

Despairing era and harsh suffering of Yemeni people in pre-independence depicting in Dammaj's novel "The Hostage"

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Abstract:

"The Hostage" is probably the most well-known novel in Yemeni literature, written by Zaid Muteea Dammaj. This paper is to analyze the sufferings and the bad conditions of Yemeni people during the rule of Imam Yahiya and Ahmed. It also portrays the political corruptions, injustice, and exploitation of people to serve this family, so the writer focuses on difficult circumstances of people's life during that time. It is to expose the hidden malice of imam's regime to exploit and suppress those people who were longing for freedom and justice. Finally, this paper is to portray the main events of historical background in the pre-independence era and its influence on Yemeni people today. Therefore, the novel is considered the real picture of the malicious Imam and his descendants towards our country, Yemen.

Key words: Hostage, Imamate, Political Corruption, Pre-independence era, Harsh Suffering and Yemen

INTRODUCTION

Zayd Mutee' Dammaj was one of the most well-known writers in the Arab world and his novel *The Hostage*, 1984, was chosen as one of the best Arabic novels of the 20th century. The novel

portrays the sufferings of a young boy who is taken hostage because of his father's political events and is sent to work as a duwaydar in the Governor's palace. It also portrays the critical events of North Yemen during the late 1940's and it is set before the revolutions of Yemen against Imams' rule. Hence, literature is basically a medium of people's voice to achieve freedom, justice, equal rights and change, which any other fields of writings fail to do. Dammaj's novel *The Hostage* represents the literature that is always expressing the life of miserable, homeless, oppressed of Yemeni hostages and prisoners during the ruling of Imamate. The two hostages Duwaydars in "*AL-Raheena*" are symbolically projected as brave soldiers of the struggle for Yemen's independence. They express strong desires for justice, freedom, and change, which symbolize not only their own lives but the life of Yemeni people. It also exposes the different situations of Yemeni people before the revolution politically, socially and economically. The period of the hostage is the turning point of the Yemeni history. It represents the ending of the Imamate's rule and the beginning of the republic of Yemen.

The ordinary characters in the novel will help us to discover a new world. A world of superstitions, ignorance, corruption, oppression, and depression that Imam's regime depends on entirely upon to rule the Yemeni society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The novel "*AL-Raheena*" is one of the most important modern Arabic fictions. Through his novel, Zayd Mutee Dammaj went back to the pre-independence era of Imam's ruling to portray dynamic human issues such as political corruption, oppression, and human sufferings in Yemen society. Hence, the purpose of Yemeni literature is to describe the themes of sufferings, oppression, corruption and subjugation along with people's intention to struggle for freedom and change. For Al-Maqaalih

The Hostage is the only novelist work Dammaj has attempted yet and which in turn gives him the considerable reputation not only in the Arab world but also internationally through its translations. According to Al-maqalih, The Hostage is an urgent cry of protest and an attempt to portray the gross contradictions which were prevalent in the years before the revolution. In other words, Al-maqalih wants to say that the novel is a humanitarian cry of protest against tyranny dictatorship of the Imams Yahya and Ahmed (Al-maqalih, 1984, p. 15). Robber Burrowes describes The Hostage as both darkness and light at the same time. Darkness as being hostage to the past tradition as well as to the Imam as well as the light of struggle for liberty (Burrowes, 1984, p. 4).

The Hostage is one of the novels that has been successful and transcends spatial and temporal limits that Dammaj paints himself the real picture of Yemen. Though it was written before the Republic of Yemen government, it reveals the life of Imam's deficiencies in the forties of the last century in Yemen. In this magnificent novel, it takes the writer along with the reader to a journey that mixes myth and truth to one of the inmate's palace in Yemen. Metaphorically, that time of the novel is returned to call Arab Spring, talking about tyrants and anarchy, tyranny, freedom, hope, to occupy the Arab scene, and those are the themes of the novel (Al Haj, 2013). Taiz is the scene of the events of the novel that Dammaj has chosen it as the palace of the deputy and a place with multiple's locations inside, the current as a room, kitchens and stabled and the Office of the deputy Attorney palace.

This is what affects the consoled oppressive child that is called the hostage, you can also imagine how much grief and anger that such a failure to harsh treatment in the same child. On the other hand, the novel tells us about the richness of the child's family hostage, so that owning a stable of horses at that time, looks like with some exaggeration, owning a private jet these days. Hence, Yemen's political theology was forced to

need help from the northern tribes to impose his authority on the cities and agricultural areas of Yemen such as Taiz , Ibb, and the cause of the emergence of what might be called internal colonialism, in which the Northern Tribes played the role of the colonizer (Saleh, 201).

POLITICAL CORRUPTION OF IMAM'S REGIME

Although a novel has published in 1948, it exposes the political corruption and the difficult conditions of Yemeni lives under the glooms of deprivation, subjugation and extortion of Imam's regime in 1940 -1962. It also portrays the romantic scenes through the meeting of the narrator and courtly lady, but it is basically a reflection of political corruption of Yemen society written in the historical background of the pre-independence era in Yemen. The Imam's regime is more dangerous to Yemenis than Othmans because he controlled over the cultivated land and used the hostage's system to subdue the Yemeni countryside for his favor (AL Masudi, 1992, p. 114).

The deeds of political corruptions have taken out of a real history of Yemen with real names such as that of the Imam Yahiya and Imam Ahmed. After the coup had failed against Imam Yahiya in 1948, the Imam ordered his soldiers to kill, loot, oppress and torture all the people that stood against him (Abdullah, 2001,p. 21). The Imam's soldiers had got the right to take the young boys from their mothers to secure the obedience of their fathers and tribes. Therefore, the novel is the tragic symbol of a boy from the village taken hostage by imam's soldiers and imprisoned him in the fortress of al-Qahira. As the boy says: How beautiful this city was! I have seen it first when I was taken away from my village and imprisoned in the fortress of al-Qahira as one of the hostages of the Imam (Dammaj, 1984, p. 3).

It the first time for the boy to see the tragic life of the other hostages in al-Qahira fortress that is considered the most

powerful place of Imam. The narrator describes the miserable life and the political corruptions of the Imam's palace towards the hostages. The hostage boy clarifies the wrong deeds of political corruption of Imam's regime: They have oppressed me and attacked my family seizing everything and transforming me into a hostage, then a duwaydar in her [Governor's sister] and the servant of her brother, the Governor(p. 4) Fundamentally, the novel revolves around an unfair political acts not only against the hostage boy but also against all people in Yemen society. Hence, Dammaj didn't mention a specific name to the narrator because the boy is a symbol of all Yemeni people that are longing for justice and freedom. It is a reflection of political corruption of Imam's ruling that holds everything in his hand and gives nothing in turn to his people except fear, oppression, corruption and torture. The Imams Yahiya and Ahmed invented the hostage's system to secure the obedience of the tribes, so they have kept three thousand hostages from the sons of those tribes (Al-Shreif, 2007,p. 40). The Imam stands against any kind of reformations including education that leads to improving and develop Yemen society. But education for the Imam is the first step of political revolution against his ruling. Hence, he depends on traditional education as his reference to his political system. The imam Yahiya considered the regime is a divine right for himself, so he closed all the schools and he was contented to open traditional learning (Katatieb) for reading and keeping holy Quran to make his people obedient (Al-Shreif, 2007,p.38).

This an example of the political corruption of the Imam's regime that sends his cruel soldiers over the poor people who delay their alms tax and other dues payment after the Governor's son's arrival with his new car. "They (soldiers) were playing their parts in the festivities ...the Governor would reward them next morning by giving them authority over the subjects who were late paying their alms tax and other dues which would mean profit for them (Dammaj, 1984,p. 53).

Finally, this the real picture of the Imam's political corruption and inhuman deeds against his citizens during that period of the Yemen history (1940-1962).

Harsh suffering of Yemeni people in pre-independence era

The novel "AL-Raheena" is considered the Yemeni literary revolution against the suffering and difficult social circumstances, looting and theft, exploitation and suppression of Yemeni people that affected several regions of Yemen. It basically deals with critical issues that directly bound up with human beings' hopes, frustrations, poverty, sorrows, sufferings, and concerns. Fortunately, Dammaj, the author of this novel, hasn't lived far away, but he is very close to the men's sufferings in his country. The year of 1946 was known in Yemen the year of famine and sufferings. Some people remembered the events of that year because of the bad government policy, corruption of senior officials and oppression (Al-Shreif, 2007,p.49). The Hostage exposes the situation of the Hostages and duwaydar during the control of the Imamate (1904- 1962). Hence, the Imam had taken the young boys from influential tribes to secure the obedience of their members. The novel is a tragic account not only the suffering of the boy but the sufferings of all boys of Yemen during the ruling of Imam. the fortress of al-Qahira is the symbol of exploitation, subjugation, torture and oppression of the hostages.

The real picture of Yemeni's sufferings exposes the bad conditions of health over the whole country. Most of Yemenis were expiring because of lack health care. The handsome dawuaydar dies in his early age because of the absence of medical facilities. The hostage says that when he searches for a doctor to remedy his close friend: "There was only one foreign doctor in the city, and perhaps in the whole country... I brought my friend out of the doctor, the doctor gave several tablets to the dawuaydar, but in vain and he went down to look at his

rabbits" (Dammaj, 1984, P.143). These lines clarify that the foreign doctor cares for his rabbits more than his patients. The hostage represented the new Yemeni generation whose desire is to revolt against the bad social conditions .

French doctor (Claudie Vaillan) has written down in her book entitled (A French Doctor in Yemen) that indicates that the deadly diseases they kill thousands of Yemenis and even minor illnesses that were infected by citizens to lead to death due to lack of services or medical care. The extreme poverty of the families of Yemen was making most families stands powerless to save their patients and be forced to abandon the patients until the last throes. It exposes the real tragedy of our fathers and grandfathers. Several activists, historians, writers, politicians and intellectuals who have spoken in many of their publications that dealt with that era and spotted the darkness of the Imam who settled on the chest of the sons of the Yemeni people (Fayein, 1957, p. 4).

Although Yemen during the reign of the imams were completely isolated from the world, it is difficult to get out or entering and particularly of non-Yemeni. A less number of foreigners and private doctors that have come to Yemen that agree with needs and interests of the family of Imam. The life inside the palace of the imam is different from the life in the city. The people who live in the city have suffered from many things such as poverty, sicknesses, ignorance, lack of medical services and even a cold water as the narrator describes: How difficult it was to wake up in this city, so different from the fortress in the mountains, with its fresh air! In the city, you always seemed to wake with the feeling that you'd been beaten black and blue, with your body swollen like a drum or the stump of a palm tree and your eyes drooping. From the very beginning, there was a lingering feeling of nausea and depression, and you didn't usually feel the least desire for breakfast or coffee. All you wanted was cool water, and that was only to be found, if at all, in the soldiers' jugs (Dammaj,

1984, p., 34). The narrator exposes the sufferings of Yemeni people not only in the fortress but also all over the Yemen regions. When the British occupied Shabwah, the Imams sent more than five thousand to expel the British soldiers. Therefore, most of the soldiers died due to poverty and diseases and were buried out of Taiz's walls (Al-Shreif, 2007, p.50). Dammaj also portrays the real bad situations of Yemeni sufferings. The darkness era of Imam deprived Yemenis of education, health, luxurious life, and made them ignorant people.

CONCLUSION

Dammaj exposes in his novel, *The Hostage*, the harsh conditions of the Yemeni people, who have been suffering from the disease, ignorance, and backwardness in all aspects of life, as well as political corruption. The situation of suffering and political corruption is still an unsolved problem in Yemen until this time. These conditions led to the injustice of a lot of people, deteriorating economy, education, communication, and transportation. Many educated Yemenis attempted to make some general reforms in Yemen, but in vain due to Imam's policy. The Imam used all means to suppress the opposition movement against him, including the use of violence and hostage-taking, which exceeded hundreds of opposition movement members in all parts of Yemen, including some scholars, tribal elders, military officers, traders, and civilians. The novel also ends with a national revolution, but the Yemeni people of 2016 are still the same hostages as the pre-independence era. The bloody confrontation of the Yemeni people today shows the violence and injustice of the malicious Imam's descendants and his family against Yemen.

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