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An Outline on the Book of Mirdad

Dr. Abdul Latif Ansary

Associate Professor, Dept. of Arabic, Moirabari College, Moirabari, Morigaon, Assam, India

Abstract

The Book of Mirdad –A light house and a haven is an extraordinary allegorical novel based on divine ethics akin to Sufi mysticism and that of the philosophy of Leo Tolstoy written by Mikhail Joseph Naimy a.k.a. Mikhail Nu`aima was published in English in Lebanon in the year 1948 and later translating it into Arabic in 1952. Nu`aima did the first move to have the book published in London, where it was rejected for propagating a religion with 'a new dogma'. Actually, Mikhail Nu`aima claimed himself as Mirdad- an Eastern prophet like Khalil Jibran and Ameen Rihani.

In fact, this is a book that takes place in a monastery on top of a mountain, where Noah's Ark is believed to have come to settle down, and where a young unfamiliar person, Mirdad, arrives who divulges himself to be a divine preacher. The subjects such as the flood of Noah, the temporality of the world, the concept of "Self", the day of judgment, Love is the law of God, The Ark of Holly Understanding, 'The Holy Omni Will', "On The Mother Ovum", ovum, ova, Macro-God and Micro-God, and the maturity of human-being have been taken up in the novel with the ideas of mystical thoughts of Islam and Christianity.

In this book there is a series of exchange of ideas consists of questions and answers between Mirdad, the abbot of a monastery, and his chief disciple Naronda.. Through the allegories in the novel presented by Mirdad, Nu`aima presents several themes layer after layer and calls for the unity of different groups of people in universal love, as well as criticizing materialism and empty religious practices.

The book has been compared to John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress in that both stories are largely allegorical. The Book of Mirdad has also been compared to Ameen Rihani's The Book of Khalid, with the book being believed to have had an influence on Na'ima's writings. Na'ima has described the work as the "pinnacle of his thought and a summary of his view of life". In fact, the book has a perennial effect in respect of the salvation of the human being.

In 1973 the book was adapted into a three act play by Padukone Ramanand.

Keywords: Mirdad, Omni Will, Mother Ovum, Holly Understanding, Macro-God, Micro-God, abbot, perennial, salvation.

Prologue: Among the best known books, written by Mikhail Nu`aima, the Arab Micro Literary Giant hailed from Lebanon, is the book of Mirdad, a most unusual text book based on Sufi mysticism first published in his birth place in 1948, in English which was translated into Arabic four years later. In Nu`aima's own opinion, the books he wrote on his return from USA to Lebanon are the most representative of his philosophy. Of these "Al- Mirdad" is significant.¹ Mirdad is known as "A light house and a haven". Here is an extract to understand this riddle:

“It is that living lamp, not wrought with hands, which I most earnestly commend to all of you. Upon it feast your eyes, and from it light your candles. Behold, it is within your reach. The name of it is Mirdad. May you be worthy of his light.”²

Mikhail Nu`aima speaks about the visit of the mysterious stranger, Mirdad, to the remote mountain monastery, ‘*The Ark*’. The culmination and indeed the message of the story is that Mirdad’s own Ark is “*The Ark of Holly Understanding*”, which will bring mankind through another deluge, greater than Noah’s, when heaven will be revealed on Earth. Actually, Mikhail Nu`aima claimed himself as Mirdad- a prophet after Jesus Christ.

Mikhail Nu`aima was a contemporary of Khalil Gibran and his writing style is very much influenced by him. It has been said that the way the book has been written, unraveling one layer after another, shows that it has descended from some mysterious source. He explained human minds and souls in it concentrating in to the reality of life; death, good and evil and thus he could able to establish relationship between human being and the omnipotence (God).

Commending the book the Canadian theosophist Dudley W. Barr said, “Every once in so many decades a book is born into the world, a book which by the authority of its inner power, quietly effortlessly, but inevitably, moves forward through the crowded ranks of bookdom and assumes its place of seniority in the vanguard. Such a book is ‘*The Book of Mirdad*’ – and aspirants of this generation and of generations to come will be under a debt of gratitude to the author, Mikhail Naimy.”

Another scholar Mr. Gordon Muirhead, reviewing the book before the ‘Indian Institute of Culture’, called it a heart- searching sermon, teaching the essence of religion, yet wholly free from dogma. Only poetry or music, he thought, could adequately convey the almost inexpressible ideas in the several passages quoted.

Though the first edition of the book was brought out in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1948, after a certain publishing house in London declined to handle it because “it entails such a change from the normal Christian dogma...”, yet acknowledged it to be “a most unusual book”.

Epicenter: Mikhail Nu`aima, however, in the book of Mirdad, expounds the theory of love, hate, life, faith and God in a befitting manner in the chapter- 11 (eleven). Some of them are the extracts:³
Love is the law of God.

You live that you may learn to live. You love that you may learn to live. No other lesson is required of Man. And what is it to love but for the lover to absorb forever the beloved so that the twain be one?

You are the tree of life. Beware of fractioning yourselves. Set not a fruit against a fruit, a leaf against a leaf, a bough against a bough; nor set the stem against the roots; nor set the tree against the mother- soil. That is precisely what you do when you love one part more than the rest, or to the exclusion of the rest.

You are the tree of life. Your roots are everywhere. Your boughs and leaves are everywhere. Your fruits are in every month. Whatever be the fruits upon that tree; whatever be its boughs and leaves; whatever be its roots, they are your fruits; they are your leaves and boughs; they are your roots. If you would have the tree bear sweet and fragrant fruit, if you would have it ever strong and green, see to the sap wherewith you feed the roots.

Love is the Sap of life While Hatred is the Pus of Death. But Love, like blood, must circulate unhindered in the veins. Repress the blood, and it becomes a menace and a plague. And what is Hate but love repressed, or Love withheld, therefore becoming such a deadly poison both to the feeder and the fed; both to the hater and to that he hates?

No love is possible except the love of self. No self is real save the All- embracing self. Therefore is God all Love, because He loves Himself. So long as you are pained by Love, you have not found your real self, nor have you found the golden key of Love. Because you love an ephemeral self, your love is ephemeral.

The love of man for woman is not love. It is thereof a very distant token. The love of parent for the child is but the threshold to Love's holy temple. Till every man be every woman's lover, and the reverse; till every child be every parent's child, and the reverse, let men and women brag of flesh and bone clinging to flesh and bone, but never speak the sacred name of Love. For that is blasphemy.

Love is not a virtue. Love is a necessity; more so than bread and water; more so than light and air. Let no one pride himself on loving. But rather breathe- in Love and breathe it out just as unconsciously and freely as you breathe- in the air and breathe it out. Seek no rewards for Love. Love is reward sufficient unto Love, as Hate is punishment sufficient unto Hate.

Love neither lends nor borrows; love neither buys nor sells; but when it gives, it gives its all; and when it takes, it takes its all. It's very taking is a giving. It's very giving is a taking. Therefore is it the same to- day, to- morrow and forevermore.

There is no 'more' or 'less' in Love. The moment you attempt to grade and measure Love it slips away leaving behind it bitter memories. Nor is there 'now' and 'then', nor 'here' and 'there' in Love; all seasons are Love seasons. All spots are fit abodes for Love.

Love knows no boundaries or bars. A Love whose course is checked by any obstacle whatever is not yet worthy of the name of Love.

I often hear you say that Love is blind, meaning that it can see no fault in the beloved. That kind of blindness is the height of seeing.

Love is peace a throb with melodies of life. Hatred is war agog with fiendish blasts of Death. Which would you: Love and be at everlasting peace? Or hate and be at everlasting war?

The whole earth is alive in you. The heavens and their hosts are alive in you. So love the Earth and all her sucklings if you would love yourselves. And love the Heavens and all their tenants if you would love yourselves.

God is your Captain, sail my Ark !⁴
Though Hell unleash her furies red
Upon the living and the dead,
And turn the earth to molten lead,
And sweep the skies of every mark,
God is your Captain, sail, my Ark!
Love is your compass, ply, my Ark!
Go north and south, go east and west
And share with all your treasure chest.
The storm shall bear you on its crest
A light for sailors in the dark
Love is your compass, ply, my Ark!
Faith is your anchor, ride, my Ark!
Should thunder roar, and lightning dart,
And mountains shake and fall apart,
And men become so faint of heart
As to forget the holy spark,
Faith is your anchor, ride, my Ark!

The chapter 21 (twenty- one) highlights 'The Holy Omni Will'. To Nu`aima, all the occurrences happens or happening in the Universe are completely guided by 'The Holy Omni Will'. So, everyone should accept them with gratitude and faith, without opposing whatever comes from the mysteries of 'The Holy Omni Will'. To understand it following are the extracts:⁵

Till you are conscious of your will in all things and of their will in you, you cannot know the mysteries of the Omni Will.

I say to you, accept the Omni will if you would turn defeat to victory. Accept without a murmur all the things that fall to you from its mysterious bag; accept them in gratitude and in the faith that they are your just and due share in 'The Omni Will'. Accept them with the will to understand their value and their meaning. And once you understand the hidden ways of your own will, you understand the Omni will.

Accept what you do not know that it may help you to know it. Resent it, and it shall remain in an irritating puzzle. Let your will be a maid to the omniwill till understanding makes the omniwill a servant to your will.

Again, Nu`aima, in the chapter 34 (Thirty- four) entitled "ON THE MOTHER OVUM" speaks about *ovum, ova, Macro-God and Micro-God*. These mysterious words are not but some what a great question mark to the readers; nonetheless, the problem can be realized pondering over these lines:⁶

Space and all therein is an ovum whose shell is Time. That is the Mother Ovum. Enveloping this Ovum, as air envelops the Earth, is God Evolved, the Macro-God, Life unembodied, infinite and ineffable. Enveloped in this Ovum is God Involved, the Micro-God, Life embodied, and likewise infinite and ineffable.

The countless ova representing all things and beings, visible and invisible, are so arranged within the Mother Ovum that the larger in expansion contains the immediately smaller, with spaces intervening, down to the smallest ovum which is the central nucleus enclosed in space and time infinitesimal.

An ovum within an ovum, within an ovum, defying human numbers, and all God- fertilized- that is the Universe, my companions.

An ovum is your head, your heart, your eye. An ovum is every fruit and every seed thereof. An ovum is a drop of water and every sperm of every living creature. And the countless orbs tracing their mystic charts upon the face of heavens - are they not all ova containing the quintessence of Life - the Micro- God, in varying stages of unfolding? Is not all Life constantly hatching out of an ovum and going back into an ovum?

Epilogue: A reviewer for *Philosophy East and West* praised the book, citing Na'ima's "power of enthusiasm and persuasion" as a highlight.⁷ The Indian mystic Osho mentioned *The Book of Mirdad* in his book *A Song Without Words*, saying that it "can be of immense help if you don't expect, and it is a book worth reading thousands of times."⁸

The book, as if each line was lovingly written across the sky to the sound of music, The Book of Mirdad is a harmonic treasure chest to one's heart and mind. The spiritual teachings and life lessons so artfully embedded within its page are a blessing upon anyone that reads. So complicated yet simple in its beauty, The Book of Mirdad nourishes the soul and feeds the mind with so much love and light one's heart does definitely sing another pleasure and highly-recommended read and deliberation!

Every page of the book is an Expression, a Realization to living a better life also attaining Salvation not by abstinence or austerity but by improving everyday deeds. The book is a masterpiece of Paradoxical writing style. Hence, it is essential to explore into the depth of the book.

The Book of Mirdad, however, there are many more heart-searching lessons which guided the human societies effectively into the right way in achieving their ultimate goals. Hence, this book is not but a symbol of peace and mental satisfaction to the mankind.

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- ³ Mikhail Naimy, *The book of Mirdad*, Bombay, 1954, chapter- 11 , pp. 68- 74.
- ⁴ Ark: It means Mirdad's own Ark – i.e. the Ark of Holy Understanding.
- ⁵ Mikhail Naimy, *The book of Mirdad*, Bombay, 1954, chapter- 21 , PP.109-13.
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