

COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN MAHMOUD DARWISH AND YEHUDA AMICHAH

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Selected Poems of Mahmoud Darwish

Abstract:

The paper focuses on how literature becomes a bridge of peace and settlement for the conflict of Israel and Palestine. Based upon the struggle of two religious communities over their right to live in their lineal land, connects the two heritages by the medium of two poets from the respective two sides. Yehuda Amichai (Israel) and Mahumoud Darwish (Palestine) presents a unifying narrative of experiences in their final stages of the poetries. By analyzing the themes of exile, alienation, abandonment, failed resolution, violence and bloodshed, the paper presents forward a point of view of how common people wish for the suffering and violence to end, so that their lives could go back to normal. Through the ideas of memory, identity and 'collective memory', the poems have been linked together in order to broach the idea of how peace can be ascertained and given due space in the literature of conflict. Thus, universalizing the effect of literature, making it a conduit for restoration of emotions, brotherhood and identity. Instead of talking about the notion of how victim should not become a victimizer, the idea of giving recognition to their anguish and suffering and thus, uniting the sides through this, becomes the key concern of my paper.

Keywords: comparative study, alienation, collective memory etc

” L'imagination au pouvoir “ (Shwartz xii)

In Arabian mythology, the land of Palestine is not just their generational home, it is also a place, where Prophet Muhammad declared himself as the last Abrahamic prophet and founded Islam. Jerusalem became their holiest city after Mecca and Medina, as prophet mandated their first 'Qibla' on that very site. It is also the place from where Prophet ascended heaven and gave their ritual of praying five times a day. In Jewish mythology, the land of Israel holds religious importance as their biblical 'Promised Land'. Their ancestral and spiritual home, the holy city of Jerusalem is the place where their first sacrifice of Abraham was held, first temple was built by King Solomon in 950BC. According to Tanakh (Hebrew Bible), Israel was the place promised to Abraham and his descendants for their settlement and salvation from the exile. Thus, when the Jew community migrated in great numbers to escape persecution from anti-Semitism and German Holocaust, the original

inhabitants, Arabs were forcefully exiled from the land. This matter was even politically mandated by the Britain and League of Nations, which sanctioned their migration. Hence, the political unrest, coupled with their religious identity entwined with their land and forceful exile of the Arabs, made it one of the longest running conflict in the history. The unrest gave way too many wars and the two rebellions, or Intifadas (1987 and 2000). Unable to arrive at any conclusion, the unrest transformed in violence and bloodshed, giving rise to terrorism, menace and division of political organizations, all giving rise to a civil war at multiple levels, thus disrupting the life of normality. In between this civil war, the common people developed two kinds of reaction to it. The first reaction was the orthodox belief of 'their rightful land, through blood and tears', and the second reaction was of those people, who had enough violence, and wanted this to end so that their life could be normal again.

Since the political discussions had failed in providing any respite, or solution, the representation of this dual narrative became a part of Zion/Arab literature. Literature acted as a convergence of experiences and feelings, where, both the reactionary as well as the tired were given space. The admittance of plethora voices, through literature, presented a literary unification people through a common element of nature, exile, alienation, roots, pain, anguish and sufferings. Poets like Mahmoud Darwish (Palestine) and Yehuda Amichai (Israel) became the bearer of this literary torch, which voiced both rebellion and desire for peace. Acknowledging the above contribution of literature, I attempt to compare and contrast the poetry of Darwish and Amichai, highlighting their unique elements, which harmonizes the common people through shared grief and suffering.

Mahmoud Darwish was the Palestine national poet, whose poetry represented the voice of the common people. Influenced WH Auden, TS Eliot and Pablo Neruda, his poetry is full of nature imageries, in contrast with narratives from his own religious myths. His poetry is divided into three phases: Phase one, where he wrote about his forced exile in 1971. Phase two, the Seige of Beirut, subsequent rebellions and his involvement in PLO (1971-1982) and the Phase three, where he worked towards a settlement of conflict and wrote about the common man's disillusionment in the rebellions, wanting it to end. (Mansoor, Milli 26)

Yehuda Amichai is a key Israeli poet, whose poetry is divided into two phases. His name, Yehuda, in Hebrew, means 'Judah', representing 'Lion of Judah'- symbol of ancient Israeliten military and political strength. 'Amichai' means 'my nation' and 'life', meaning 'my nation lives '- the poet who invented himself. Thus, initial phase defines his war, assertion over the 'Promised Land' and the Holocaust imagery. The final phase of poetry talked about universal identity, shared grief and harmonizing the common people of two sides. Moreover, Amichai was greatly impressed by Darwish, when he first started composing his poetry. His

poem, 'My Mother baked The Whole World for Me' is influenced by Darwish's poetry 'To my Mother'. (Wazzan 8)

However, one of the key factors of difference in both of their poetry can be seen from their initial compositions, when they wrote about individual community assertion over the land, through religious and generational claims. 'Identity Card' - one of the most famous poem by Darwish is an example of the anger at forced exile and loss of homes. The stanza narrates this idea, quite effectively:

"Put it on record at the top of page one I do not hate poeple
Nor do I encroach
But if I become hungry
The usurper's flesh will be my food Beware..
Beware..
Of my hunger And my anger!"

The same quest of identity can be seen in the poem 'On Wishes', where the last stanza projects the right time of the rebellion to begin and be a success, talks about a glorious moment when the people in forced exile would get their native land back. Harping upon the painful memory of exile, Darwish wishes the people to remember, so that they can fight for what is rightfully theirs.

Similarly, Amichai writes about the idea of defending for their land, until the very end. He writes about people to not forget their past, their centuries of exile and suffering, not settle on the less, and defends their 'gift from God'. in his poem, 'Do not Accept', he urges people to remember the ordeals for them to get here, and hence, not settle for anything else. The following stanza presents the above idea:

" Make your pain

An image of the desert. Say it's said And do not look to the west. Refuse To surrender. Try this year too ..To live alone in the long summer, Eat your drying bread, refrain From tears..... "

Urging the people to not to give, he also writes that, "Spilled blood is not the roots of trees/| but it's the closest thing to roots / we have". (Amichai 22)

The notion of Exile is one the most harrowing experiences in the mythology of Judaism. According to the Legend of the Wandering Jew, the community is bound to roam around the Earth, unless the saviour comes back, redeeming them from this curse. The Promised land of Israel is said to be the place for this second coming, hence there was a mass settlement of Jews by expelling the Arabs from their homeland. As this conflict changed into a civil war, the amount of violence and alienation in the land changed the notion of exile for

Amichai. Through his poetry, he ponders the question of whether the acquisition of Israel has really ended the centuries long exile, or just made them 'aliens' in their own 'Promised Land'. His poetry, "I don't know If History Repeats Itself" is a reflection of his wondering; whether the exile has ended, or it has just assumed a new face, as they are unable to reconcile with the Arabs, both of them having roots to the monotheistic Abrahamic religion.

Similarly Darwish, belonging to the Arab community, found them forcefully uprooted from the place, where they have lived since their ancestors. Wielding the memory of exile as a cautionary tale, the call for revolt and taking back their homeland was reverberated throughout the community. However, after the rebellion turned into chaos, Darwish began to identify with the idea of exile differently. In his poem "Who am I, without exile?", he presents the time of exile as a bridge. By acknowledging that both communities are deeply rooted in one place, he defines the idea of 'universality', where both the communities have found themselves living together in harmony, respecting the differences.

Darwish also presents the image of 'water', as a symbolism of memory, and acceptance of past struggles which were bore by both the communities. To highlight this argument even further, another poem by the poet, "We Walk Towards A land", also bears symbolism of 'sea', presenting a combined culture and experiences of both the religion.

Moreover, the following lines, "You have your victories and we have ours / we have a country where we see / only the invisible", can be interpreted as a small confluence of both the religions, existing together in an 'invisible' country. The idea of 'mythic women clap' represents the resolution of past narratives, with women symbolizing the carrier of their rituals and teachings, also carrying the message of unity across generations, integrating two diverse mythologies.

Similarly, Amichai also wrote about the idea of how memory and religion were brought together, in order for everyone to merge the individual consciousness into one collective memory. Quoting his poem, "An Arab is Searching for his Goat on Mount Zion",

".....Afterwards we found them among the bushes
And our voices came back inside us
Laughing and crying.

Searching for a goat or for a child has always been the beginning of a new religion in these mountains."

Thus seeing how Amichai equated the beginning point of Islam and Judaism at the holy city of Jerusalem. By placing them at the same point, he presents an image of the Arab finding

his goat and the Jew finding his child, symbolizing a beginning of a new religion of humanity, which has redefined the notions of identity and given space to both the communities.

After the concepts of exile, memory, religion and culture are reconciled by both the poets, the ongoing violence in the name of rebellion became futile. Bloodshed and destruction had brought the original dictum to halt for both the communities. This change brought out helplessness and plea from the common people, who desperately wished for the conflict to die down. The fear, anguish and loss of being forced to leave their homes, is reverberated from both sides. Darwish's poetry, 'Steps in the Night', talks about an approaching fear of death, always hanging by the neck. It talks about how the only safe sanctuary for a person is nature around him, which has turned ominous, much like his own house. Steps, which usually signal the arrival of our loved ones, are now feared and dreaded upon by common people. They have become the messengers of death and destruction which can strike anytime. Hence, people are forced to remember their loved ones, even the smallest detail of them, so that, during the siege, they can identify them, from the stacks of dead bodies. This sentiment is echoed in the poem, "Victim Number 48", which also talks about how the revolution became terrorism, in its last stanza:

'So, the children of my country, Thus did the moon die'

Similar ideas of dread and anguish is portrayed by Amichai, in his poem, 'I want to die in my bed', where the poet is ready to give up anything, even his wife, for him to die safe and comfortably in his own bed. The idea of danger and terrorism is also portrayed in the poem, as well.

With the dread and futility of violence growing, it fell upon the shoulders of poets to restore the peace in the land, through their compositions. Hence, through portrayal of loss, death and destruction, due to failed political resolutions, the two poets, Darwish and Amichai, become a bridge between the two communities. Quoting Darwish, "I learnt all the words and broke them up / To make a single word: Homeland", (Darwish I come from there) and Amichai, "Let it come / like wildflowers / suddenly, because the field / must have it: wildpeace", (Amichai Wildpeace) it shows how both poets toyed with the conventions of the peace, and presented it through their compositions as something tangible in their lives. Through their writings, they showed a humanistic outlook to the conflict, resolving it within the boundaries of literature. Thus, the literature did what the political debates and leaders couldn't; it united the community in term of their history, culture and literature.

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