



Ghassan Kanafani: The Palestinian Voice of Resistance

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Abstract

Ghassan Kanafani is a Palestinian writer who has raised his voice against injustice and tyranny of Zionist regime in his writings. He is the voice of subaltern or voice of voiceless and through his writings one can easily trace out the struggle which he has undergone throughout his life but has been firm in his resolution to speak against any kind of injustice done against his countrymen.

Kanafani have tried to highlight issues related to humanity through his writings. So in depiction about issues related with humanity his perspective is to raise his voice against all kinds of racism, imperialism and atrocities. In his works he has depicted characters who are trying to uplift themselves from all kinds of colonial encounters. Characters who are trying to assert their autonomy in adverse situations, who are trying to liberate themselves from various kinds of exploitation, oppression, persecution and inhuman activities, are part of their writings.

Keywords: voice, resistance, subaltern, racism, imperialism.

Introduction

Some people are born for a cause and Kanafani is one of them. Being born in Acre, Palestine in 1936, when Palestine was a British mandate. But unfortunately in 1948, his family had to flee away from their motherland because of illegal Zionist occupation. His father who was a lawyer took his family first to Lebanon and then to Damascus, Syria where they settled for some years. This exodus which he has experienced in his childhood is the subject matter of many of his works. He lived a life full of struggles and revolutionary ideals. It was Palestinian cause for which he was associated throughout his life and he died as a martyr for it. He was assassinated by Israeli Mossad in 1972 in Beirut. Being a member of Popular Front of Palestine he devoted his entire life for his country.

He received his secondary education in Damascus, Syria and was granted a teaching certificate from United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) in 1952. In the same year, he also took admission in the University of Damascus in Department of Arabic and also started teaching refugee children in UNRWA schools in the refugee camps. But he was not able to complete his degree from University of Damascus as he was expelled due to his political associations with the Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN). In 1953, he was recruited to Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN), a pan-Arab organization by Dr. George Habash. He was exiled to Kuwait where he started editing a newspapers

affiliated by MAN, al-Ra'i (*The Opinion*) and it was then that he became in Marxist philosophy and politics and became a comrade.

Once again he went to Beirut, Lebanon in 1960 where he has spent his some years of childhood. Here, he started editing al-Hurriya, a mouthpiece of MAN. In 1961, he met his life partner, Anni Hover who was a Danish educationist and children's right activist. They met for humanitarian cause, fell in love with each other and got married and had two children. In 1962, he had to go underground for a brief period of time due to his stateless persona and lacking proper identification papers but reappeared in the same year in Beirut. In the same year, he started editing al-Muharrir (*The Liberator*), a Nasserist newspaper. At the same time in 1963, he also published his novel, *Men in the Sun* which established him as an Arab novelist in the Arab world. He became editor of al-Anwar (*The Illumination*), another Nasserist newspaper. Barring editing many newspapers and magazines he went on publishing many novellas in series.

He joined Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in 1967 and started editing its weekly, al-Hadaf. This was his most important contribution to the Palestinian freedom movement as he devoted himself completely to the cause of Palestine and for which he is still remembered by the people of Palestine all over the world. Once he was asked about the relation between his writings and politics, he answered confidently:

My political position springs from my being a novelist. In so far as I am concerned, politics and the novel are an individual case as I can categorically state that I became politically committed because I am a novelist, not the opposite. (Kanafani)

His political ideas were deep rooted in Marxism and he was highly influenced by George Habash belief. George Habash, the founder of Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine believed that Palestine can only gain freedom when a social revolution is carried out throughout the Arab world. He was very well supported by Egyptian President, Nasser but with his defeat his movement also received a setback. It was Habash who shaped Kanafani's views towards Palestinian-Israeli conflict. And it is with his influence that Kanafani became an active member of Palestine Liberation Movement, The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Arab Nationalist movement. As a freedom fighter, he had a firm believe that there should be national unity which will be a binding force and the strongest weapon for the freedom of their land. In 1967, he became the spokesperson of PFLP and in 1969 as a spokesperson he drafted a programme making their movement officially based on Marxism-Leninism. He founded the movement's newspaper, al-Hadaf (*The Target*) and also edited it, contributing revolutionary articles relating politics, culture and history till his death.

His involvement in Palestinian liberation movement led to his assassination. As on 8th July, 1972, he was killed in a bomb plant in his own car in Beirut which is

believed to be planted by Israeli Mossad, who later claimed the responsibility of his death. At that time, he was heading towards his al-Hadaf office with his seventeen years old niece, Lamees Najim who was also killed in the blast. His wife Anni and his two children, a daughter and a son survived because they were at home at the time of his assassination. He was just 36 years of age when he died. The following day, *New York Times* biasedly reported, "Beirut Blast Kills Guerilla Leader" due to the American support to Israel. There were several obituaries written for him but in one of them it was written that he was "the commando who never fired a gun" (Harlow: 181). Mahmoud Darwish, the great Palestinian poet published a collection of Palestinian Resistance poems, *The Palestinian Wedding* in his memory and to honour him. In memory of Kanafani, Ghassan Kanafani Cultural Foundation was formed to help children of Palestinian refugees in their education. Since its formation it has established eight kindergarten schools for the children of Palestinian refugees. He remarkable personality is admired not only among Palestinians but in entire Arab region and with its translations in English, his works are reaching masses and are admired by all those people who believe in justice, equality and liberty. In the contemporary scenario, he is considered as one of the greatest modern Arabic authors.

Because of Israeli support in some of the Western countries, Kanafani was not much popular as a writer but in the West, he was famous as spokesperson of Popular Front for the liberation of Palestine but in the Arab countries he is popular as a leading writer not only of Palestine but of entire Arab region who are greatly inspired by his revolutionary writings.

His important work includes: *Men in the Sun* (1963), *All That's Left to You* (1966), *Umm Saad* (1969) *The Lover* (), *Returning to Haifa* (1970) and *The Other Thing* (). All these were originally written in Arabic by Kanafani but have been translated by many other writers who have liked his writings and who wanted the world to acknowledge him as a great writer. He wrote his thesis entitled as, '*Race and Religion in Zionist Literature*' which formed the basis of his study on Zionist Literature. As an active literary critic, his seminal work, '*Palestinian Literature Under Occupation, 1948-1968*' is a masterpiece work of literature as it introduces Palestinian writers and Poets to the Arab world. He is also known for his major critical work on '*Zionist and Israeli Literature*'. He believed in the ideology of Jean Paul Sartre, for such a literature which would be committed for change and throughout his life he did so. His most famous short stories include; *Death of Bed No. 12* (1961), *The Land of Sad Oranges* (1963), *A World Not Our Own*(1965), *Of Men and Rifles*(1968) and *The Stolen Shirt* (1982).Some of his famous Plays are: *A Bridge to Eternity* (1963)*The Door* (1964) and *The Hat and the Prophet* (1973)

His work in Arabic includes: *Mawt Sarir 12, 1961 (Death of Bed No. 12)*, *Ard Al-Burtuqalal-Hazin, 1963 (The Land of Sad Oranges)*, *Rijal Fi-sh-shams, 1963 (Men in the Sun)*, *Al-bab, 1964 (The Door)*, *Aalam Laysa Lana, 1965 (A World Not Our Own)*, *Adab Al-Muqawamah fi Filastin al-Muhtalla 1948-1966, 1966 (Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine 1948-1966)*, *Ma Tabaqqa Lakum, 1966 (All That's*

Left to You), *Fi Al-adab al-Sahyuni*, 1967 (On Zionist Literature), *Al-Adab Al-Filastini Al-Muqawim Al-ihtilal:1948-1968*, 1968 (*Palestinian Resistance Literature Under the Occupation 1948-1968*), *An Ar-RijalWa-I-Banadiq*, 1968 (On Men and Rifles), *Ummsa'd*, 1969 (*Umm Saad*), *A'idilaHayfa*, 1970 (*Returning to Haifa*), *Al-A'maWa-al-atrash*, 1972 (*The Blind and the Deaf*), *BarquqNaysan*, 1972 (*The Apricots ofApril*), *Al-qubba'ahWa-l-Nabi*, 1973 (*The Hats and the Prophet*) Incomplete. *Thawra 1936-39Fi Filastin*, 1974 (*The Revolution of 1936-39 in Palestine*), *Jisrila-al-abad*, 1978 (*A Bridge toEternity*), *Al-qamis Al-masruqWa-qisasUkhra*, 1982 (*The Stolen Shirt and Other Stories*), *The Slave Fort' in Arabic Short Stories*, 1983 (*Translated by Denys Johnson-Davies*), *FarisFaris*, 1996 (*Knight Knight*). Some of his works have been published posthumously or most of them have been translated after his death in 1972.

'*Men in the Sun*' is the first novella by Kanafani dealing with the issue of forceful exile experienced by many Palestinians. It is the story of three Palestinian refugees who are living in exile due to forceful creation of Israeli. Though living in a difficult situation, they are trying to build their future or we can say rebuild their future. This is Kanafani's own reflection of his life which he is telling through these characters and which is the theme of the text. In the story, these three Palestinian refugees move from one place to another in search of better prospects; first they move from Jordan than to Iraq to escape to Kuwait. They wish to change their economic status so they choose Kuwait because they think here they will be able to earn enough money and thus will be able to come out from poverty.

All That's Left to You is a novella by Kanafani which has been translated by May Jayyusi and Jeremy Reed. The story of the novella which is about pair of brother and sister, Hamid and Maryam, is set in Gaza. Their father is dead and mother has left them long back. The responsibility of sister is on brother who loves her very much for who deceives him by going against his wishes by loving Zakaria, who is very much hated by her brother. His single act of treachery breaks his brother, who though marries her to him but leaves her forever.

Zakaria was a man who was already married with five children and was considered a person having a bad name in the society. But Maryam had an illicit affair with him and married him who on the day of their marriage told his intention to marry her; which is just for the fulfillment of physical desire. Earlier he trapped her in his fake love and made her pregnant but after marriage he asked her to abort their child or he will divorce her. At this juncture of life Maryam realizes her mistake but it's too late now as her brother had already left the city. She feels completely devastated.

In *Returning to Haifa*, has raised issue of vital importance related with those Palestinians who have left their lands to safe themselves during occupation because by doing so they have paved the way to the Israeli colonial settlers to occupy their lands. At the same time it also reflects the dreams of each Palestinian who is living away from their land in other countries as migrant or a refugee. The novella tells the

story of a couple; Said and his wife Safiya who have lost their son while they were fleeing from Haifa, their own city after Zionist occupy their lands in 1948. As Kanafani reflect his own feelings in the following words which portray his own pain of losing his homeland because as a child he himself has witnessed this catastrophe. He explains:

Morning, Wednesday, April 21, 1948. Haifa, the city, was not expecting anything, in spite of the fact that it was filled with dark tension. Thunder came abruptly from the east, from the heights of Mount Carmel. Mortar shells flew across the city's center, pelting the Arab quarters. (153)

Returning to Haifa is one of the most important and discussed work of Kanafani because he has given a strong message through this novella. It portray the dream of not only Said and Safiya but each Palestinian who have lost their homes due to forceful creation of Israel and who longed to go back to their ancestral place which is occupied by people who doesn't belonged to that land.

In an interview given to Australian journalist, Richard Carleton which was also filmed, Kanafani expresses his stand on attaining freedom for Palestine as he says:

One thing: that we have a case to fight for. That is very much. This people, the Palestinian people, prefer to die standing than to lose its case. We achieved proving that the King (of Jordan) is wrong. We achieved proving that this nation is going to continue fighting until victory. We achieved that our people can never be defeated. We achieved teaching every single person in this world that we are a small brave nation who are going to fight until the last drop of blood to put justice for ourselves, after the world failed in giving it to us. This is what we achieved. (Kanafani: 1970)

This was his resolution on which he was firm throughout his life, he lived for it and died for the sake of it.

Kanafani has raised his concern against the atrocities committed towards his countrymen by the Zionist regime in his writings through novels, novella and short stories. In this way, he has shown his protest against racism, imperialism and all kinds of inhuman activities. He is a role model not only for writers but for every individual who believe in equality, freedom and justice for all. By reading his works an individual feel motivated to stand always for justice no matter whatever it costs.

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