

Memorial of a Sudanese Scholar

Dr. Abd-Allah Eltayeb Abd-Allah

(1921-2003)

Editor: Dr .Mohammed Elhassan Altikena



Professor Abd-Allah Eltayeb Abd-Allah

Abd-Allah Altayeb Abd-Allah was born in the village of Temirab, west of Aldamar Town on the 25th of Ramadan 1339-AH – corresponding to 2 June 1921. He died on 19th of June 2003. His parents were Altayeb - Abd Allah Altayeb and Aisha Jalal Aldin.

He studied in Kassala, ALDamer, Berber Schools and read for his university degree in Gordon Memorial College in Khartoum. He was then sent to the University of London at the Institute of Oriental and African Studies where he received his doctorate in 1950. He taught in Omdurman El-Ahlia secondary school, Bakhat Elrida Institute for teachers` training and joined the University of Khartoum in 1955.

He was later on appointed dean of the Faculty of Arts for 13 years (1961-1974) during which he successfully accomplished a great deal of improvements to the curriculum of the Faculty.

He introduced Bachelor Degree Programme in French, German, Russian and Chinese Languages, in addition to psychology, Philosophy, Archeology and Transilation.

He worked hard for adopting Arabic Language as the medium of instruction in university education.

Abd-Allah Eltayeb sacrificed all his time, efforts and potentialities to a noble goal, that was to keep the Arabic language vibrant, vivid and popular. He worked hard for 50 years to achieve that goal not without many opponents and aggressive opposition.

In 1969 secular and communists group staged a successful coup de tat ku in the Sudan. The University of Khartoum was targeted in particular and the communists consequently gained leadership of the university and without delay issued a presidential decree to terminate the service of 19 professors including Abd- Allah Altayeb.

Soon after been dismissed from the University of Khartoum in 1970 he was invited by the University of Ahmedo Bello in Nigeria. He helped establishing Abd –Allah Bayrou College which in a few years supposed to a University. After many years in Nigeria he was invited to Morocco to work as Dean of higher studies in the faculty of Arts the University of Sayed Mohammed Bin Abd –Allah in the town of Fes.

1971 witnessed a rift between the ruling communist Party and President Numeiri who cancelled all his former decisions in which he dismissed the teachers of the university of Khartoum and Abd – Allah Eltayeb returned back to the Sudan .

In 1974 Abd –Allah Eltayeb was appointed vice – chancellor of the University of Khartoum. He stayed in the post for only 2 years. During this short span of 2years he helped increasing the human and financial resources and legalized all the University estate by changing its` lease hold to free hold by Sudan Judiciary.

In1975 he left to Juba in the South of Sudan as first Director of Juba University. He achieved a lot for Juba University despite the scarce resources and the difficult circumstances.

Abd-Allah Eltayeb spent almost all his life to organize the status of the Arabic Language and had always felt sorry that his endeavors in this respect were not fully acknowledged by a sizeable sector of the intelligentsia in the University of Khartoum in particular and in the Sudan in general. This sense of betrayal was reflected in his moving poetry.

Eltayeb has always been considered among the most notable scholars of Arabic Literature and Language of the 20th.century. One of his most distinguished work `` Guide to Understanding Arabic Poetry``, a massive book written over thirty five years, for which he was awarded the King Faisal Prize for Arabic language and literature in 2000. In their tribute to his work, the judges of the King Faisal prize wrote ``The first three volumes are regarded as the most thorough analysis known of the composition, rhyme, and rhythm , unity and other features of Arabic poetry since pre- Islamic eras``. The fourth volume – a landmark text of over 1,500pages – includes exhaustive details of the role of both ancient and modern Arab literary critics, the development of the Arabic poem through the centuries and its impact on European poets.

Eltayeb was known as poet, play-wrighter and author of essays on African culture. His collections of Sudanese folk – tales: - Heroes of Arabia, folk stories from the Northern Sudan and Stories from the Sands of Africa were translated into English by his wife, Griselda Eltayeb. He is also remembered for his voluminous radio broadcasts interpreting the Quran over a span of 60years and is still broadcasted daily at a fixed time (7p.m.) Series of this program were also broad- casted in Chad, Somalia and Nigeria radios.

In recognition of his achievements the University of Khartoum established ``the Professor Abd-Allah Eltayeb Institute for the Arabic Language in 1992``.

Abd-Allah Eltayeb was the President of the Arab Language League of Sudan , member of the Arabic Language Academy in Cairo , Head of the Senate of University of Khartoum , member of the Editorial Board of the African Encyclopedia in Ghana and appointed an Emeritus Professor in the University of Khartoum .

His famous publications included From the Memory Bag, From the Train Window, Stories from the Sands of Arabia, The Cotton Nawar, in addition to Marriage of the Samaritans and Nakbat ElBaramka (poetry).

Abd –Allah Eltayeb married a British lady called Griselda William while he was in London in the fifties of the last century. She married him against all odds including outcries of her community. She got involved in Altayeb`s life and discovered her ingenuity and great contribution to the brilliance of her beloved husband. He was a great family man of high amiability , chastity , honesty in his feelings and very loyal . They lived happily together and eventually she accepted Islamic . Gresilda was mainly known for her pioneering research on the traditional costumes as they reflect culture and society of Sudan since the 1970s. She published her research in 2017 in the illustrated book Regional Folk Costumes of the Sudan .

Having lived in Sudan and other African countries for most of her life with her Sudanese husband Abd –Allah Elayeb , she published ethnographic studies and watercolour painting on such fields as visual arts of Sudan , folkliterature , music , traditional costumes and women`s education in Sudan and has been called ``a Sudanese artist of British origin``.

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