

ADONIS

Powerful Voice of Modern Arabic Poetry

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I. Introduction

Ali Ahmad Saeed (Adonis) is one of the pioneers of the modern Arabic poetry. He opened new horizons to the Arabic poetry. He is one of the prominent thinkers of the modernization in Arab culture. Since his strong and bold appearance towards the literary scene he worked diligently and actively with creative liberal ideas to change the old concepts of poetry. He fought with the inherited meanings of Arab poetry to revive the literary and poetic heritage in a new mould. So Adonis is considered as a powerful and effective voice that pushed the Arab poetry in to a new phase, which was totally opened to the free horizons of creativity.

II. Early life, education and career

Ali Ahmad Saeed Isber (Adonis) is a Syrian poet, essayist and translator. He has written volumes of poetry in Arabic language and more than twenty books as well as he has translated several works from French to Arabic.

Ali Ahmad Saeed Isbar was born in Al Qassabin village near Latakia, of Northern Syria in 1930 to a family of farmers. He was the eldest son among the six children. As the family could not afford the cost for giving formal education to their son, they didn't send him to school and the boy didn't get school education in his childhood. He worked with his father in their farm, but the father who was very anxious about the future of his son, taught him to read and write and helped him to memorize poems while he worked in the family farm. The boy always recited these poems with a loud voice even in front of the guests who visited their home. Eventually the boy began to compose poems of his own. In this early stage he was immensely influenced with his village culture in which he was brought up. In his age of fourteen Adonis got a chance to recite his own poem in front of the Syrian president Shukri al-Kuwatli¹ during his visit to a neighboring town. It became the reason for the boy getting chances for his education. He was given a scholarship and was sent to a French school in Thorthoos in Latakia. The boy jumped the levels of schooling and left the secondary school in 1949 to join the Syrian University in Damascus, where he received a B.A degree in Philosophy in 1954. Later he went to Damascus, the capital of Syria in search of another turning in his life. He joined in military service in 1954.

Adonis received a scholarship to study in Paris from 1960-1961. In 1961 he participated in the world conference of Arabic literature conducted in Rome. Finally he earned a PhD at St. Joseph University of Beirut in 1978. From 1970 to 1985 he was the professor of Arabic literature at Lebanese University. In 1976 he was a visiting professor at the University of Damascus. In 1980 he migrated to Paris to escape the Lebanese civil war and he was the professor of Arabic at the Sorbonne University in Paris during the period 1980-1981. In 1985, he was a visiting professor in Georgetown University of U.S.A. From 1985 – 1989 he was the permanent representative at the Arab league of UNESCO in Paris.

Name

In his late teens, the poet adopted himself the pen name “Adonis”² after the Greek god of beauty. This name was not given to him by Anton Saadeh, the leader of the radical Pan-Syrian party (Syrian Social Nationalist Party), as some believe, but in his age of seventeen the poet called himself with this name and began writing under this name when a number of magazines rejected to publish his poems under his real name.

Migration to Lebanon

In 1948, he became a member of Syrian social nationalist party. In 1955, He was imprisoned in Syria for a period of six months for being a member of this party and for his rebellious political thoughts. Even after his release, he regularly had clashes with the authorities. He helped in editing the cultural supplement of El-

¹) Shukri al-Quwatli (1891 –1967) was the first president of post-independence Syria.

²) Adonis in Greek mythology, is a Phoenician demi-god of beauty and desire.

Thawra newspaper, but the pro government writers clashed with his agenda and forced him to flee from the country.

In 1961, Adonis migrated to Lebanon with his wife Khalida Saeed and settled in Beirut where he found a rich community of expatriate writers and artists. In Lebanon, he founded a magazine "majallathu shi'r with Yusuf al-Khal the Lebanese poet. The magazine was faced with strong criticism as it published free verse poetry. In front of this harsh criticism Majallat Shi'r was forced to pause the publication in 1964. But the poet found another literary periodical in 1968 titled "Mawaqif" with the pre-eminent Arab critic Kamal Abu-Deeb and he again started to publish his free verse poems in this magazine breaking the tradition of formal structure of Arabic poetry.

Poetical works

Adonis has written volumes of poetry in which several of them have been translated into many world languages such as French, English, Swedish, Norwegian, German, Italian, Spanish, Turkish, Vietnamese, Greek, Polish languages.

Collection of his poems

Qassaidun oola (1988), Awraqun fi reeh (1988), (1988), Kithabu thahavvulaathu val hijra fee aqaaleemi nnahari va llail (1988), al masrahu val maraaya (1988), Vaqthun baina rumaadi val ward (1980), Haada huva ismee (1980), Manaarath (1976), Mufradun bi seegathil jamhi (1988), Kithaabul qassaidil khamisi (1979), Kithaabul hisaari (1985), Shahvathun thathaqaddamu fee kharaaithil maadha (1988), Ithifaa'n bil ashyaa'il vaalihath (1988), Abjadiyyathun thaaniya (1994), Mufradaathu shi'rin (1996), Al-kithabu I,II,III (1995), (1998), (2002), Fihrasun li a'amaali reeh, Awwalul jasadil aakhirul bahri (2003), Thanabba' ayyuhal a'maa (2003), Thaareekhun yathamazzaqu fee jasadil imraathin (2007), Varraqun yabeeu kuthuba nnujoom (2007), Al-maalu sshi'riyya al-kaamila (1996) Kithabul hisaar (1982).

Style of writing

Adonis is one of the great modernizers of Arabic verse. "He represents the vanguard of Arabic poetry and modernity of Arab culture in this era, and he is a master of language which comes from his depths such as the flow of spring water or showering of rain or blowing of wind. In addition to that he is a delicate man of sensitivity, loving, open minded to the conflicting currents, and he is a scholar of ancient and modern Arab cultural history"¹. He has tried to liberate Arabic verse from its traditional forms and subject matter and started experiments with free verse, variable meters, and prose poetry.

Themes

Adonis is a rebellious poet and an iconoclast who follows his own rules in his writings, who challenges and overturns the traditional way of Arabic poetry. In his childhood of poem writing he was a poet of certainty, challenges and hopes as he was influenced with the thoughts of Anton sa,ada especially with his book "Intellectual conflict in Syrian literature" and also with his affiliation with Syrian social nationalist party. He was a good reader of the poetic journal of the party "qeetharah". In this period he published his collection of poems "qaalathil ardu" in 1954 in which he deals with the subject of certainty. His migration to Beirut was the turning point to a new stage in his personal and literary life. Before this he came to experience the prison life for a while. This Experience influenced his later writings where the hope turned to feelings of disappointment as he saw these feelings in his mind as well as in the society. So he found that, it is inevitable to look back to his first collection of poems and he selected some of its best poems and published them under the title "qassaidun oolaa" in 1957. He republished them again in 1963 with some more changes and modifications and named the first part of this collection with "hudoodul ya,as".

From this new stage, the poet engaged in poem with themes of exile and transformation. Some critics have suggested that his poetry is, in a way, poetry of exile, and that does not trouble him at all. "Every artist is an exile within his own language," he said. "The other is part of my inner being."

Adonis couldn't see Poetry as a mere genre or an art form but he saw poetry as a way of thinking. That's why the poet asks many questions to both author and reader. These questions are raised from the real state of his mind and the society.

Through His collection of poems "Aganee mihaaru dimashquee" the poet shakes the people to their reality depicting the matters to them unconsolidated and clear. This stage is considered as the third stage of Adonis' poem writings since from this collection of poems the poets harshly destructs the existing poetics and turns towards a new direction in poetic language. The theme of "Vaqthun baina rumaadi val ward" sprouts from poet's experiences and emotions of the six-day war of 1967 when Israel captured a number of territories

¹) Girbathul kaathibil arabee- Haleem Barkaath

including in Syria and Lebanon. His collection “Kithabul hisaar” reacts to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

Awards and honors

The poet was awarded and honored for his prolific writings of poems. He has received a number of awards declared from different nations, such as:

International Poetry Forum award of U.S.A (1971), Highest Award of the International Poem in Biennial of Brussels (1986), International Nazim Hikmet Poetry Award in Istanbul(1994), Golden crown award for poetry in Macedonia (1997), Golden Wreath of Struga Poetry Evenings in(1997), International Nonino prize in Italy (1999), American Award in Literature (2003), The Norwegian Academy for Literature and Freedom of Expression’s Bjornson Prize(2007), Goethe Prize (2011), Janus Pannonia’s International Poetry Prize (2014), Aashan Viswa Puraskaram - Kumaranasan World Prize for Poetry (2015)
He has been regularly nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature since 1988.

III. Conclusion

Adonis is a most prominent Arab writer in the post-World War II period. He is a poet and a theorist on poetry with a radical vision. His name has become synonymous with rebellion, rejection, radical writing, and modernism. His poetry represents a genuinely radical break with what came before. It has been seventy years since the poet’s powerful voice is echoing to the ears of literary world.

Reference

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