



## CONTRIBUTION OF IHSAN ABDUL QUDDUS TO SOCIAL REALISM IN MODERN ARABIC FICTION: A STUDY

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### Abstract

Ihsan Abdul Quddus is considered one of the leading figures of social realism in modern Arabic fiction. This study examines his contribution to Arabic literature through his realistic portrayal of Egyptian society and human relationship. It discusses the concept of social realism, the historical and social background of Egypt, and the life and literary career of Ihsan Abdul Quddus. The study also analyzes how his novels and short stories reflected social issues such as women's freedom, class differences, social hypocrisy, and the conflict between tradition and modernity. Through simple language, realistic characters, and psychological insight, he successfully presented the realities of modern Egyptian life. His works played an important role in the development of modern Arabic fiction and contributed significantly to social awareness and literary realism in the Arab world.

**Key Words:** Ihsan Abdul Quddus, Modern Arabic Fiction, Social Realism, Egyptian Society, Women's Freedom

### 1. Introduction

The development of modern Arabic fiction in the twentieth century marked a major shift in literary expression, as many writers began to portray the realities of social life and the challenges faced by ordinary people.<sup>1</sup> Within this literary movement, Ihsan Abdul Quddus emerged as one of the most influential Egyptian authors whose works greatly contributed to the growth of social realism in Arabic literature. As a novelist, journalist, and intellectual, he used literature as a means to examine social transformation, moral conflict, and human emotions in contemporary Arab society.<sup>2</sup>

Ihsan Abdul Quddus became well known for addressing important social issues that directly affected the lives of people in the Arab world. His novels and stories dealt with themes such as women's freedom, family relationships, social inequality, political pressure, and the tension between traditional values and modern life.<sup>3</sup> Through realistic characters and situations, he presented an honest picture of Egyptian society during a period of rapid cultural and social change. His writings reflected the experiences of the middle class and highlighted the emotional and psychological struggles of individuals living within restrictive social systems.<sup>4</sup>

A distinctive feature of Abdul Quddus's literary contribution was his treatment of women and their role in society. He portrayed female characters with depth, intelligence, and individuality, challenging the conservative attitudes that limited women's freedom and identity. His works often emphasized the right of women to express their opinions, emotions, and personal choices. Because of this progressive outlook, his fiction became an important voice in discussions related to social reform and gender equality in the modern Arab world.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from his thematic richness, Abdul Quddus was also admired for his clear and effective narrative style. His language was simple, expressive, and capable of reaching a broad readership without losing literary value. By combining realism with emotional intensity, he succeeded in making social criticism more engaging and relatable. Many of his literary works were adapted into films and television dramas, which increased their popularity and cultural influence throughout the Arab world.<sup>6</sup>



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This study seeks to explore the contribution of Ihsan Abdul Quddus to social realism in modern Arabic fiction. It aims to analyze the major social themes, artistic techniques, and realistic elements present in his writings while evaluating his role in shaping the direction of modern Arabic literature.

## 2. Concept of Social Realism

Social realism is a literary and artistic movement that focuses on the representation of real social conditions, everyday life, and the struggles faced by ordinary people in society. It emerged as a reaction against romanticism and idealized portrayals of life, aiming instead to present reality in a truthful and critical manner. Writers associated with social realism attempt to highlight social problems such as poverty, inequality, injustice, corruption, exploitation, and class conflict through realistic characters and situations drawn from daily life.<sup>7</sup>

In literature, social realism emphasizes the relationship between individuals and the society in which they live. It portrays how social, political, economic, and cultural forces influence human behavior and shape personal experiences. Rather than presenting imaginary or exaggerated worlds, social realist writers describe life as it actually exists, often focusing on marginalized groups, workers, women, and oppressed communities. Their objective is not only to depict reality but also to create awareness about social issues and encourage reform.<sup>8</sup>

The movement gained prominence in many parts of the world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially during periods of political change and industrial development. In modern Arabic literature, social realism became an important literary trend as writers began to address the realities of Arab society, including colonialism, social inequality, political oppression, gender discrimination, and the conflict between tradition and modernity. Authors such as Naguib Mahfouz and Ihsan Abdul Quddus used realistic narratives to portray the lives, emotions, and struggles of common people within changing social environments.

One of the major characteristics of social realism is its use of simple and direct language, realistic dialogue, and detailed descriptions of social settings. The characters are usually ordinary individuals rather than heroic or idealized figures. Their experiences reflect the actual conditions of society, allowing readers to connect literary works with real-life situations. Social realism also frequently includes criticism of social institutions and moral hypocrisy while advocating justice, equality, and human dignity.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, social realism can be understood as a literary approach that combines artistic expression with social observation. It seeks to reveal the truths of society, give voice to the experiences of common people, and inspire critical reflection on social realities through realistic and meaningful representation.

## 3. Historical and Social Background of Egypt

Egypt possesses one of the oldest and richest civilizations in human history. Located in the northeastern part of Africa, Egypt developed around the Nile River, which played a central role in shaping its culture, economy, and social life. Ancient Egypt became famous for its advanced system of government, architecture, science, and literature. Over the centuries, the country experienced the rule of various civilizations and empires, including the Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Ottomans, and the British. Each period left a lasting influence on Egyptian society, culture, language, and political structure.<sup>10</sup>

The Arab conquest of Egypt in the seventh century introduced Islam and the Arabic language, which gradually became the dominant religious and cultural foundation of Egyptian society. During the medieval period, Egypt emerged as an important center of Islamic learning, trade, and political power. Later, under Ottoman rule, Egypt maintained strategic and economic importance because of its geographical location connecting Africa, Asia, and Europe.<sup>11</sup>

In the nineteenth century, Egypt entered a period of modernization, particularly during the rule of Muhammad Ali Pasha, who introduced reforms in administration, education, industry, and the military. Western influence increased significantly during this period, especially through trade, education, and cultural exchange. However, growing European



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interference eventually led to British occupation in 1882. Colonial rule created political tension and strengthened nationalist movements among Egyptians who demanded independence and social reform.

The twentieth century marked a crucial stage in the social and political transformation of Egypt. The 1919 Revolution became a symbol of national unity and resistance against British colonialism. Although Egypt gained partial independence in 1922, political instability and foreign influence continued for several decades.<sup>12</sup> The Egyptian Revolution of 1952, led by the Free Officers Movement under Gamal Abdel Nasser, brought major social and political changes. The monarchy was abolished, land reforms were introduced, and efforts were made to reduce social inequality and foreign domination.

Egyptian society during the modern period experienced rapid urbanization, educational expansion, and cultural development. At the same time, social problems such as poverty, unemployment, class divisions, gender inequality, and political restrictions remained important concerns. The conflict between traditional values and modern ideas became a significant feature of Egyptian social life. These transformations deeply influenced Egyptian intellectuals and writers, who began to address contemporary realities in their literary works.

Modern Egyptian literature, especially fiction, reflected the social and historical conditions of the country. Writers portrayed the lives of ordinary people and discussed issues related to social justice, women's rights, political oppression, and cultural identity.<sup>13</sup> Through literature, Egyptian authors contributed to public awareness and social criticism, making Egypt one of the leading centers of modern Arabic literary and intellectual movements.

Thus, the historical and social background of Egypt reveals a society shaped by ancient civilization, colonial experiences, modernization, nationalism, and continuous social change. These factors played a vital role in forming the cultural and literary environment of modern Egypt.

#### **4. Life and Literary Career of Ihsan Abdul Quddus**

Ihsan Abdul Quddus was one of the most prominent figures in modern Arabic literature and journalism. He was born on January 1, 1919, in Cairo, Egypt, into a family deeply connected with literature, journalism, and the arts. His father, Muhammad Abdul Quddus, was an actor and writer, while his mother, Rose al-Yusuf, was a famous journalist and founder of the influential Egyptian magazine *Rose al-Yusuf*. Growing up in an intellectual and artistic environment greatly influenced his personality, ideas, and literary interests from an early age.

Ihsan Abdul Quddus completed his education in Cairo and later graduated with a degree in law from Cairo University in 1942. Although he studied law, his passion for writing and journalism led him toward literature and media rather than legal practice. He began his career as a journalist in the magazine established by his mother and gradually became one of the leading journalists in Egypt. Through his articles and editorials, he discussed political, social, and cultural issues with courage and honesty, often criticizing injustice, corruption, and restrictions on freedom. His bold journalistic style sometimes brought him into conflict with political authorities, and he even faced imprisonment because of his outspoken views.<sup>14</sup>

Alongside journalism, Ihsan Abdul Quddus built a remarkable literary career. He wrote numerous novels, short stories, and essays that gained immense popularity across the Arab world. His fiction mainly focused on social realities and human relationships, especially the emotional and psychological struggles of individuals living in modern Egyptian society. He became particularly known for his realistic portrayal of middle-class life and his exploration of themes such as love, marriage, freedom, morality, social inequality, and the conflict between tradition and modernity.

One of the most important aspects of his literary contribution was his treatment of women's issues. Ihsan Abdul Quddus presented female characters with depth, independence, and emotional complexity. He defended women's rights and challenged conservative social attitudes that restricted women's freedom and individuality. Because of this progressive



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approach, many readers considered him a bold and reformist writer who addressed subjects that were often regarded as socially sensitive.

His narrative style was simple, direct, and emotionally engaging, which helped him reach a wide audience. Unlike highly complex literary styles, his writing combined realism with clarity, making his works accessible to ordinary readers while maintaining artistic value. Many of his novels achieved enormous popularity and were adapted into successful Egyptian films and television dramas, further increasing his influence on Arab culture and society.

Among his well-known literary works are “لا انام” (I Do Not Sleep), “في بيتنا الرجل” (A Man in Our House), “انا حرة” (I Am Free), and “الوسادة الخالية” (The Empty Pillow). These works reflect his concern with social and psychological realities and demonstrate his contribution to the development of modern Arabic fiction.

Ihsan Abdul Quddus continued writing throughout his life and remained one of the most influential literary and journalistic voices in the Arab world until his death in 1990. His contribution to modern Arabic literature lies not only in his artistic achievements but also in his commitment to social realism, intellectual freedom, and social reform. Through his writings, he succeeded in portraying the realities of Egyptian society and left a lasting impact on modern Arabic fiction.

## 5. Social Realism in the Works of Ihsan Abdul Quddus

Social realism occupies a central position in the literary works of Ihsan Abdul Quddus. Through his novels and short stories, he portrayed the realities of Egyptian society with honesty, emotional depth, and critical insight. His writings reflected the social, cultural, and psychological conditions of people living in a rapidly changing society. Rather than presenting imaginary or idealized worlds, he focused on the everyday experiences of ordinary individuals and highlighted the struggles, contradictions, and moral conflicts present in modern Egyptian life.

One of the major features of social realism in his works is the portrayal of middle-class society. Ihsan Abdul Quddus explored the lives of men and women trapped between traditional values and modern aspirations. His characters often experience emotional tension, social pressure, and inner conflict as they attempt to balance personal freedom with social expectations. Through realistic situations and believable characters, he presented a clear picture of the transformation taking place in Egyptian society during the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup>

Women's issues form one of the most significant aspects of social realism in his fiction. Ihsan Abdul Quddus was among the first modern Arab writers to discuss women's emotions, rights, ambitions, and social restrictions openly and courageously. His female characters are not passive figures; rather, they are portrayed as intelligent and independent individuals seeking dignity, identity, and freedom. In novels such as “انا حرة” (I Am Free), he criticized conservative traditions that limited women's opportunities and freedom of expression. Through these portrayals, he challenged patriarchal attitudes and advocated social reform.

Another important element of social realism in his works is his criticism of hypocrisy and moral corruption within society. He exposed the gap between public morality and private behavior and showed how social conventions often suppress genuine human emotions. His writings reveal the psychological suffering caused by rigid customs, social inequality, and political oppression. By focusing on the hidden realities of family life, love, marriage, and social relationships, he encouraged readers to question accepted norms and reflect critically on society.

Political and social transformation also appears prominently in his fiction. Egypt during the mid-twentieth century experienced rapid changes due to nationalism, modernization, and political movements. Ihsan Abdul Quddus captured the impact of these developments on individuals and families. In works such as “في بيتنا الرجل” (A Man in Our House), he connected personal experiences with broader political realities and illustrated the emotional and social consequences of political struggle and national conflict.



His realistic style is further strengthened by his simple and direct language. Unlike highly symbolic or complicated literary approaches, his narrative technique remains accessible and emotionally powerful. He used realistic dialogue, familiar settings, and psychological analysis to create characters that readers could easily understand and relate to. This clarity of expression helped his social ideas reach a wide audience throughout the Arab world.

Furthermore, many of his literary works were adapted into films and television dramas, which expanded the influence of his social realism beyond literature. These adaptations brought attention to important social issues and increased public discussion regarding women's rights, social justice, and personal freedom.

Thus, social realism in the works of Ihsan Abdul Quddus is characterized by truthful representation of society, deep psychological insight, criticism of social injustice, and concern for human freedom and dignity. Through his literary contribution, he played a significant role in the development of modern Arabic fiction and established himself as one of the leading voices of social realism in Arabic literature.<sup>16</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Ihsan Abdul Quddus played a significant role in the development of social realism in modern Arabic fiction. Through his novels and short stories, he portrayed the realities of Egyptian society and highlighted important social issues such as women's freedom, social inequality, family conflict, and the struggle between tradition and modernity. Influenced by the historical and social conditions of Egypt, his writings reflected the emotions and experiences of ordinary people with honesty and psychological depth. His simple narrative style and realistic approach made his works widely popular and influential. Thus, his contribution greatly enriched modern Arabic literature and strengthened the tradition of social realism in the Arab world.

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