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Influence of Leo Tolstoy on Mikhail Nuaima: A Literary Discussion

Abstract: Mikhail Nuaima, From his early years was drawn to the "inner" realm of individuals who repress natural and sensory experiences. Consequently, his initial significant work focused completely on issues of perspective. Many of his concepts coincide with Tolstoy's writings. Nuaima views humanity as the divine principle. His comprehension of truth via self-awareness aligns with the ideas presented by Tolstoy in his essay collection on life which addresses the concept of the fundamental nature of a joyful human life. The impact of Leo Tolstoy's philosophical perspective, particularly his belief that spiritual life is more important than material needs, along with his emphasis on self-improvement and love, is evident in the Arab world. Tolstoy frequently referenced the philosophers of the ancient East in his writings and showed interest in Eastern people. This study will demonstrate how Tolstoy greatly influenced Nuaima in shaping his worldview.

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1.Introduction:

Mikhail Nuaima (1889-1988) is one of the celebrated classic authors in Arabic literature. He was amongst the emigrant Arab writers in the USA. His primary education was started in a Russian school (Mahdi Ismat 153, 1983). Thus, he found his way to Poltave of Russia where he encountered the full wealth of classical Russian literature and quickly immersed himself in the foreign literature. There a new world was opening up in front of his eyes. The poverty of Arabic literature and the ineptness of its writers, who interest themselves only in the exterior phenomena of the human soul, became increasingly clear to him. Nuaima's staying period in Russia was an important time for his moral and spiritual maturing (Aida, Imangulieva 123, 2009). Mikhail Nuaima was the only writer who developed the Arabic literature with the influence of Russian literature. Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy, also known as Leo Tolstoy, a Great Russian artist and philosopher is widely recognized for his philosophical world view. Tolstoy's interest was closely linked with ancient Arab culture and Arab folklore. He always thought about humanity, oppressed people, society, self-perfection and universal love.

2.Tolstoy's world view

Leo Tolstoy is universally recognized for his influence as a thinker and artist on the cultural and spiritual life of the world. Tolstoy always presented the social and human problems through his artistic and journalistic works. With his strong statements and his rejection of all oppressors, regardless of their class or nation, Tolstoy won the attention and sympathy of oppressed people from the various and most distant ends of the earth. Tolstoy is one of the giants of Russian literature; some of his most celebrated works are *War and Peace, Anna Karenina*, *Hadji Murad*, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* and so on.

His fiction consistently attempts to convey realistically the Russian society in which he lived. *The Cossacks* (1863) describes the *Cossacks'* life and people through a story of a Russian aristocrat in love with a Cossack girl. *Anna Karenina* (1877) tells parallel stories of an adulterous woman trapped by the conventions and falsities of society and of a philosophical landowner (much like Tolstoy), who works alongside the peasants in the fields and seeks to reform their lives. Tolstoy not only drew from his own life experiences but also created characters in his own image, such as Pierre Bezukhov and Prince Andrei in *War and Peace*, Levin in *Anna Karenina* and to some extent, Prince Nekhlyudov in *Resurrection*.

Tolstoy's writings have a great popularity throughout the Arab world. Many Arab translators have frequently turned to his works. Khalil Baydas, one of the first translators of Tolstoy into

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Arabic says: "I am firmly convinced that for the Arabs, Leo Tolstoy is the most easily understood of the Russian writers." (Aida, Imangulieva 123, 2009)

The most celebrated Arabic short story writer Mahmud Taymur comments: "The heroes of Tolstoy's novels are so close in spirit to us, the people of the East that they differ only in names" (Aida, Imangulieva 142, 2009)

The influence of Leo Tolstoy's philosophical world-view specially his view- the spiritual life takes precedence over the material requirements of man, and also his call to self-perfection and to love has shown itself clearly in the Arab world. Tolstoy himself turned more than once in his works to the thinkers of the ancient East and took an interest in the people of East.

3. Influence of Tostoy on Nuaima

Nuaima first made the acquaintance of Tolstoy's works while still an adolescent at the teachers' seminary in Nazareth. In Poltava, learning Russian in a higher level, he again turned to Tolstoy, studying many of his writings. In 1908 Nuaima wrote in his diary: "I am indebted to you for so many thoughts which filled with light the darkness of my spirit. Your recent works that I read last year were a great source of my inspiration which illumined my life. Indeed you have come to be my teacher and guide, a fact of which you are unaware."(Nuaima, M. 142; 1977)

Nuaima was immensely influenced by Tolstoy's later works in the formation of his world-view. These works include *Folk Tales, My Confession, What I Believe, On Life* and *Love One Another.* The idea of moral important understanding of God as love and all-forgiveness and the renunciation of carnal impulses for the sake gaining knowledge of one's spiritual essence- all these ideas are clearly found in Nuaima's works. These overlap of ideals and philosophy with Tolstoy is particularly characteristic of his maturity in works such as the story *Liqa' (Till We Meet),* the novels *Mudhakkarat al-Arqash* (*Memoirs of a Vagrant Soul*), *The Book of Mirdad* and *al-Yawm al-akhir (The Last Day)* and his short stories "*Asfar al-Nab" ("Yellow Teeth")*, "*'Abir Sabil*" ("*The Wanderer*"), "*Qulamat zifr*"("*Nail Paring*"), etc. It can be also noted here that Nuaima was not only influenced by Tolstoy in his philosophical basis, but he was also affected by the Eastern cultural traditions and philosophies.

Let us compare Mikhail Nuaima's story "The Wanderer" with Tolstoy's folktale "The Two Old Men". The didactics of "The Wanderer" are very clear; cruelty, selfishness and imperiousness are the vices with which man must constantly struggle. The victory over one's carnal "I" is the way to salvation and to eternal life. "The wanderer" is of divine origin, possibly an angel or prophet- but this is not made explicit.

The story "Two Old Man" by Tolstoy shows strict realism, restrained, precise, welcoming wanderers, helping strangers, loving everybody; the language of the story is very simple and characteristic is of a folk tale.

It seems that the conflict in Nuaima's story completely corresponds to that in Tolstoy's, though the two tales differ in both style and technique. In Nuaima's work, by contract, everything is impregnated with mystery; nothing is certain or explained, although there are realistic elements.

Since his youth Nuaima's attention was attracted towards the "inner" world of the man who suppresses natural and sensory phenomena. Thus his first major work was entirely devoted to questions of world-view. Most of his ideas overlap with those of Tolstoy's *My Confession*, his article "*What is to be done?*" and other socio-political pieces.

The 1st major narrative work of Nuaima was "*Mudhakkarat al-Arqash (Memories of a Vagrant Soul)*. The story formulates his understanding of life: "Life is a sacred school that is concerned with divine education. Leave earthly life behind and you enter the divine." (Nuaima . M., 51, 1962) .According to Nuaima, life for the overwhelming majority of people consists solely in their realising their vain and carnal principle, unaware of the truth. The knowledge of the world is possible by knowing oneself, and the complete mastery of oneself is the key to mastery of all secrets of the world: "He who wants to know nature must first know himself and he who wants to become lord of nature must become lord of himself." (Nuaima . M., 80, 1962)

He castigates the hypocrisy of the church that gives its blessing to war and to national and

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religious strive: "If people know God, they would not split themselves into Jews, Christians and Muslims, and man would not shed the blood of man." (Nuaima, M. 134; 1962) These utterances are very close to the world-view of Tolstoy as he writes in *"My Confession"*: "At that time Russia was at war. And Russians, in the name of Christian love, began to kill their fellow men. It was impossible not to think about this, and not to see that killing is an evil repugnant to the first principles of any faith. Yet prayers were said in the churches for the success of our arms, and the teachers of the faith acknowledged killing to be an act resulting from the Faith... And I took more notes of all that is done by men who profess Christianity, and I was horrified." (Tolstoy, L. N. 161-162; 1983).

The same thoughts occur to the Russian writer in his letter to Mahatma Gandhi dated 7th September, 1910: "the life of the Christian nations presents a greater contradiction between what they believe and the principle on which their lives are built: a contradiction between the love which should prescribe the law of conduct, and the employment of force, recognized under various forms- such as governments, courts of justice, and armies, which are accepted and necessary and esteemed" (cited. Aida, I, 148; 2009)

The hero of *Memoirs of a Vagrant Soul* thirsts for truth and true being, which are achieved by mastering one's intellect, will and passions. Nuaima considers man to be the divine principle. His understanding of truth through the knowledge of the self is similar with the propositions set out by Tolstoy in his book of essays "*On Life*" which deals with the idea of the essence of happy human existence. For Tolstoy "the renunciation of the benefits of the animal self is the law of human life." Only then can man overcome his own animal principle and submit himself to the law of universal love, and thus gain for himself eternity. According to Nuaima, each man's reason must overcome his passions and he must love not himself but others.

Nuaima believes that God is neither Allah, Jessus nor the Budha, but an eternal law. Tolstoy understood the generality of all religions as a certain generality beyond any dependence on their names. For him, the belief is a comprehension of truth that engaged all of a person's spiritual powers. He wholly repudiated and caustically ridiculed outward ritual and the observance of obligatory church canons. This concept is also found in Nuaima's thoughts: "Nor have you any need for temples to pray in. whoever cannot find a temple in his heart, the same can never find his heart in any temple." (Nuaima, M. 147; 1948)

The Book of Mirdad, published in 1948, is the moral and ethical testament of Nuaima's philosophical, religious and artistic ideas.. Here he considers self-perfection as the only possible route to universal harmony. According to him in truth, a man struggles only with his own soul and never shall the balance be adjusted till men have learned to knead all their desires in the kneading trough of love and bake of them the bread of Holy Understanding; each person must master and govern his own "I". The book can be considered as the author's credo. Particularly, Nuaima's novel draws on Tolstoy's idea of religious "salvation". The novel's characteristic motifs include the criticism of materialism, a call for the purification of religion from empty ritual and the aim of uniting people with ideas of universal love, which again resonate with the teaching of Tolstoy. Tolstoy linked his social views with moral and religious philosophy, and in *Mirdad*, social conflicts are portrayed in the form of moral conflicts. (Aida, I, 153; 2009)

Nuaima's novel *"al-Yaum al-Akhir"(The Last Day)* published in 1963 at Beirut, is in terms of his world-view, the author's summary work. The book is influenced by Tolstoy's moral and religious views and his criticism of structures of human society, and points towards a search for the religious ideal and for self-knowledge. The desire of the hero of *"al-Yaum al-Akhir"* is to re-examine life and to understand the meaning and the value of human being. It brings the pathos of the work close to Tolstoy's "*The Death of Ivan Il'ich*". *"al-Yaum al-Akhir"* is similar to "*The Death of Ivan Il'ich*". Both works concentrate on the self-analysis of the leading characters and their efforts to understand the lives they have lived.

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4. Conclusion

The influence of Tolstoy's moral- religious outlook, his uncompromising criticism of the structure of human society, and his quest for the religious ideal and self-knowledge are found in many works of Mikhail Nuaima. Tolstoy was for Nuaima, as for many thinkers of the East, not so much a great Realist artist as a teacher of beliefs, whose philosophy and humanistic ideals met with their own ideas and aspirations. Ideas such as moral perfection, love and all-forgiveness, and the sublimation of the flesh for the sick of spiritual knowledge, all had a marked effect on the content of Nuaima's work. This commonality of ideas with Tolstoy remained throughout Nuaima's creative life, from his early works to his mature and late periods. Specially the ideas contained in "The Wanderer" (a teaching about God as the symbol of love and unity among people, and the approach to God through love and service to people) are almost identical to those of Tolstoy's story "The Two Old Men". Nuaima practically reflected the Enlightenment aesthetic ideal in the plot, the treatment of the conflicts and the placement of the characters. However in creating his characters Nuaima was a critical Realist and this ultimately defined his role as the innovator of the genre of Realist drama in Arabic literature.

5. Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest concerning this manuscript.

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