

# Cultural clash between East and West<sup>1</sup> as depicted in the novel 'A Sparrow from the East'

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## Abstract:

Cultural clash is nothing but a conflict arising from the interaction of people with different cultural values. The Arab students experienced this kind of conflict during their studies in Europe. Many of them depicted such kind of experiences in their writings. But Al-Hakim is credited with setting this topic and treating it for the first time in Arabic literature. 'A sparrow from the East' is an Arabic novel written by Tawfiq al-Hakim, which appeared in 1938 AD. In this novel, al-Hakim depicts the cultural contrast between East and West that he felt and experienced during his stay in Paris. This article focuses on the experiences that the novelist gathered regarding contrast between eastern and western culture during his stay in Paris.

**Key words:** Cultural clash, dialogue, eastern, western, experience, Arabic literature.

'A sparrow from the East' is an Arabic novel written by Tawfiq al-Hakim, which appeared in 1938 AD. And it is one of the novels of personal experience, as it is based on an experience that the writer went through during his stay in France in 1925 to 1928 AD. It takes no effort from the reader to understand that the protagonist of this novel, Mohsen, is the writer himself. In this novel, al-Hakim depicts the cultural contrast between East and West that he felt and experienced during his stay in Paris. Al-Hakim arrived in Paris in 1925 AD. He was a student of law, but he tried to persevere in his studies and read stories and dramas in France literature and elsewhere.

The protagonist of this novel, Mohsen, is also a young Egyptian who went to France to study and lived with a family consisting of a married couple, their child, and the husband's aged mother. Husband, Andrea, and his wife work in a factory. The duty in the factory devours their time and comfort, so the child is deprived of his mother's companion, and he grows up under the care of his old grandmother, who hate the Germans and trains him to play miniature war tools. Mohsen, a young eastern man, and Andre, a young man from the west, befriend, and Mohsen lives in Andre's house as a guest, and the author uses the talks between them to show the clear contrast between the Western and Eastern cultures. Mohsen relates to the spiritual and lives on the imagination, while Andrea lives on protectionism and lives on materialism. Once they go to church together to attend the funeral ceremony of a friend of Andre, so Mohsen enters in it showing respect and honour to this holy place, as it is a house of God, while Andre enters in it as he enters a café and mocks Mohsen for his respect and reverence towards it.

Mohsen fascinates in the novel a French girl, Suzy, who is working at ticket counter of the Adwann theatre, so he contemplates her for some days from a café which is close to the theater and floats in his imagination about her without ever approaching her with his love. This love is also used for the contrast between the two cultures, so when he tells his friend about the matter of his love, he ridicules him and encourages him to be realistic by approaching his love for her and obtaining pleasure from it in realism. But Mohsen does not dare to do this, but follows her repeatedly in the metro while she returns from her work until he knows that she is staying in a hotel, then he rents a room in the same hotel on the top floor of her room, leaving Andria's house in a hurry, and he tries to talk to her until he

gets to know her. And he provokes Andre about something suitable to gift her as a memorial of his love, and he guides him to things like perfumes and powders, but he does not accept all these materials, so he thinks a lot and decides to gift a parrot that he buys from the market and names it by his name and teaches him the word 'I love you' and tightens his cage with a rope and attaches it from his window to a window of her room in the morning, the girl encounters him, and she sees that it is from Mohsen, who is staying on the top floor, and she understands that the parrot is named by his name, and whenever the parrot is called by the name of Mohsen, it replies saying 'I love you', the girl realizes the situation, and she also loves Mohsen and visits him in his room. He recites to her some poems of a Greek poet expressing passion, love and affection during the conversation between them in the night. When Mohsen tells his friend Andrei what happened, he confirms to Mohsen the success of his realistic politics and the failure of the imaginations and idealism that he relied on in the first matter of this love. But Mohsen, despite winning this girl and enjoying her, feels that he "fell from heaven to earth," and despite that, he continues his relationships with Suzy for about two weeks. They meet every day repeatedly and enjoy and take lunch together in luxurious restaurants at Mohsen's expense. And one day, while they were having lunch together in the restaurant, exchanging love in word and deed, a handsome young man entered the restaurant and looked at Suzy with a look, and whenever she saw the young man she turned away with her eyesight and cut the talking with Mohsen. In addition, she asked for a magazine from the restaurant worker and held it between her and Mohsen and started turning its pages in silence as if it were a stranger to Mohsen. Mohsen was astonished by this change in Suzy's behaviour and tried to find out the secret from his friend, but she did not respond to it despite his constant request. And he realized later that, that young man was the other boy of Suzy who had been in quarrels with him for a few days, and Mohsen was not patient with this wounding situation, so he pushed the nourishment and went alone after paying the bill, and he felt distracted and confined himself in his room becoming sad and painful over his love that lasted for two weeks and tried to knock on the door of the girl to inquire from her about the evil of this transformation, but she did not respond to it; He looked out of his window looking for the parrot but did not find it. Mohsen sends a sad message to Suzy, telling her about his pain. She replied to him regretting what happened and wishing that it was not what she was, and declares that she is trying to erase these two weeks of her history.

Mohsen did not find any way except to leave the hotel, so he sought refuge this time at the house of an acquaintance, whose name is "Ivanovich", a good man who was a worker in Russia and had left it to Paris. He was also like Mohsen, devoted to reading and thinking. One day, Mohsen saw him reading Karl Marx's Capital, and expressed his passion for books, and they chatted until a friendship arose between them. Ivanovich loved eastern culture and hated Western culture. The West meets the East with the most accurate comparison, denouncing the material ways in which the West solved man's economic problems, praising the spiritual ways in which the East solved these problems, expressing his reverence for the East's prophets and their spiritual solutions to human issues, as well as expressing his mockery and abhorrence of those material solutions to which Western leaders resorted to.

One morning, Mohsen sees his friend ill and despite his severe illness, he devotes his times to reading three heavenly books: the Torah, the Bible, and the Qur'an. Mohsen is astonished and asks him about his covenant with these books, even though he is not a believer. He answers that he wants to know how these three books were able to give humanity a rest. He continues his talking about the bankruptcy of the civilization of the West and beauty of the civilization of the East. When Mohsen tries to condemn him, saying that the West has been distinguished by its scientific development, Ivanovich replies that this development is sensory and superficial and does not sing in it to real human

happiness. Ivanovich expresses his desire to move to the East with Mohsen, because it is the place where a person should live. But we see Mohsen preventing him from that, saying: The East today is no longer the East that was yesterday. The east was overwhelmed by many diseases of the West, and Mohsen soon told his friend this until he was dying and hoped for his eastern friend to go alone to the East because he was unable to do so and it was too late for him to say the last farewell to him.

In this novel, al-Hakim exposes the conflict, collision and division between East and West, as a culture and as a civilization. It depicts the cultural interaction between them, as it depicts the influence of the ancient civilization of the East on Europe and the modern civilization of the West on the East. This novel is based on the author's personal experience during his stay in Paris from 1925 to 1928 AD. This period of his life gave him acquaintance with Western culture and helped in forming his literary personality. He was amazed at the literary and scientific development in Europe and was greatly influenced by the pioneers of literature and art in it. At the same time, it was perplexed, like other Arab students in Europe, of the wide discrepancy between East and West culture. The cultural conflict that Arab students experienced during their studies in Europe is depicted in some other Arab novels as well. But Al-Hakim is credited with setting this topic and treating it for the first time in Arabic literature.

The writer has depicted the vast gap and the categorical revenge between East and West in his above mentioned novel 'A Sparrow from the East' very nicely, the protagonist of the novel, Mohsen, is a naive Egyptian young man who came for the first time to France. There, he feels the same feeling as fish whose water has changed from fresh to salt. Andre, who met Mohsen after arriving in France and lived in his home with his family, belongs to the working class that grew up in Europe in the post-industrial revolution period; He is one of the victims of capitalism, he and his wife work in a factory and their work takes more hours of the day so that they do not find time to take care of their child, as he is brought up in the care of the old Andre's mother, who is also affected by the mechanics of Western life and teaches the child to play by playing the tools of war. And the character Ivanovich is an old, civilized Russian. He is a sensitive person who is able to accurately meet the West over the East. He has studied comparatively socialism and the other Western ideology and Eastern ideology, preferring the "East" with its spirituality, purity, tolerance and supremacy over the "West" with its materialism, selfishness and mechanics. In the novel, he goes on describing the misfortune of the West and the virtue of the East the most.

In this novel, Al Hakim made Ivanovich a powerful figure to convey his message to readers. He has categorical views on the East and West. Al-Hakim shows excelency at making him Russian who is materialistic in origin, but later became bored with materialism. His sayings and opinions about the East and the West contain some objectivity. Moreover, as Russia, he is neither an absolute Eastern nor an absolute Western, and the reader sees in him a neutral position in which the reflections of the two civilizations converge and balance between them fairly. If he were Indian or Chinese, he could also be accused of being ignorant of the civilization of the West. As for the Russian, he is the one who can be said to be western and eastern, as he is not far from this and that. His judgment is closer to the rightness of the experienced person, the accuracy of the knower, and his balance between East and West in which there is no bias.

The writer depicts this difference between the two cultures from the beginning of the novel. Mohsen thinks over the statue of the poet "De Moussa", and the inscription is on its base. "Nothing makes us great but great pain" and the rain is abundant, as he is fascinated by statues and inscription, standing in front of it with respect as if he is in the yard of the Sayyida Zeinab mosque in Cairo, and he floats

in his imaginary world without caring about the rain. When his French friend Andre encounters him, he expresses his disdain and amazed at Mohsen, saying:

"If this poet would not have been made of marble, the first time, it would have been an escapee, he and his bride, to the nearest coffee, and they left you alone, in this water! ..... .."<sup>i</sup>

Andriya observes Mohsen's black clothes from his hat, coat, tie and shoe, and sees that he has a 'complete blacksmith suit' and asks him to accompany him to the funeral of an acquaintance while Mohsen sees himself in the most beautiful and appropriate clothes to go to his girlfriend, and in the church as well all the mourners stare at him as he is in 'complete mourning clothes' and not even the relatives or relatives of the deceased wear similar clothes, and the attitude of these two friends to the church differs according to their different cultures. For Mohsen it is a spiritual place, so he feels the same feeling when entering the mosque of Sayyida Zeinab in his country, but for his French friend it is a public place like a café, he says:

"We enter it as we enter coffee house ... What difference?? ... Here is a public place. ... Here is a general store. ... There is the organ, here is the orchestra! ..."<sup>ii</sup>

The picture of the cultural and civilizational contrast between East and West appears more clearly in the dialogues between Mohsen and his Russian friend Ivanovich. In these dialogues, Mohsen seems inclined to Western culture because of its scientific development, and Ivanovic seems more enthusiastic about Eastern culture because of its spiritual character. For example, a long dialogue appears between them about the West's attempt to solve humanity's problems through material scientific development without any suffering towards spiritual advancement. Ivanovich believes that the paradise of the poor will not be on this earth and that the problem of the world has not been solved, but he is boycotting it and sees that the problems of the world have been solved by the prophets who came from heaven with the best solutions. However, he believes that the West has lagged behind in this regard, and says:

"You are prophets?! Yes, this is permissible! ... The East once solved the dilemma ... This is beyond doubt; The prophets of the East understood that equality could not be established on this land, and that they could not divide the kingdom of the earth between the rich and the poor; - So enter into the division the "Kingdom of Heaven" and make the basis for the distribution between people, "Earth and Heaven" together: Whoever is forbidden to descend into heaven on earth, his right is preserved in heaven! ... This is beautiful! ... If these principles continued, and these beliefs remained until today, then the whole world would not have boiled in this burning furnace, but the 'West' also wanted to have its prophets who would deal with the problem in a new atmosphere, and this light was emanating this time from the ground, not coming from the sky ... It is the light of modern science; So our prophet, Karl Marx, came with his earthly gospel: "Capital" and wanted to achieve justice on this earth, so he divided the "land" alone among the people and forgot the "sky", so what happened? ... it happened that people grabbed each other by the necks of each other, and the massacre occurred There is a drift between the classes on this 'land' !! ... "<sup>iii</sup>

Mohsen admits his friend's opinion and adds:

"He threw a bomb of 'materialism, hatred, eagerness and haste' among the people, on the day that the people understood that there is nothing except 'the earth' - the day 'the sky' took out from the reckoning, because modern economics does not know the sky! ... As for the prophets of the East, they threw a flower 'Patience' and hope in the souls, on the day they said to the people: Do not wear out on the earth; the earth is not everything! ... That there is something other than 'the earth'; you will have

something else that enters into the 'distribution'! ... That a person does not exist for bread, as he does not live for bread alone...Uh! ... The prophets of the East are truly geniuses!! ...<sup>iv</sup>

We see Ivanovitch glorifying and exalting the religions that originated in the East and prefers them to Western ideologies, saying:

“The spirit of 'Christianity', as it originated in the East, is: love and the ideal. In the Kingdom of Heaven, he urged them to give what Caesar had to Caesar, and what God had to him; - Rather, by tempting them into a kingdom, established on the ruins of a layer, and the body parts of a layer, and advising them to attack Caesar, and to take what was Caesar's! ... And that the "Bible" of this religion: the book "Capital" also finds on some of its pages frightening predictions; As predictions of 'John' in his vision; In it he promised the collapse of this world, and the solutions of another world consisting of workers alone! What bodies do without heads go over the prostheses?! What a scary dream! As for the 'Islam' of the modern era in the West: It is "fascism" and it is also the character of belief and discipline! ... a belief not in God, but in a human "leader" and a system that does not lead to social equilibrium through modesty and zakat; It is a regime imposed by the hand of terror; To lead to the ambitions of colonialism, and to skip the weak from the nations! ...<sup>v</sup>

Mohsen, however, was surprised by his friend's attack on Marxism, despite being a worker, so Ivanovich confirms his views and says:

“Yeah; I am from the workers, and from the poor ... But unfortunately, I have a head who thinks; I know that the promises of all the new 'West' religions ... that they are nothing but deceit the workers and the poor ... that 'Marxism' and 'Fascist' have taken from the religions of the 'East', their methods and ways, and they understood very well that the Prophet's entire plan was to win over the disaffected and pious and the destitute, and they are the dear multitude! This way 'Isa' and 'Muhammad' did! ... Were they followed, at first, by anyone other than slaves, the poor and the weak? ... so that the satisfied and affluent class do not need to follow anyone! ...<sup>vi</sup>

In another meeting between the two friends, we see Mohsen appreciating the West's materialism and realism over the East's imagination and spirituality, so Ivanovich interrupts him and says:

“-Reality and direct scientific methods?!... Those are exactly the whole life of the animal! ... The only virtue between humans and animals is to live one minute, outside of reality and matter ... the day when the animal resorts to indirect moral methods to reach its goals. ... the day in which the animal can spend the night 'dreaming' in its moonlit forests instead of chasing the prey; this day is the last of its reign in the animal ... 'The dream' is the upper world that no animal can enter! ... 'Imagination' is the crown of sovereignty and superiority by which the human being become distinguished! ...<sup>vii</sup>

In sum, Tawfiq al-Hakim represents among the dialogues between these two characters in his novel ‘A Sparrow from the East’ the cultural distance between the East and the West and proves that whatever the good deeds, found in western culture are taken from the East, but in fact, the East has lost most of its identity in the modern era after the West's occupation in it. The reality is that the cultural colonialism occurred alongside imperial colonialism. This novel not only depicts the materialism of the West and the spirit of the East, but rather the cultural occupation of the West over the East, so we see Mohsen unfolding to Ivanovich how European ideas became the sanctities of the East, and how the easterners defend them as they defended their religions before, and that he will not find an East in the East as the heroes. The East has died in the hearts of the East, and the East has imitated the West with all its faults.

Reference

- i ) Al Hakim, Tawfiq. (1988) A sparrow from the west .Maktaba al-Adab wa Matbatuha 13-14
- ii )Ibid 24
- iii ) Ibid 90-91
- iv ) Ibid 91-92
- v ) Ibid 92-93
- vi Ibid 93-94
- vii ) Ibid 104-105