the society. Najjar writes: “Jibran’s purpose for the story was to satirize in order to reform is evident in his frequent didactic intrusions by which he introduces his dissenting views regarding the conditions of the Arab woman”⁹

Conclusion:

From the above discussion we see the story shows Jibran's approach towards social reformations. He tries to illustrate some universal truths reflecting on the meaning of the human existence. Jibran also portrayed himself as a champion of women and of the values of human freedom and dignity. "TheBrokenWings" rejects orthodoxy. Jibran attacks priests for he believes they embody falsehood, immorality and evil. But he was not against of religion. He always emphasized his concern for individual freedom in society. He uses an allegory between a caged bird and a caged human heart that laments the imprisonment of men by convention and civilization.

References:

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