Topic- Historical Dramas of Ali Ahmad Bakathir: A Critical Study

The thesis has been divided into six chapters in addition to the conclusion. Each chapter has been divided into a few sub-chapters. The chapters are as follows-

Chapter 1: Introduction:

Chapter 2: Arabic Drama: Origin and Development.

Chapter 3: Life and Works of Ali Ahmad Bakathir

Chapter 4: Ali Ahmad Bakathir as a Dramatist.

Chapter 5: Theme and Style of Bakathir's Historical Dramas.

Chapter 6: A Critical Study of Bakathir's Historical Dramas.

Conclusion:

The first chapter which is of crucial importance to the understanding and appreciation of the topic introduces the research work. It covers the study of drama in general and its status in Arabic literature in particular. Furthermore, it gives a brief discussion of each and every chapter of the thesis.

The second chapter deals with the historical background of Arabic drama (thereby adding more background) before going into the specifics of our actual topic, namely the origin and development of the Arabic drama, and finally the contribution of Ali Ahmad Bakathir as representative of this development. In the first half of the chapter surveys the chief elements of drama in Arab and the main theatrical arts and their founders in Egypt, emphasizing the fact that the Arabic theatre in the formative period consisted mainly of translations and liberal adaptations of western plays which usually took the form of musical theatre. The second half of the

chapter surveys the emergence of original Arabic playwriting which started in the second decade of the 20th century; it provides brief biographies of the pioneer dramatist, their prevalent themes and best plays.

The third chapter traces Bakathir's literary development through the stages of his life. The dramatist started his career as poet of note in his original home, South Yemen. Bakathir's emigration to Egypt and enrolment in the English Department at Cairo University led to his work as a dramatist. Bakathir's study of English literature and of Shakespeare in particular, guided him to some of the innovations the dramatist pioneered, such as the use of running blank verse and free verse which became a medium of later Arabic verse drama. However, Bakathir wrote the majority of his plays in prose, emanating from his credo that drama could be poetical without the restrictions of meter and that free verse should be used only in non-realistic plays.

The fourth chapter discusses the dramas of Bakathir on different aspects of human life such as social, political, historical and religious. These works analyzed to show Bakathir's unique and innovative style of writing for which he was so famous. Knowledge of the historical aspects and his major works have explained much of his opinions and ideas (as gleaned from his writings).

Bakathir wrote plays both in prose and verse. He has also composed an epic drama on the life of second Caliph 'Umar bin al-Khattab. Bakathir had a distinct preference for subjects drawn from history, myth and legend as well as folklore, a preference for which he tried to find an aesthetic justification. Even when he wished to make a comment on the modern world, he often found it easier to use the past as a metaphor for the present. His passionate commitment to Islam made him turn naturally to Islamic and Arab history, but his treatment of myths and legends embraced a wider field, including ancient Egyptian and Greek themes.

Of his huge output, only a few plays deal with contemporary social issues. They mostly deal, in some form or other, with the problems of Egyptian women and the relation between the sexes. The historical dramas of Bakathir are derived from both ancient and modern history of the Arab world. Bakathir's others plays set in the modern world deal with political issues. His religious plays are moral fantasy based on the Islamic ideology from the Holy Quran and anecdotes from Quranic interpretations.

Thus as an Islamic ideologist Bakathir endeavoured persistently to present the Islamic point of view; he implicitly presents Islam as a philosophy throughout his various works. Consequently, Bakathir's interpretations of events and stories from modern or ancient history constitute an addition to the world's dramatic heritage with a distinctive Islamic content and treatment. He was the only Arab dramatist who consistently dedicated his works to Islamic ideology, as well as conducting his life by its principles.

This research reveals the influence of Shakespeare on Ali Ahmed Bakathir and shows the latter's creativity in adapting Shakespeare's ideas and employing them to highlight the conflict between Arab people, especially the Palestinians and the rising power of the Zionists, the new generation of the Jews.

The fifth chapter deals with the theme and style of Bakathir's historical dramas. To gain a good and clear understanding of the author and his works, this chapter deals with his circumstantial and factual background. Seen against this background, it clears that who and what influenced Bakathir in his writings.

Bakathir's plays are divided into two groups: plays inspired by events (political plays) which established Bakathir as the first Arab playwright to use drama for political purpose; and plays inspired by ideas (intellectual plays) with their material largely borrowed from history or the western

literary heritage, but given new interpretations which reflect his Islamic ideas. Bakathir's Ikhnatun, Al-Hakim, Napoleon and Oedipus are selected as models of his intellectual plays.

The sixth chapter gives an assessment of Bakathir's historical dramas, covering both positive and negative criticism. Bakathir's plays on history received great fame in all parts of the Arab world.

Bakathir's plays deal with themes from both history and mythology. Some are set in the modern world and treat specifically social or political problems of contemporary Egypt and the Arab world. It must be admitted, however, that despite Bakathir's obvious commitment to his subject, on the whole these tend to be less satisfactory as drama, not least on account of the type of language he uses in his dialogue. Because of his deeply held religious and political convictions, namely, his total commitment to Islam and Arab nationalism, Bakathir avoided colloquial Arabic altogether, but the literary Arabic he employed often sounded too literary and turgid for his modern themes and lacked the immediacy of spoken speech.

The conclusion summarizes all the main points of the aforementioned chapters, reviews the substance of the discussion and mentions some aspects that can be further researched.

Each chapter has a short introduction and a concise conclusion and they are divided into sub-sections leading from on issue to the next logically.

The research work reached at the following conclusions:

1. Many aspects influenced the growth of Bakathir and his cultural formation and polished his literary talents.
2. The study reveals Bakathir attitude to western culture; it has been found that Bakathir has been positively influenced by western culture.

3. Bakathir treated history comprehensively, be it classical or modern history or mythology. He was concerned with presenting history with a modern insight where past is mixing with the present. He presented history in an artistic framework, devoid of the dullness history is associated with.
4. The immigrant life which Bakathir lived in the beginning of his life in Egypt was one of the reasons which made him resort to history, the other being religious, artistic, political, and nationalistic.
5. Arab theatre, just like western theatre started with commitment in form and content but later freed from commitment in form.
6. Bakathir was firstly committed to the Islamic concept of universe, man and life and secondly to his comprehension to the firmness of character of the Muslim litterateur. This means that commitment as far as Bakathir was concerned was different from commitment which the western writers knew.
7. Commitment in the historical characters of Bakathir was inclined to ideological, political, social and moral issues.
8. Motivated by ideological commitment, Bakathir could save the Greek myths from its idolatry atmosphere and employ them in a new way to serve the Islamic thought and issues. This is the most distinctive feature of the historical dramas of Bakathir. Motivated by this ideological commitment he treated the religious hypocrisy and exposed the new ideologies, be it communism or secularism and encouraged people to the Islamic principles and values. By this way, he utilized the theatre for reformation and education creatively.
9. His attraction to Shakespeare was mainly for two reasons: First, he found his favourite art in Shakespeare's poetry; second, Shakespeare the playwright enabled Bakathir to discover in himself the instinct for drama.

10. The study sheds light on the social issues, be it related with social justice, social evils, family obligations or human rights.
11. It was found that there are many linguistic features in the historical plays of Bakathir like the abundance of religious lexicon, usage of examples from the literary heritage and popularization of folk expressions; he used in the dramas a language in harmony with the spirit of his period. All these features enhance the values and the liveliness of his dramas.
12. The study found that these are different kinds of dialogue in the historical plays of Bakathir. Some of the dialogues are explanatory that helped the understanding of the natural events, while some other dialogues are realistic. And some other dialogues are humorous mixed with a tone of satire.
13. Bakathir, in his historical dramas employed different types of characters. There are central characters, hostile characters, Jewish characters, spy characters and stupid characters.
14. The study found that commitment is more apparent in the theme of the historical theatres of Bakathir than in the form and content.