

## **Sociological Criticism of the Novel “Abdul Motajali’s Confessions” by Najib Al-Kilani**

Seyyedeh Akram Rakhshandehnia, Hadi Shabani Chafjiri,  
Seyyed Esmaeil Hosseini and Ajdad Niaki

Department of Arabic Literature and Language, University of Guilan, Guilan, Iran

---

**Abstract:** There is a close and direct relationship between literature and society and since the literature is the mirror of a society, it having two branches of prose and poetry has long been narrating social events, especially social problems including poverty, corruption and lack of justice. Meanwhile, Najib Al-Kilani is one of the contemporary Egyptian writers who have skillfully depicted the turbulent society, poverty and corruption in his novels, one of which is entitled “Abdul Motajali’s Confessions” and is among his social realist novel. In this study, using descriptive and analytical methods and based on this novel, we are to observe the Egyptian society and its social problems in the mirror of the novel “Abdul Motajali’s Confessions”. The results of this study reveal the social realities of Egyptian society including poverty, corruption and proliferation of piracy in different classes of society.

**Key words:** Sociological criticism, society, Najib Al-Kilani, poverty, corruption

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

Along with the emergence of Romanticism in the early nineteenth century, the grounds for the emergence of literature-related social theories were provided in Europe. Following the formation and evolution of social theories, sociology became an independent science, isolated from its philosophical context and quickly combined with other sciences. Over the 19th and 20th centuries, scientific sociology evolved and was divided into several branches. Sociology of literature as a branch of art sociology examines literature social functioning as well as the relationship between society and literature and the rules governing them (Sotoudeh, 1999). “Sociology of literature shows that like family, education, government, economy, etc., literature is a social institution, i.e. it is rooted in human social life. In fact, sociology of literature is a scientific study of the nature and content of literary works with regard to other aspects of social life” (The Holy Quran).

Mohammed Mandour with presenting the concept of “literature: Review of Life”, is regarded as one of the most prominent pioneers of social interest in Arabic literary criticism. He believes that it is time to men of letters and artists involve in their own social and contemporary issues and play role in determining the humanity’s destiny. Mandour considers the main focus of social criticism the current needs and demands of modern man

and the artist is not only obliged to mention it but also, according to the philosophy of commitment, should be biased towards it based on his own view and perspective (Abedi *et al.*, 2012).

In the meantime, the novel as a branch of literature has ample capacity to portray community and, in modern Arabic literature, the Egyptian writer Najib Al-Kilani having knowledge of this reality and in his various novels, including “Abdul Motajali’s Confessions” has illustrated poverty and corruption and proliferation of thievery and injustice, even at the head of the country and among the officials. Here, we are to review and analyze this novel.

### **LITERARY LIFE**

Najib Kilani son of Sheikh Ebrahim Kilani was born in June 1931 in the Sharshabeh village, suburb of Zefti in west of Egypt. After high school, he entered the medical faculty of Cairo and then initiated writing stories and received more than eight national awards in the field of novel and short stories and various research studies. After a while, he started political activities; he became familiar with a group named “AKhvan Al-Moslemin” and got in line with their principles and values. Hence, Kilani consciously chose his own path and boldly revealed his faith. After observing the deteriorating political, social and economic conditions of his community and feeling

the pain of people deeply, in addition to accurate description of society and expressing his people's shortcomings and excruciating life, chose story as a literary form suitable for depicting people's suffering and rulers' tyranny (Abedi *et al.*, 2014).

### OVERVIEW OF "ABDUL MOTAJALI'S CONFESSIONS"

In this novel, Najib Kilani speaks of a young man named Abdul Motajali who makes efforts to reform the corruption of his society. Abdul Motajali is young man not living in his own age, not because he talking about strange values but because he relying on correct and fixed principles and virtuous focuses on moving in a straight path. His personality exists in many communities, like an employee who is not of concern at work, but people love him.

The story of the theft was about stealing a common crane; however, Abdul Motajali as the main character of the story, is not an ordinary person; therefore, the story of stealing the village crane was not, for him, as simple as the media ignored it. It was not easy for him. He regarded this theft a great tragedy and a challenge to the will of the people. Hence, announced research results indicating that the thief was unknown, unknown bighead, was not pleasant in his view. In searching for the crane, he tolerated torture and injustice.

### SOCIOLOGICAL CRITICISM OF "ABDUL MOTAJALI'S CONFESSIONS"

**Proliferation of thieving in the community:** Social novel is often written with the aim of guidance to make a difference in the community; therefore, the novelist tries to make people realize the shortcomings of the society (Soleimani, 2008). One of the subjects for which the community is criticized in Kilani's novel by the main character in this story Abdul Motajali is proliferation and spread of piracy in the community; it has different sizes and shapes including stealing money, property, reputation and electoral votes;

Thieves steal money and property from the pockets and spend it up ... They even steal personal and family identity cards and documents. They also steal chickens and animals. There are some thieves who steal the lights, fame, power and the election ... This is normal in our age as it is customary and common. Therefore, it is possible and it is not surprising to steal cranes. He says: The world is full of thieves and from his point of view, thieving is

considered the ugliest action so that the crane stealing in daylight reflects the unraveling of the nation:

From his perspective, Crane stealing is humiliation of public opinion and squandering values ??such as virtue and innocence; it leads to destruction of political and economic state and the collapse of humanity and the destruction of the hopes and aspirations of people and contaminating his dignity and honor. No matter whether a bike or a chicken or a car is stolen; however, stealing the crane in daylight means that all nations are on the verge of collapse.

Abdul Motajali reprimands people because of their ignorance and looks for the thief. With a broader view, he introduces America and Israel as robbers stealing the crane; those who are opposed to others' progress: You're asleep when they steal cranes during daylight? Is it possible that the thieves are America, Israel, or other great powers? They have atomic bombs and we sacrifice our sheep in our great holiday and only the wealthy and the rich eat them.

In addition to comparing the progress of the West in the field of technology with his own society, he also refers to the gluttony of the rich in his community and introduces thieving as cholera-the disease of the century; Thieving such as cholera has spread over the country so that he in the presence of the village chief (Kadkhoda) reveals robberies as follows: Kadkhoda, I write besides you: "Abraham Sawan" is a professional, flattering and insincere theft. The head of the village council is an embezzler and briber and hypocritical. General Secretary of the party in our country is respected due to companionship and being relative. He is a mediator and second-hand goods dealers and sells groceries in the black market.

**His view towards technology:** Abdul Motajali has a broad vision towards the future. He speaks of the importance of technology and new achievements in life for the naïve people of his village: Crane is the coming future. They have stolen the future. We are in the technology era...I know that you do not understand the meaning of this word. Technology is the same as comfort and security, stability and justice. As he speaks of the importance of technology in such a way that regards stealing the crane as the stealing of wishes: Who has stolen our crane and subsequently our dreams?

Of course, as the case of the stolen crane and importance of technology is significant for Abdul Motajali, other naïve village people even do not realize its importance: Abdul Motajali! Are you talking about Technology? While you are still using Tanboor and

Shadoon(traditional tools) for irrigation of your farm and plowing the farm by plow as you're and the Pharaohs did...? When he is under blame and replies them shows the breadth of his own perspective and speaks of the bright future: I really like all people to have a computer.

However, the naive people, due to their being naive, are convinced by the least things and only want bread "First bread", though, Abdul Motajali with trust in God talks of the importance of technology in meeting even these wishes of the people: This issue has been overthrown. You're constantly repeating it. There is bread and our God never deprives us from our lowest animal life. And the computer will not only be helpful with facts and figures; Computer produces bread, fruits and chocolate; Abdul Motajali is murmuring about Technology, he says: "Israeli defeated Arabs by technology". His mother asked: "Why do not we buy technology?" Technology cannot be purchased as drums and timpani and must be produced within the country. Otherwise, it remains incomplete. You say: Why do not we do this? I can mention thousands of reasons, but colonialism is not among the reasons. The reason is certainly our negligence. We are living in the past or present and do not think of our future.

Therefore, the protagonist of Kilani's story, in addition to detailed analysis of the importance of technology, mentions a point which is indicative of his strong faith. At a time when many communities are attributing their failure to colonialism, he regards ignoring the law of the God as the main reason of shortcomings.

**Injustice and lack of freedom of expression:** One of the most valuable points in Kilani and his protagonist's perspective is general freedom and freedom of expression in particular: Abdul Motajali wants to be and to live free. When a dream dies and freedom is waived, the life is meaningless from his perspective. He is a man who believes in God and in freedom and justice for his country. He also believes that practice and knowledge are two principles to avoid difficulties. He believes that the real enemies of people are robbers, abusers and torturers. These are issues in which each free normal individual believes. With such strong belief in an atmosphere of repression and silence over Abdul Motajali era, normal speech is considered enmity with the state and is prohibited. With his curiosity and courage, he using words removes this ban and speaks of another corruption in the society:

Here, talking of some issues is more dangerous than drugs. When I have a chance to choose between two issues of thinking and drug, I choose the latter one. Why?

Because a lawyer can do something for drugs, find a way out, nullify the evidences, make witnesses doubtful and in many cases, obtain an acquittal. However, regarding the political issues, the charged is guilty even if his innocence is proven. Hence, Kilani in this part of the story, expresses the political problems of the society in a social form. He investigates drug as the most basic problem of the modern society and reflects injustices in the fight against merchants of death in his society. In this community and in the stifling condition, everything is forbidden. Talking is forbidden. Sleeping is forbidden..... Is this your house or house of God? Abdul Motajali, with the use of these terms, depicts the depth of disaster.

The main character of Kilani's story who is a young, passionate and justice-seeking man does not consider silence appropriate in such an atmosphere. As a result, he tolerates heavy penalty and cumbersome torture of the government: "The officer closed one of his eyes and Abdul Motajali was surprised to see him in this position. It did not last long that hard blows of slapping touched his back without warning. He looked back and saw his friend of café. Such a tight fist touched his face that threw him on the ground. Abdul Motajali tried to get up but he was suddenly shocked with a strong kick in his stomach. He felt severe pain and fell to the ground and his face got yellow". The officer told him contemptuously: keep your mouth shut brute! He returned to Abdul Motajali and said you rush to government policy? Do not you know that this undermines this stability:

- Detective, This is a constructive criticism
- You're playing with words?
- I am concerned with my democratic right

When he released from prison, the officer wants him to be silent and not to say anything about the last few days' torture to people and even his wife and this peak is the lack of freedom of expression: Hence, the government will use any means to ban the word; sometimes with torture, sometimes with mild language and sometimes with intimidation; however, Abdul Motajali's conviction is unswerving because he does not think of consequences; what is important to him is rise and truth word.

**Corruption in society:** Kilani referred to the prevalent corruption in society. And the main character of the story also is suffering from all the corruption and immorality: For example, the bribe in the Ministry of Industry for him is more important than the discussion of the decline in Nile water that threatens the future of agriculture; the bank debts from which capitalists and affluent groups escape is more important for him than pest that affects

cotton production. In addition, reducing the price of the dollar and its impact on the price of currency in Egypt (ripe) aroused in him waves of grief.

Therefore, in this society, bribery and evasion of bank debts and fluctuation of the dollar are annoying part of society's problems and Abdul Motajali in this condition stopped his life and work and looks for the robber of their dreams. Hence, Abdul Motajali has the feeling of emptiness and aimlessness after seeing all the corruption in society and despair sometimes is evident from his words: "The devil with disbelief and denial and greed change the God creatures and nothing is left in the world which is far away from titles. God told the truth: corruption on land and sea is obvious because of people's functioning. What a time are we living in? I am looking for a needle in a haystack, as my mother would say. Abdul Motajali elsewhere in the novel began talking of agricultural community corruption and grassroots organizations and rules of accommodation and rents and taxes imposed on lower class individuals and he could not catch the big heads "Imagine Master... a wood merchant who deal outside amounted to about 10 million Egyptian riyal and 97.68 in the smallest Egypt currency unit pays the tax? This defied the will of the nation. Do you know its failure and corruption and debt rate? They have forgotten God and get away from the law of God. God did the same so that they forget themselves.

Corruption has reached to such an extent that even the borders of this country are not safe for people; however, it is safe for pirates who are escaping to a safe place. Elsewhere, a young man asked from mosque imam about the oppression and lack of freedom of expression. In response to Imam who regards the border of lawful and unlawful measures evident, he shouted back: Lawful and unlawful are mixed and the lethal corruption corrupts thought. Other manifestation of corruption in the society is turning towards drugs and the worse is the public security forces companionship: Abdul Motajali, in response to the words of Alasty Hanafi (Ome Sabrine's ex-wife's friend and current wife of Abdul Motajali) who regards addicts and drug users respectful people that take opium to get strong against pain and high cholesterol and black thoughts, he asks: Are not you afraid of the police? Alasty Hanafi shortly laughed and said: Why? They are with us? Some of them participate in our meetings ... Are we not a popular base? To this extent? In addition, they speak about drugs.

Abdul Motajali during the conversation with Khanafi implicitly speaks of the main drug importer and introduces its cause the destruction of people. Finally, the best

example of corruption in the society from the perspective of Abdul Motajali is moral corruption about which he talks with the village chief: Kadkhoda, pollution is one of the main concerns of the world today... And we have formed the Supreme Committee for the protection of the environment. Unfortunately, the whole world is wrong in understanding the concept of pollution. They focus on material pollution caused by gases and chemicals, etc. and forget the most important pollution. Moral pollution is the most important type of pollution. If there was no moral pollution, we won't be affected by environmental pollution (The Holy Quran); Abdul Motajali knows environmental pollution which is the major problem of contemporary society the result of apollution that is more important than moral pollution.

He pointed to the continuing oppression throughout history, present and in the future to emphasize on the need to fight this injustice till the end. "Old women said to me that they killed Hussein, the grandson of the noblest servant of God. While the ignorant every day kill Hussein's children. But Hajjaj Ibn Yusuf is not dead ... His generation continuously governs on the earth at this time and until the Day of Judgment. They scream and say: Death to the traitors; however, traitors do not die. Martyrdom is just for the pure.

**Role of money in society:** Abdul Motajali in search of the crane and its trace approaches a city, a bustling, crowded and brutal city that everything is summarized into money: Cairo's huge flaw is that it has no mercy regarding the prices and the employed are unfamiliar with giving charity and only wishes and dreams and images and figures can be seen in the newspaper. He needed money even for meeting his simplest needs in this relentless city. Everything in this great city depends on having money: Abdul Motajali in the city went looking for the restroom and found it with difficulty but it was full of people who were delayed in leaving it. The guard whispered in his ear and Abdul Motajali understood that if pay his 5 pennies, he immediately finds an empty room he could not tolerate anymore. Even toileting needs money here. In what place? In the holiest place.

Abdul Motajali with understanding this case concluded that all his money soon will be paid for restroom and bathrooms: In this city "May God protect it everything can be bought and sold and the poor have no choice but to work or theft. Is it the cause of stealing the cranes?. Therefore, Abdul Motajali considers the root of poverty and thieving urbanization and financial problems since in this great city, according to the rule of money and assets, the poor have no choice but to steal.

**Poverty:** Abdul Motajali is aware of the importance of marriage in society; he addressed his sister and said: Badria, marriage is half of religion and infallibility. However, in response to someone who asked he about his being single says: Dear, this issue is different for different individuals. If someone is poor, he does not propose, he is proposed. He does not command, he is commanded; however, the rich man's confidence will lead him to progress. Abdul Motajali established a direct relationship between marriage and poverty. He finds no solution for this problem with referring to the poverty of the people in the community; he smiles bitterly and says crane problem is all Arabs' problem ... just like the Middle East and it needs transnational and public efforts along with bilateral and multilateral agreements.

How can a person caught find a solution to such a dilemma when he has only a few clothes and a few Pennies in his pockets that the skilled hands of robbers are seeking them? Abdul Motajali regards poverty as the main reason of indifference in states because, in his opinion, how a person with no clothes and torn pockets which are permanently seeking to be stolen by thieves can think of a stolen crane and its consequences?

**Ignorance and illiteracy of the people in the community:**

There is another big social problem in Kilani's society. It is ignorance and illiteracy and Abdul Motajali believes that it cannot be solved in the short term and requires strong will: Most of people are ignorant; Abdul Motajali believes. It is not possible to remove it in a day or night with such an approach adopted by the government. Preparing people for the 21st century requires a pervasive sense and forcing minds like cranes' will. The crane is always in front and it works as long as it has fuel and the driver is sober. He is well aware of the importance of science in society and knows illiterate people away from studying and learning deprived; those who do not understand this deprivation due to their ignorance: He believes that those who do not study are deprived even though this deprivation is not understood (Mousavi Moghadam *et al.*, 2016).

**CONCLUSION**

Sociology review of novels has provided the grounds for literary criticism of those potent works. This branch of sociology of literature has regarded novel as the base of its studies to show the link between these two interpretations of society and literature and to examine the hidden social facts consistent with the structure of society and its literary work. In Kilani's novel "Abdul Motajali's confessions", Kilani depicts the realities of the society and the writer mentions the bitter social fact instead of the protagonist and criticizes them.

Including the bitter social realities in this society is promoting thievery and corruption and it is not only seen at micro levels of society. It can also be seen at the macro levels and has deep roots in the community and its people. In this regard, moral corruption stands out noticeably. In addition, injustice, lack of freedom, oppression, ignorance and illiteracy, poverty and money talks are other manifestations of social problems obvious in the novel. This injustice has crippled the ordinary people and made them just think of bread; an injustice that results in the release of criminals and arresting the innocent and ignorance and illiteracy that has taken root in people's lives and cannot easily be eradicated. Money-worshiping in the society has become a genuine originality and performing even the simplest tasks is not possible without money.

**REFERENCES**

- Abedi, G., H. Seiyamiyan and F. Rostami, 2012. The study of waiting line of receiving intensive care unit services in the hospitals. *Health MED.*, 6: 126-130.
- Abedi, G., S.H. Darvari, A. Nadighara and F. Rostami, 2014. The relationship between quality of life and marriage satisfaction in infertile couples using path analysis. *J. Mazandaran Uni. Med. Sci.*, 24: 184-193.
- Moghadam, S.R.M., H. Afsaneh and N. Moradi, 2016. Communicational skills in Islamic life style from Koran and Nahjolbalaghe point of view. *Soc. Sci.*, 11: 447-455.
- Soleimani, M., 2008. *What is a Novel?*. 2nd Edn., Sooreh Mehr, Tehran, Iran.
- Sotoudeh, H.A., 1999. *Sociology of Literature*. Avaye Noor, Tehran, Iran.