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## **Society and people: In reflection to the selected short stories of Jibran Khalil Jibran**

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**Abstract**---Science and philosophy has a strong polar division from the very beginning of human civilization. People have been using the both to tackle down the issues and troubles of the society, domesticity and of personal levels. While the western has been seeking, practical solutions to the problems through science, The Arabs in spite of internal turbulence and external pressure have retained their strong individuality preferred to look at life in poetic and philosophical terms. The Arab has a dominance of religious biasness instead of scientific developments. The writers from the area also respected the same and have captured the spirit of masses, portraying their devotion to home and their blind fidelity to their rules. Arab writers have left freedom of expression with their own unconventional pattern and no amount of outside pressure or criticism has been able to divert them from it. The social, political and religious issues were very widely discussed in the works of some Arabic writers. One of the most notable one is Jibran *Khalil Jibran*, the paper aims to explore these social concerns through his one of most celebrated short story collections- “عرائس المروج” *“Nymphs of the Valley”*.

**Keywords**---rhythmic prose, society, politics, religion, women domination, humanity.

**Methodology**

The discussion of the paper is precisely based on the short story collection of Jibran Khalil Jibran, where the clear evidences of woman, forced marriage, society’s impediment, the contempt of the rich for the poor whom they exploit, love and its victims, injustice of the religious have been presented. Although the short stories are particularly set on the mentioned era and the particular spatial periphery but the concerned issues have universal appeal, where it goes beyond the timeline and regional limitations.

## Discussion of Main Topics

Among the *Mahjar* writers *Jibran Khalil Jibran* was the most influential and leading figure. He protested against the established modes of thought in socio-religious and literary spheres. *Jibran* was dominantly influenced by Nietzsche, Blake, Rodin, the romanticism and transcendentalism of American literature, the Bible and Eastern Mysticism as he had the Western ideas. His works are captured with literary and artistic, permeated with feeling of his exile and nostalgia for his homeland and yearning to return to the nature. He had brought a change in the writing tradition of Arabic poetry by practicing the new style of poetic prose and prose-poems. The deals of *Jibran* were supported by *Mikha'il Nu'aima* in his critical articles and essays and wrote a lot from his works in Arabic literature .

The Prophet of Lebanon, Jibran Khalil Jibran, never forgot his native land although he spent a major part of his life in America. he viewed his adopted home from the vantage point of his own cultural heritage in spite of his impressive attitude towards the technological achievements of America and mindful of the material well-being. Jibran combined prose with the art of painting, sculpting, music and poetry. According to the Orientals, the merging of different arts appeared for the first time in Arabic in Jibran's writings. With his artistic background he paints with the pen and his expressions become pictures filled with life. moreover, Jibran always had the intention to blend Eastern mysticism into western materialism. (Mahdi, 1983:146)

Arabic prose and poetry are the fruit of his early years of life with the aim of reforming the society. Injustice mete out to women, corruption of the clergies, stereotypes of the prejudiced society are the constant reflection of his works. His writings reveal that he has studied the high priests of Eshtar, Baal and Tamuz, the Moses and the Prophets. His drive of reading Christian and Islamic theology took him to the well of Budha, Zoroaster Nietzsche, and Emerson and to Lincon. He assumes religions advocate discipline and guidance, first through ceremonial practices and secondly through prescribed ethical conduct.

In the Arabic literature, Jibran occupies a very unique position. To the Arabs he showed them how to break away from classical rhymed poetry and to feel free with the rhythm. He delivered his words, phrase, emotion in a rhythmic manner in his prose works, which makes them very close to poetry.

One of the first good collections of short stories of Jibran is "عرائس المروج" "*Nymphs of the Valley* published in America as early as 1906. It is a collection of three stories, they are- *John the Madman*, *Marta al-Baniyya* and *Dust of the Ages and the Eternal Fire*. The life and social problems in Lebanon are clearly represented in these stories.

In the story *John the Madman*, *Jibran* depicted the religio-political corruption of the church through the story of a shepherd boy 'John' who passed his time between the fields, which were full of beauty and wonder, and the book of Jesus, full of light and the living spirit. The society had created a taboo by forbidding the poor not to read the religious texts because the priests did not allow the simple in mind to probe the secrets the teachings of Jesus. If they did so, then the church

would excommunicate them. But John was very determined to read them. Hence, while reading the Gospel, he had to be careful that his father should not see him.

His every visit to the church only gave him depression and anxiety as because the teachings of the priests were different from the precepts he found in the Gospel and the life of the faithful was not the beautiful life of which Jesus spoke, which made him bury into thoughts while spending time among his companions. The discord in his mind between the teaching of Jesus and those of the priests led him to a direct conflict with the monks of the wealthy monastery of Elisha in North Lebanon. When he submerged in the thoughts of Jesus and of nature

ويتألم مع الآله الإنسان بالسجد ويتمجد معه بالروح (Jibran-85)

*While Yuhanna suffered with the God-man in agony of body and was exalted with Him in spirit. (Nahmad-56)*

After awakening from his deep thoughts, he found that the oxen he set free had strayed into the pastures of the wealthy monastery. John was imprisoned because his oxen had demolished the plantations of the convent and consequently was forced by the priests to repay the damage. John entreats the monks and their superior to forgive him in the name of Jesus, but they twist the teachings of Christ to justify treating John with a cruelty and hypocrisy, while he seems to imitate Christ, fighting them with the teachings of the Gospel. John ends his reading the sermon of Jesus on charity and forgiveness by accusing the monks exploiting the poor.

ولم يطلق سراحه إلا بعد أن اقتداء ابوه بمبلغ من المال وشهد والده أمام الناس بأنه مجنون.

*He was not released until his parent handed over to them some amount of wealth as compensation and his parents witnessed John in front of the people that he was mad.*

By a long sermon on true Christianity and the rights of man, John again tries to challenge the authority of the priests and arouse the people against them. In a strong voice John cried:

انظر يا يسوع الجالس في قلب دائرة النور الاعلى.....انظر أيها الراعي الصالح، فقد نهشت مخالب الوحوش ضلوع الحمل الضعيف الذي حملته على منكبيك.....نواح المحزونين لا تعبها اذان المتكلمين بتعاليمك فوق المنابر.....تعال ثانية يا يسوع الحي واطرد باعة الدين من هياكلك. (Jibran, 101 & 102)

*Behold thou, O Jesus, who sit test within the circle of light on high..... Look O good Shepherd, for the weak lamb Thou didst carry on Thy shoulder is tom to pieces by wild beasts.....those who set upon thrones in Thy name heed not their cries. Neither is the weeping of the bereaved heard by those who preach Thy words from pulpits.....Come then, O Jesus, a second time, and drive out from the temple those who trade in religion. (Nahmad-70)*

Even though majority of the people were convinced by what he said, but some did not like to listen because of the stereotype as they had never heard such things from their fathers and forefathers. More importantly some believed that he was

possessed by an evil spirit. The monks captured John and delivered to the police. They took him to the Governor's palace for trial. He did not utter a single word during his trial, for he remembered that Jesus also kept silent before his persecutors. So John was again imprisoned, and then released. The news of his madness became spread out and he became more alienated from people and absorbed in nature. He pities his people, and weeps over their fate during his period of loneliness.

*John* was imitated Christ by *Jibran* in the story. *John* alone fights against the authority of the Maronite Church. *John* was depicted as the God of love, forgiveness, kindness, and compassion, and *John* is detached from every political favouritism. A Shepherd had been idealized, romantic manner, and the rural scenes serve as a celebration of the rustic idyll. "Marta al-Baniya" مرتنا البانية is a story of an innocent girl *Martha*, whose father died and she was in the cradle; her mother also died and she did not cross tenth year of her age. Every morning she walked barefooted behind a cow to the valley. One day while she was sitting under the shadow of a tree, a horseman approached her and forcibly took her to his house in Beirut. There he satisfied himself of her body and abandoned her, with a suckling child. These episodes of cruelty of her life turned her into a prostitute. As she finally lay dying, *Jibran* as the first person narrator, tried to ease her feelings of shame.

أنت مظلومة يا مارتا وظالمك هو ابن القصور، ذو المال الكثير والنفس الصغيرة. أنت مظلومة ومحتقرة، وخير للإنسان أن يكون مظلوماً من أن يكون ظلماً وأخلق به أن يكون شهيداً ضعف العزيرة الترابية من أن يكون قوباً ساحقاً بمقابضة زهور الحياة، مشوهاً بميوله محاسن العواطف. (Jibran-74)

*You are oppressed Marta, and he who has oppressed you is a child of the palaces, great of wealth and little of soul, you are persecuted and despised, but it were better than that a person should be oppressed than that he should be oppressor; and fitter that he should be a victim to the frailty of human instincts than that he should be powerful and crush the flowers of life and disfigure the beauties of feeling with his desire. (Nahmad- 19)*

أي مارتا، أنت زهرة مسحوقه تحت أقدام الحيوان المختبئ في الهياكل البشرية. قد داستك تلك النعال بقساوة، لكنها ما تخف عترك المتصاعد مع نواح الأرامل وصراخ اليتامى وتنهيدات الفقراء نحو السماء مصدر العدل والرحمة. تعزي يا مارتا بكونك زهرة مسحوقه ولست قدماً ساحقة. (Jibran-75)

*Hey Marta, you are a flower crushed beneath the feet of the animal that is concealed in human being. Heavy-shod feet have trodden you down, but they have not destroyed that fragrance which goes up with the widow's lament and the orphan's cry and the poor man's sigh towards Heaven, the fount justice and mercy. Take forth Marta, in that you are the flower crashed and not the foot that has crashed it. (Nahmad-20)*

She listened to what the author said and her face lighted up with solace. The author wanted to gather the concealed sorrow of her heart. After moving a silence she said:

نعم انا مظلومة، أنا شهيدة الحيوان المنتخبى في الإنسان. أنا زهرة مسحوقه تحت الاقدام.....أيها العدل الخفي، الكامن وراء هذه الصور المخفية، انت، أنت السامح عويل نفسي المودعة ونداء قلبي المتهامل. (Jibran-76 & 78)

*Yes, I am oppressed. I am the prey to the animal in men. I am a flower trodden under foot..... O Justice who are hidden, concealed behind these terrifying images, you, and you alone, hear the cry of my neglected heart. (Nahmad-21 & 23)*

Thus alleviated, Marta found at last the ecstasy of death. Jibran helped her son and another boy, "whom the adversaries of existence had taught compassion," bury Marta in a deserted field, because the priest refused to pray over her remains.

Martha's sad fate has been portrayed in a very beautiful manner by Jibran and exhibits his humane feelings imitating Jesus. The realistic abuse and exploitation of Lebanon and the streets of Beirut of that period was skillfully presented in his work. In a lucid way Jibran chose death as the escape for Marta, madness was the refuge for the hero of 'Yuhana the Mad'. It is a story of a shepherd boy named Yuhana, who led his cattle to the pastures daily. One day when his calves were in the fields, he started reading the Bible. Unfortunately his calves went to the pasture of a monastery. This made the priests of the monastery angry and they demanded payment for trespassing on religious property. Yuhana pleaded for mercy from the priests but they refused. He then desperately resorted to his Bible as the warrior draws his sword to defend himself and cried.

*"Thus do you make a mockery of the teaching of this Book, Oh hypocrites, and use that which is most sacred in life to spread the evils therein." (Nahmad-60)*

*"In your harshness you have brought me to this place and seized hold of me as a transgressor for the sake of a little pasture land that the sun has nourished for us equally. Take then this book, look into it, and show me when Jesus was not forgiving." (Nahmad-61)*

*"You are many and I am one. Do to me as you wish." (Nahmad-62)*

The life of the Lebanese religious martyr Assad Shidiaq has been reflected through the subsequent imprisonment and the brutal beating Yuhana. In 1829, Shidiaq, an early convert to Protestantism and a believer in the Gospels, was captured and brutally murdered in a monastery near Besharri. Jibran, who was aware of the horror of his persecution, knew that the messages of the scripture were ignored by most of the religious orders in the towns of Lebanon. But Yuhana suffered less than his real-life model. The governor, condemning his Christ-like sermons, finally pardoned him and he lived out his days as a madman beleaguered by the jeering hypocrites of his village. The last of the stories is "Dust of the Ages and the Eternal Fire", dealt with themes of reincarnation and pre-ordained love that had obsessed Jibran ever since he had first made Josephine laugh by saying they had known each other many years ago.

In this story the hero appeared not as the usual Maronite figure but first as Nathan, the son of a Phoenician priest in Baalbek and then as Ali al-Husaini, a Bedouin nomad. Nathan had been promised by his dying beloved that she would return to this world. The vow was fulfilled nineteen centuries later when, amidst the ruins of the ancient temple city, the shepherd Ali experienced haunting "Distant Remembrances" of life in Baalbek as it had been in Nathan's time before Christ. He remembered those pillars standing upright in greatness and pride. He felt the impressions of sleeping things stirring in the silences of depths.

Consumed by this magical memory, Ali returned to his sleep and within a few minutes beheld a girl before him. She seemed to share his sense and their re-union was the act of one who finds an acquaintance who has been lost. Jibran's innocent and anticlimactic message was that love had conquered the onslaught of time and was finally and victoriously consummated.

Similar to the first short story collection of Jibran his most of the works have the dominating theme of society, spirituality, domination and others. Likewise *Spirits Rebellious* الأرواح المتمردة is a remarkable work of Jibran Khalil Jibran, published in 1908. The book is a collection of three narratives dealt with the oppressive social conditions of Lebanon and are bolder, outspoken and forceful. Moreover, the book is a sequence and continuation of Jibran's *Nymphs of the Valley*. As per the suggestion of the title of the book, it is about the soul who rebelled against the traditions, customs and laws of the society, which limits the freedom of thought and allow a small section of the society to govern the emotions of others. Through the consequence and fate of the hero and heroine, Jibran presented the concerned theme in an aesthetic manner.

After the first publication in Arabic, this book aroused significant anxiety and intrigue. It was burned publicly in the Beirut market place by furious church and state officials, who denounced it as poisonous and troublesome for the greater society. Jibran was exiled from the society during the period when Lebanon was in virtual slavery to oppressive Turkish rule. Years later his exile was remanded, and the church embraced him.

### Conclusion

Some significant social and religious issues such as the enslavement of woman, forced marriage, society's impediment, the contempt of the rich for the poor whom they exploit, love and its victims, injustice of the religious heads etc were displayed through the pages of the short stories written by Jibran Khalil Jibran. Relevance of some of the other social problems of the contemporary Arab society, such as the marriage of minor girls to elderly men, drunkenness, prostitutions and attacks on feudal or clerical oppression are also evident in his works.

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