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**The Kuwaiti writer ‘Abd ar-Razzāq al-Baṣīr (1920-1999)**

Introduction

If those who possess high inspiration and determination are appreciated and honored, and they are existing all over the world, that appreciation and honoring is increasing if the owner of high determination is one of those who suffer a constant handicap. ‘Abd ar-Razzāq al-Baṣīr is one of those unique who possess high determination and inspiration instead of being a handicap. How Al-Baṣīr overcame all hinders that faced him and emerged as the biggest writer in Arabian Gulf? A man who lacked much education and faced that blame him for the rest of his life.

Kuwait society at the beginning of the first quarter of the 20th century was a primitive one, where ignorance, diseases and superstitions are prevailing. Disease was a fate from God that couldn't be recovered, and that was how it was described by ignorance of people at that time. And it is what had dictated ‘Abd ar-Razzaq al-Baṣīr to loose his eyes as a result of that lagging, beside, what he had been teaching of learning by heart only. But Al-Baṣīr the mutinous, gone ahead towards light, education and freedom by utilizing the present of God represented by properties that compensated what he had lost.

This essay focus on Al-Baṣīr's life, obstacles he faced during his life and what means he had to become the most biggest writer of essays in Kuwait and Arabian Gulf.

‘Abd ar-Razzaq al-Baṣīr, one of the greatest journal writers in the Gulf area, and even in the Arab world, was a self made man. But how could he attain that? Was his career as a journal essay writer his own destiny? What mean journalism for him? Was it the space, which could receive all different and contradicted ideas and opinions, to write continuously about for more than half a century? On the other hand, one may wonder whether the journal essay writing was suitable for his educational abilities? Couldn't he be more than a journal writer? Were his scientific abilities, which made him a

researcher in the field of culture, different from his being as a journal writer? No doubt that Al-Baṣīr had a great ability and an indefinite flow. But as a matter of fact, there were two obstacles he experienced. Firstly, he had lost his sight and this matter might prevent him from achieving his ambitions. He used to depend on someone to read and write for him. Secondly, he received his early education in a traditional school, which limited his activity in the realm of research, and long continuity of some subjects he wrote about. Consequently, we find that he depended on the short researches: in the sense that he adopted the essay writing style deals with a definite topic. Thus, the journal essay writing was the most suitable method for Al-Baṣīr to present his critical, cultural, social, political and objective thoughts and ideas.

Scrutinizing Al-Baṣīr works, we can find, that he had written in several fields for approving himself as a man of literature, a critic and a journalist, and in all this he was present to keep up with the problems of his own country, and the problems of the Arab world. He was considered to be the strong voice supporting the Arab issues. As an Arab arrow he was against Zionism and colonization. He was always turning up down the tricks of any flatterer or any one who deceives people under the title of religion, or nationalism.

Artistically speaking, Al-Baṣīr's essays are multidimensional. Patiently enough and in a wide scope, he was writing his essays making his readers recognize his thoughts. Diving in the depth and the senses of the idea was his style, but with the tendency to simplify and clarify. Thus, his ideas were not ambiguous nor of trivial simplicity. His essay might last few hours and sometimes three days so he could review it well and inlay it with quotations from the Holy Qur'ān, the Holy Ḥadīṭ, or the Arabic poetry.

How was he raised in an underdeveloped environment? How could he overcome the obstacles confront his Birth There is a discrepancy among historians in identifying Al-Baṣīr's exact date of birth. Some of them said that he was born in 1905<sup>1</sup>. Others said that he was born in 1925<sup>2</sup>. But the actual truth can be taken from him personally. He told me once that he participated in the occasion of the Legislative National Assembly in 1938. He was then about seventeen or eighteen. In conclusion, this means that he was born in 1920. This date is the closest to reality for it is not accepted that he could participate in that political occasion as an orator, while he was younger than the mentioned age. It is not logical, on the other hand, that he

<sup>1</sup> Robert T. Campel, *A'lām al-adab al-'arabī al-mu'āṣir*, Beirut 1996, p. 335.

<sup>2</sup> Laylā Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ, *Udabā' wa-adībat al-Kuwayt*, Kuwait 1996, p. 54; Yūsuf as-Sālim, *Mu'ğam udabā' wa-šu'arā' al-Kuwayt*, An-Nağaf 1973, p. 40.

was born in 1925 to become an orator in the age of thirteen before his intellectual maturity, or his cultural and juristic study. On the other hand, he couldn't be in the age of thirty-three at the time of the occasion of the Assembly. So we can say that he was born exactly in 1920 in Šarq district in Kuwait city<sup>3</sup>.

### Childhood

'Abd ar-Razzāq al-Bašīr's life was not void of pain and shortages. Between the age of four and five, he was afflicted with variola<sup>4</sup> and this disease attacked him twice. Remarkably enough, he suffered from this disease and then dramatically his eyes were infected. This led to weaken his sight to fade away gradually and ultimately, caused him to become blind. His sons had told that he was, for some time, able to recognize colors if he brought them closer to his eyes. Later on he couldn't do that any more. Vaccination against this disease was known at that time. Unfortunately, one of those who were called Shiekhs gave an advice to the father not to vaccinate his son on the pretext that it was God's Decree. Consequently, 'Abd ar-Razzāq lost his sight and suffered from pain and grieves.

### Boyhood

The deceased 'Abd ar-Razzāq was in his boyhood stubborn and full of activity. He liked to play with his mates in his district. The father had a great fear that his son could fall in a trouble, which might cause him pain. Since he was a blind boy, his father used to prevent him from playing. But 'Abd ar-Razzāq did not respond<sup>5</sup>. He used to climb the lotus jujube tree to have the fruits having no fear that he could fell. He was also not afraid of the tree thorns. He knew how to recognize the good and the ripe Fruits to fill his pocket with these fruits and come down. How could he recognize the ripe fruit despite his blindness? It was his insight and intelligence that led him in

<sup>3</sup> I have made interviews with his family; his brother Šāliḥ, his son 'Adnān al-Bašīr, 'Išām al-Bašīr, and his daughter Su'ād al-Bašīr. I met also his nephew 'Alī and I get a lot of information about 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Bašīr.

<sup>4</sup> Ḥālīd Su'ūd az-Zayd, *Udabā' al-Kuwayt fī qarnayn*, Kuwait 1981, vol. 2, p. 311.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

his playing and fiddling around. So it is not a surprise that he challenged his blindness and played with his mates almost all of their games. He didn't care about his blindness. He didn't confess that he was a blind. So the games of his mates were his own games too.

'Abd ar-Razzāq, the boy, was full of going and liked to play a lot especially with those who gave him cleverness. He fixed in his mind all of the lanes and streets of Kuwait city where he used to go shopping alone depending on no one to lead him. Moreover, he used to buy whatever he wanted depending on his own sense and insight; depending on touching instead of seeing.

### Learning

'Abd ar-Razzāq's father sent his son to study in one of the primary schools known at that time. A woman teacher called Ṣalḥa aš-Šimālī led the school. The pupils were males and females. 'Abd ar-Razzāq stayed there until he mastered reading and memorizing the Holy Qur'ān. He learned also a little bit of biography of the Prophet Muḥammad. He was nine years old at that time. He was noticed by one of the religious scholars Mirzā 'Alī, who taught him jurisprudence, language, history, and philosophy. Al-Baṣīr became later a religious judge and continued working as a judge for seventeen years. He was a friend of Ğa'far, Mirzā 'Alī's son, who started reading books of language and literature for him. Al-Baṣīr found himself feeling a great leaning towards literature: spending a lot of his time with Ğa'far listening to him reading the Egyptian magazine called "Ar-Risāla". It is worth mentioning here that, Ğa'far read to him many books of the Arabic literature. In a later time, he depended on his nephew Ali, who was studying at the primary school when he started reading and writing for his uncle Al-Baṣīr. The beginning was in 1940's till 1955. Despite of the boy's poor reading, Al-Baṣīr continued listening to him, correcting him many times and tapping his shoulder on each mistake. Ali still recognizes the favor of his uncle in training and guiding him to obtain a good ability in reading and writing. Al-Baṣīr left Kuwait heading to Iraq where he studied language and literature. He met many scholars and students in Karbalā'. Then, in 1955<sup>6</sup>, Al-Baṣīr obtained a hand-written certificate signed by the Iraqi education director testifying that Al-Baṣīr passed all the determined tests. Later on, he

<sup>6</sup> There is a copy of this certificate (attached). His sons found it after his death.

studied also journalism in the Institut of Egyptian Journalism and got the diploma in 1958.

### Youth

Al-Başīr's youth was different from any other young man at that time. He was full of activity, movement, and enthusiasm for change. So it was a matter of course for him to be an orator before the supporters of the Legislative National Assembly in 1938. When the Assembly broke down, Al-Başīr fled to Al-Aḥsā' in Saudi Arabia. Then, he went to Bahrain where he spent more than six months there, and returned to Kuwait eventually. Those who involved in the problem of the Assembly were granted a forgiving by his highness Sheikh Aḥmad al-Ġābir aṣ-Ṣabāḥ. Al-Başīr was an enthusiastic nationalist. He joined the Kuwaiti Cultural Nationalist Club in 1952, where he started writing in the club journals, like "Al-Īmān" and "Ṣadā al-Īmān" magazines in addition to "Al-Īmān Complement"<sup>7</sup>. He felt that his blindness was an obstacle limiting his success; so he tried to commit suicide: he went up to the roof of his house to jump down but he abandoned the idea saying to him that if he didn't die, he would remain with cripple beside his blindness and he would suffer the worst situation. He was encouraged when his brother Ṣāliḥ told him that Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn, the great Arab writer, was blind. That is why he used to admire Ṭāḥā's writings that much so he restored his hope again and started writing with kinds of social, educational and ideological ways of life<sup>8</sup>.

### Marriage

Al-Başīr married twice: the first one was at the beginning of 1940s where he was about 22 years old and got a daughter from his wife. But this marriage didn't last but five or six years and before he divorces the first wife, he got married to his second wife Umm 'Adnān, who stayed with him till the end of his life. He got from his second marriage his son 'Adnān (born in 1957), and 'Iṣām (born in 1961) as well as he got five daughters. So his offspring was two sons and six daughters. This leads us to talk about his life with his family

<sup>7</sup> Ṭālib ar-Rifā'ī, Al-Başīr wa-tanwīr, "Ālam al-Fikr", vol. 28, No.1, July-September 1999, p.149.

<sup>8</sup> This what I was told by Ṣāliḥ, Al-Başīr's brother.

and the question is: How was his life with his daughters and sons? Once upon a time, one of his sons told me that they used to hold a great respect for their father; they used to love him so much. He was very kind to his family in the sense that, he established a good friendship with them.

He was very happy and participated in the wedding parties when all of his sons and daughters grew up and got married. His happiness was very great when he got his grandsons for he used to play with them and talk the childish way. It was notable that he used to love his daughters more than his sons; but on the other hand, he was equal and just with all of them males or females<sup>9</sup>. As a matter of fact, he was a good reference for his children when they were studying at school by helping them in the lessons of Arabic, religion, and history. Actually, he used to answer their questions, explaining the difficult things, spending a long time and encouraging each one of them to choose the fields of study they liked.

### Job

Al-Baṣīr's career life started when working as a personal status judge. Then, he worked as a marriage official until 1954<sup>10</sup> and during this period of time, he worked also as a preacher in the religious meetings (ḥusayniyyāt). He engaged in this work because of his religious education. Because he liked the language and literature, he left his work in the ḥusayniyyāt, which was depending on annual occasions ('Āšūrā'), but never stopped going there and listening to other preachers. Then Al-Baṣīr chose the official employment, where he worked as a secretary general of the library of the Ministry of Information. He organized and coordinated the library bringing precious books including the banned ones in Kuwait; he included these books in the library of the Ministry of Information. He was appointed there after Ḥālīd al-Mas'ūd al-Fuḥayd had recommended him in front of Shaykh Ṣabāḥ al-Aḥmad, the director of the printing and distribution department.

Moreover, he was an effective member in the Culture Committee, which manages editing and printing the Islamic Arabic culture books. He was a member in the High Committee for Book Censorship. Having his own ideas and philosophy in the way of censorship, he wanted to establish a complete course for it. He wanted to judge the ideology not the way adopted by the

<sup>9</sup> This what I have known from him personally and then from his sons especially his daughter Su'ād.

<sup>10</sup> Laylā Muḥammad Ṣālīḥ, op. cit., p. 54.

writer to present his ideas. Many times he didn't agree with some of the committee members due to their narrow-mindedness. He didn't reject the idea of censorship. But this should be responsible, and open-minded. We shouldn't close our minds under the pretext of protecting virtue or traditions.

### **His contributions**

He started his interests in the national and educational work since his early days. He engaged the National Community, which supported the Legislative National Assembly in 1938. He was an orator influencing his listeners and making them respond to his ideas supporting the Assembly. But later on, he considered himself at that time too rash, so he became more grave and wise in dealing with such important issue.

In 1952 Al-Baṣīr engaged the National Educational Club. This club used to ask for establishing a modern, civilized and national country. He was enthusiastic to the idea and he used to attend all the club meetings. He participated in the releases of the club ("Al-Īmān", "Ṣadā al-Īmān", and "Al-Īmān Complement"). His essays were as a positive factor in stabling the basis of the educational club. On the other hand, his essays were against the narrow-minded people and who wanted the society to adhere to the past and refused every thing new. He was one of the founder of the Writers League in Kuwait in 1958. Then he became a member in the administrative board since 1967 until 1980. He decided to leave the administrative work in the league to devote himself to his readings and writings. In the same time, he always used to attend the league to share his ideas through his interference and comments. Simply speaking, Al-Baṣīr participated in all the fields of Kuwaiti life in the sense that he was a member in the consultant board in the Ministry of Information and he also engaged the National Council for Culture Arts and Letters. In other words we can say that, Al-Baṣīr participated in every occasion whether it was social or educational<sup>11</sup>. He dealt with the television, radio and journalism offering his contributions.

There were a lot of interviews and discussions broadcasted through Kuwait radio and television with varied topics and discussions about literature, history, national and religious occasions. He was all the time looking forward to see his country as one of the most developed and modern countries in the world, for which he insisted on attending each occasion

<sup>11</sup> Ṭālib ar-Rifā'ī, op. cit., p.149.

considering them as a part of his own life. Once he was in London receiving medical care, a conference was held in Kuwait to discuss "Mr. Al-Baṣīr and Enlightenment" as part of the Sixth Grain Festival activities. Dr. Muḥammad Ḥasan 'Abd Allāh noted: "it something strange not to have Mr. Al-Baṣīr among them that meeting."<sup>12</sup>

He was invited by all societies and institutions to participate in their lectures, meetings and national or social occasions. He used to accept all these invitations. He was invited by the Socialists League and was honored as one of the pioneering social personalities in Kuwait. Due to his strong support to the Kuwaiti women political rights, he was also invited by the Women Educational League. Moreover, the faculty of arts represented by Arabic Department invited Mr. Al-Baṣīr to honor him in a celebration held especially for him in 1998.<sup>13</sup>

#### Education

Al-Baṣīr started educating himself when he finished studying language and jurisprudence, he moved to concentrate on literature and language studies. We mentioned earlier that he accompanied Ġa'far, Mirzā 'Alī's son who read for him all kinds of books he wanted. Since Al-Baṣīr had the same situation of blindness like Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, he was greatly influenced by his book *Al-Ayyām* (The Days) in which the writer talked about his own story. Al-Baṣīr said: "this book was the lost golden key for me. It has opened the doors of knowledge and learning for me. Before I read the book, I was thinking that a blind man could not participate in the literary field or in the common life. But after reading this book, I found that the doors of life were

<sup>12</sup> A lecture about Al-Baṣīr & Tanweer it was held on 14/11/1999. It was one of the activities of "Grain Festival the Sixth" The people who participated in this lecture: Dr. Muḥammad Ḥasan 'Abd Allāh, Dr. Sulaymān aṣ-Ṣattī. They were introduced by 'Abd al-'Azīz as-Sarawī, the secretary general of the Socialists League. Dr. Muḥammad Ġanīm ar-Rumayḥī, secretary general of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, talked in this lecture also. A group of Al-Baṣīr's students and colleagues attended the ceremony.

<sup>13</sup> The Arabic Department in the Faculty of Arts held an Honoring Party under the name of "Yawm al-Adīb al-Kuwaytī" on November 1998. Dr. Su'ād 'Abd al-Wahhāb, the Head of Arabic Department, and Dr. Nasima al-Ġayṭ who suggested this honoring party. Another group of the teaching staff in the Arabic Department, and a group of students in the Department speak also in the party. He was granted a Commemorative certificate.



opened to me. It is one of the most important books, which influenced me for it helped me in changing my social behaviors, and my literary learnings. Moreover, I have witched form reading and writing the rhymed prose to the free literary writings".<sup>14</sup>

That book was the reason behind the strong friendship between Al-Baṣīr and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn. So we find that Ṭ. Ḥusayn nominated Al-Baṣīr to be a correspondent member for the Arabic Language Society in Cairo in 1968. Al-Baṣīr was the first Kuwaiti who occupied such a position and was very glad with this nomination. He started attending all conferences and meetings of the Society, besides his linguistic studies and his participation in the activities of the Society.

Books played an important role in Al-Baṣīr's life. Books were a kind of feeding source for his mind and soul. Once, his eldest son asked him: 'Would we take away from you all your merits and good fame, and give you back your sight?' Al-Baṣīr said: 'No.'

It is worth nothing here that, Al-Baṣīr read all the books of Dr. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and discussed him about most of them. Taha liked his meetings with Al-Baṣīr. So he used to ask every body to leave while he was with Al-Baṣīr. In this sense, we can say that Al-Baṣīr was a good reader, where he used to read for many hours from 9 a.m. to 1 pm and from 5 pm to 8 pm. Furthermore, he didn't get tired or bored from listening to his reader. In the same context, he used to ask his reader to write some notes or cornments on some chapters and paragraphs. His library was consisted of about six thousands books. Al-Baṣīr remarked most of these books with some comments.

Al-Baṣīr memorized a lot of poems from old poets. He liked Al-Mutanabbī, Aṣ-Ṣarīf ar-Raḍī, Ibn ar-Rūmī and many others. He used to read and memorize to poems of Al-Ġawāhirī, Aḥmad Ṣawqī and many other contemporary poets. He used to repeat the verses until he could memorize it. Sometimes he used to record the poem on a cassette and listen to it many times. One day his brother Ṣāliḥ examined his memory by reading a long poem for him. When he had finished, Al-Baṣīr could repeat about 40 to 50% of the poem.

Al-Baṣīr was very fond of books and insisted all the time to have somebody to read for him. Even in his last illness he used to read and write. If a new book was published, it will be his great pleasure to have that book in his library. One of his friends told him once that there was a new edition for

<sup>14</sup> Laylā Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ, op. cit., p. 55.

the book of History of Damascus by Ibn 'Asākir. He asked him how many volumes was the book? His friend answered it was 70 volumes. Al-Baṣīr felt sorry that he couldn't have a space to include this book in his library. So he used to go to his friend to read for him some chapters from that book.

### His Traveling

Knowledge for Al-Baṣīr was of two parts. One of them could be obtained from reading. While traveling and visiting many places and countries around the world it could do the second one. So he liked traveling so much and visited most of the European countries like Great Britain, Germany, Spain, Italy, Poland, France, Hungary and others. Also, he visited most of the Arab countries like Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and other.

His civilized interests astonished people around him. If he would visit a country, he persisted on visiting its old places, and historical and art museums. He used to stand before the big statues in Italy, and admired the volume of these statues. Once his son asked him: How you know that statue is a big one? Al-Baṣīr answered 'It is my inner feeling'. Another time they entered a large hall in a museum, Al-Baṣīr expressed his surprise of the wideness of that hall. When he was asked how he knew that it was a big hall? He answered that, 'I knew that through the echo of sounds coming to my ears'.<sup>15</sup>

His feeling with places volumes, day, night, narrowness, and wideness was very high and strong, the matter which made this man earn the respect and trust of his family and friends. He didn't get his knowledge merely out of the books, but he received a lot of knowledge from his traveling. He was a man of human civilized interests and if he read about a civilization he used to check and look for the traces of civilizations when he visiting its country. When he visited Spain, he looked for the traces and influence of the great Arabic civilization there. Once, he stood before an old mosque, which was changed to be a church but still part of it as a mosque, where Muslims and Christians were performing their worships in the same place. Al-Baṣīr was very courageous. He wasn't afraid of entering the deserted places. Even some people who can see normally used to feel afraid and hesitate to go with him.

<sup>15</sup> During one of the interviews made with Al-Baṣīr's family. These were the words of his daughter Su'ād.

Al-Baṣīr made a lot of use from his travelling. In the same time, he was himself a source of Knowledge for his family and for others. He devoted his pen to shed light on many topics related to the causes for development and civilization.

### His patriotism

Al-Baṣīr had a great feeling of patriotism for loving his country very much, and was sincere in his love for his homeland. He looked forward, all the time, to see his country one of the most developed countries in the world. He was a strong defender for his homeland.

He did not believe when the neighboring country, Iraq, attacked his country on Thursday 2nd of August in 1990, where Ṣaddām Ḥusayn's troops launched their attack on Kuwait. In the dramatic scene, people started leaving Kuwait in a very hot weather. Many of them headed towards Saudi Arabia. But Al-Baṣīr refused to leave his country. He said "it is my country, I will not leave it". He knew the Iraqi press attaché at Iraqi embassy in Kuwait. The press attache visited Al-Baṣīr with two persons from the Iraqi intelligence agency and asked him to appear on the Iraqi TV to declare that he welcomes the Iraqi invasion to Kuwait. He rejected them by pretending that he was not feeling well, and he couldn't do that. They didn't leave him in peace, but they came to him after a week, and repeated their demand. Al-Baṣīr pretended that he was very ill and he couldn't even to move. They left him saying "next time we'll take you by force." The Iraqis thought that they could make use of a great man like Al-Baṣīr in order to legalize their criminal invasion of Kuwait. But it was impossible for him to accept that. After a while the attackers came back while he was sleeping, and they entered his house and checked every room. Then they entered his room and kicked him out from his bed. They didn't have mercy on this old man and they were very rude and cruel. After this attempt he told his family that he would like to leave for Saudi Arabia, but it was too late for him to depart Kuwait. Al-Baṣīr didn't reveal the Iraqis' threat to him at that time. But after the liberation of Kuwait he did. He was very happy on the day of liberation of Kuwait on 26s' of February 1991. He celebrated with his people and tears of rejoice running on his cheeks.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Kārin Dādir, Nāṣir al-Ġawāhirī, Mu'ğam al-udabā' dawī al-āḥāt, Beirut, n.d., p. 197.

This occasion demonstrates the great measure of psychological pain, which inflicted Al-Bašīr because of that criminal oppressive attack on his country. He felt with hatred towards the Iraqis and their crime burned his sympathetic emotion towards the Iraqis. He also turned against all those Arab writers who supported the Iraqis. He said, "it was my great sorrow to hear that there were some Arab writers who supported the ugliness and rudeness of Iraq against Kuwait. I thought that they were holding honest consciences, but they were not." He added saying "the crisis which happened to Kuwait turned up down all my ideas. I believe that there were a lot of my colleagues who dreamed of the unity of this Arab nations who suffered the same thing with me. We devoted all our abilities writing for 50 years to support the Arab Nation unity but every thing was broken and destroyed."<sup>17</sup>

#### Al-Bašīr's Arabism

He was very enthusiastic to the Arabs defending all Arabs cases. He used to say "I am personally an Arab fan all in all in blood and flesh."<sup>18</sup> So, he used all the time to encourage people to talk the standard Arab language. But he couldn't hide his discontent with some Arabic behaviors. He was still thinking that there was a certain mistake in the case of the Arabic nationalism but He didn't call to abandon it.<sup>19</sup> However, we were shocked with a very deep wound, we have to renew ourselves.

'Abd ar-Raḥmān aš-Šayḥ said about Al-Bašīr: "there was a basic idea which he couldn't let go. It is the idea of Arabism. In 40 essays he couldn't abandon the idea of Arabism writing under the effect of this idea all the times."<sup>20</sup> The idea of the Arabic Nation Unity was overwhelming most of his essays. In 1950s and 1960s Ġamāl 'Abd an-Nāšīr represented the Arabic dream of Unity. So Al-Bašīr was very sad when 'Abd an-Nāšīr died that he cried a lot. Ḥālīd Su'ūd az-Zayd said "I will not forget when we were in front of 'Abd an-Nāšīr tomb and Al-Bašīr broke down crying, he throw his body

<sup>17</sup> Ḥālīd Su'ūd az-Zaid, op. cit., volume 2, p. 312.

<sup>18</sup> "Al-Bi'ta" Vol. 6, p. 296. It was issued again by Kuwait Researches and Studies Center in 1997.

<sup>19</sup> 'Abd ar-Razzāq al-Bašīr, Al-Ġarīma al-kubrā fi Al-Kuwayt wa-Amanat al-Qalam, Kuwait 1995, p. 75.

<sup>20</sup> 'Abd ar-Razzāq al-Bašīr, ibid., p. 32.

on the tomb as if he was embracing the tomb. None of the guards tried to bother him in that situation”.<sup>21</sup>

Yes, ‘Abd ar-Razzāq al-Baṣīr was Arabism lover who loves its symbols such as language, history, and its humanitarian symbols. He was not used to hide behind some words to conceal something in his chest, but he was very frank in loving Arabs and Arabism as he is the pure Arabian who is loyal to them. He wanted those Arabs circumstances to change to the best and in his essays, he was contributing to that approach ... but winds run.

### The beginning of writing essays

Al-Baṣīr started his experience in writing the journal essay when he was 20 years old with an essay published in “Al-Baḥrayn” Magazine. The editor of this magazine was ‘Abd Allāh az-Zayid and it was then 1941<sup>22</sup>, when a literary controversy launched between Mubārak and Aḥmad Amīn, Al-Baṣīr wrote an essay supporting Mubārak. This essay had a wide effect in the literary circles. Some writers agreed with Al-Baṣīr, and others disagreed with him. ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Ruzbah, a Bahraini writer, agreed with him, and he himself called ‘Abd ar-Razzāq Ibrāhīm “Al-Baṣīr” (The Insider). Our writer liked this nickname and began to write under this nickname.<sup>23</sup>

It is worth noting here that, Al-Baṣīr wrote all the time in “Al-Baḥrayn” Magazine. He was one of the first pioneering writers in Bahrain journalism. So the writers of Bahrain, as colleagues of ‘Abd Allāh az-Zayid, honored him in 1997.

When “Al-Bi‘ṭa” magazine was issued in 1946 from Cairo, Al-Baṣīr started corresponding this magazine. Needless to mention that some Kuwaiti people studying in Egypt issued it. Most of “Al-Bi‘ṭa” volumes were including Al-Baṣīr’s writings.

It was the first Kuwaiti magazine he wrote in. As a matter of fact, in one of his essays in this magazine, he blamed the education department for not teaching the poems of Kuwaiti poets<sup>24</sup>. Discussing with a writer Ḥāmid ‘Abd as-Salām who claimed that publishing the Kuwaiti poems was only depending on transforming. Al-Baṣīr showed this claim was not true saying that Kuwaiti poems were published in some magazines. This means that he

<sup>21</sup> ‘Abd ar-Razzāq al-Baṣīr, *ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>22</sup> “Al-Anbā’”, No. 7181, 14/May/1996.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān aš-Šaykh, *Adab ‘Abd ar-Razzāq al-Baṣīr*, Kuwait 1975.

<sup>24</sup> Ḥālid Su‘ūd az-Zayd, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 311.

follows the publishing of Kuwaiti poems. ‘Abd ar-Razzāq was an example of well understanding writer in the sense that he was considering literature as means to help and serve the community. He didn’t believe in the aim of literature, or the fighting for time. He believed that time is so precious. Thus, we can see him declaring in his essays in “Al-Bi‘ṭa” magazine, that "literature must have a social aim, artistic or historical, otherwise, I consider that devoting time for those novels is merely a waste of time"<sup>25</sup>. This is literature for Al-Baṣīr: a commitment and a promise to the society to develop it and any kind of literature away from this range is not considered by Al-Baṣīr as a real literature but nothingness and absurdity which have no benefit or use. This is the way Al-Baṣīr adopted and he never got away from this way for over than 50 years long.

The reader of Al-Baṣīr’s essays in “Al-Bi‘ṭa” magazine, notices two approaches in his writing: firstly, his very much concern in education comparing the new method of teaching with the old one. Also, he was evoking to give much efforts to develop education and he asked to spread education and teaching. He, furthermore, criticized the shortcomings of the education system. Secondly, we can notice his so much concern in Arabic literature in general including the local literature. And that is why we can see him accompanying Fahd al-‘Askar, ‘Abd al-Muḥsin ar-Ruṣayd and others from the educated poets.

In one of his essays about education which was published in “Al-Bi‘ṭa” magazine he says: “The Ministry of Education is giving so much efforts to spread teaching, and to get rid of illiteracy. The Kuwaitis are so rushing to get the knowledge for when you get a school built you can hardly find a place for more students. But, this keen of Kuwaitis and these efforts of the Ministry can’t achieve for us what we want of real renaissance for the Arab land.”<sup>26</sup>

As you see here, though Al-Baṣīr, admitted of the prosperity and the development which was taking place in the 1940s, but still, he was asking for more interest: “Many people are giving up reading when they finish school as if they have got everything and they quite reading and the evidence is clear where they don’t like to read science or literal magazines. And if you have got the chance to get into one of the rich people—and how many they are—you can hardly see a bookcase, which clearly gives you the impression how much they are not interested in their food for thought<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Ṭālib ar-Rifā‘ī, op. cit., p. 153.

<sup>26</sup> Laylā Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>27</sup> “Al-Bi‘ṭa”, vol. 6, p. 111.

Despite of his much interest in reading, he didn't keep some of the jokes which he had and one of which when he says "one of the funniest things ever happened to me was that someone was reading for me a book called Ma'a Al-Mutanabbī and all of a sudden a name of Al-Farazdaq occurred and that reader asked me where is this city situated? And I told him laughing much, it is situated on the coast of the Mediterranean and the reader did believe him, and he said then that this story is real and true and it is not in any way fake or imaginative." Then Al-Baṣīr goes on evoking people to read and make people devote time for reading: he was not asking to devote the whole day for reading but to have time whatsoever for reading. In other words, Al-Baṣīr needed us to make knowledge to be our first concern and we can achieve that by reading for, as long as, people have the tools of reading and they have enough time to read. And that is why we see the great poet: Fahd al-Askar is calling Al-Baṣīr as a scientist.

The second orientation of Al-Baṣīr's essays is his much concern in literature: literal critics and descriptive studies, which show clearly his love for literature especially the Arabic poetry. Thus we can see him adding some poems to his essays, which shows clearly his good memorizing of many poems for many poets, which enabled him to use in different fields. He has memorized the long poems in early years of his childhood. He has mentioned in one of the interviews that a man called Mullā Ya'qūb has helped him to memorize thousands of poems to be used in the Hussainiyya meetings and he thanked that man for this favor. So, we can see him adding some different kinds of poems to his essays.

Al-Baṣīr was so fond of modernization since his teacher Mirzā 'Alī had taught him jurisprudence and language: the well educated man in language and the Islamic literature. He loved modernization in language and literature since he was accompanying Mirzā's son: Ğa'far who read for him the Arabic literature. He, also, loved the new tone in Fahd al-'Askar's poetry. Furthermore, he was testing every new thing to know how serious is that kind of technique or to know whether that can serve the oriented literature, and that can be really presented in his essay called *Between the Eastern and the Western Literatures* where he says "since I was young I loved literature, and I was so much fond of it. I liked all fields of literature, but these kind which people run after, and I know the western translated novels which spread so much in the sense that once these novels get in the mail you can find that all about these novels and you see people come to read them. And they go and devote the time to finish them completely. And I criticized my friends, when I see them involved and devoted to this kind of literature and they never listened to me."

This is Al-Baṣīr's point of view of the western novels and he considers them as useless, or at least one of the many kinds brought from the west. And what can he do, and his friends are running after these kind of literatures. Did he stand as an enemy of this kind, and he was so much fond of modernism: he says "it is better for me to read these novels so I can get why others are so much keen to read them, and he did read the western novels, and he has got, what he wanted to get, and he gave himself to these novels when he finished reading he didn't get any kind of catharsis so he came up with the following verdict: this is the simple issue that might face you in the western novels, the imagination and the ability can't be seen in our writers' novels and stories but in the same time we do admit that they have got a good well built style and the smoothness of their structures, but it seems that the western writers are more able in this kind of writing."

Al-Baṣīr was so fair and so he did appreciate the literature and the artists when he says something about one of the arts. Isn't that the scientific and the academic way for criticism? That is to read the text, and then to give your own comment for, or against it. That is what Al-Baṣīr did despite the fact that he didn't study in any university and he didn't indulge in any of the new critical isms, but his sense, and taste and his own jealousy for literature opened for him the scope of knowledge to get as much as he can which, in turn, pioneered him as a great critic in the Gulf.

Al-Baṣīr was so fond of learning to get knowledge. Moreover, he was revoking others to get that knowledge, and to learn from all the accessible sources of knowledge. He has done his best to get every mean by means of which he can get more knowledge and he mentions once in one of the interviews that he and his friend Ġa'far where they both bought an Encyclopedia and when they went home they sat reading about 20 hours and they didn't feel time passing for they were so much fond of reading and because Al-Baṣīr was sitting with great men and poets like sheikh Yūsuf Ibn 'Īsā al-Qinā'ī, ṣayḥ Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ at-Tikrītī, the poet Fahd al-'Askar, the poet and the writer Fāḍil Ḥalaf, the poet 'Abd al-Muḥsin ar-Ruṣayd and others from his own generation of educators.

#### Al-Baṣīr through modern journalism

While the journalism in the 1940s was in its starting points, it was having so much development in the 1950s where many strides were taking place in the sense that the newspaper was issuing monthly became to be issued



weekly. The dramatic movement was also taken place in the style of writings moving from the simplistic viewpoint into a journalism of good strong, and well built style which in turn changed to become as independence journalism, and this change and development were the outcome of the margin of freedom and the artists who find the journal writing as a change and a sign of the development, which Kuwait was witnessing at that period where many of the educators and artists returned back to the homeland to contribute with others to the journalism movement.

Al-Baṣīr was present in this great development in the Kuwaiti journalism for he had prepared himself, and read a lot, and what he has ability of objective analysis with his ability to criticize and his quick reaction with events. So, he had written social, literal, and political essays, and he didn't give up writing since the 1940s till his death. Where the magazine of "Ar-Rā'id" issued by the teachers club, "Al-Īmān" magazine the spokesman of the national cultural club, "Aš-Ša'b" and "Al-'Arabī" magazine all of them do witness the contributions of Al-Baṣīr in all their activities and essays, and that is why he was well known in the journal and the literal community.

It is supposed that Al-Baṣīr was writing an essay each week in one of the Kuwaiti newspapers in the 1950s before the government closed them, and these newspapers were issued non-regularly in that period and this means that he wrote for nine or ten years, therefore that he has written about 500 essays. If we add the journals of the 1960s which have started in 1961, where Al-Baṣīr was a regular writer for about 2 essays each week, so the number increased and multiplied to be about 1000 essays, and if we add his writing of the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s till his death. his last essay published two weeks before his death that is 20th of March 1999, and his death was on the 5th of April 1999, hence Al-Baṣīr has about 4000-5000 essays in the Kuwaiti journals and the Arabic ones too. Therefore, we can evaluate and appreciate the importance of these essays, the topics, and this great thought, which could get all the local, Arabic and international events taking place at his time.

The Arabs knew Al-Baṣīr from his journal writings, and he had mailed a lot of essays to Arabian magazines and newspapers in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Arabic Gulf states. He was known from Bahrain where he started his career life in the 1940s, and he joined Zakī Mubārak against Aḥmad Amīn. Then, his correspondence to the magazine of "Ar-Risāla" issued by Aḥmad Ḥasan az-Zayyāt, and other Arabic magazines. The reader of Al-Baṣīr essays felt that he is a great man, and his wide scope of the topic, he is talking about, his knowledge, his memorizing of many great poems, where he used

to decorate his essays, and that is why we see many Arabic journalists and artists appreciate and evaluate, the man, so much, and that is why they invited him to write in their magazines and newspapers.

He wrote for “Al-Waṭan” weekly but he moved to write for “Al-Qabas” about two essays in week. Al-Baṣīr wrote also for “Al-Hadaf” magazine. Moreover he corresponded the Middle East, “Al-Ahrām al-Adabī”, “Al-Mağalla” magazine and other Arab magazines.

Who is ‘Abd ar-Razzāq al-Baṣīr? And how other writers and artists look at him? What do the men’s books and essays talk about him? Wasn’t Al-Baṣīr who seeks sympathy from other writers to talk about him. He is a man who wrote since 1941 till his death, and that he wrote for more than half a century, What field of writings did he write?

He wrote in history, literature, politics, philosophy, art, education, religion, and civilization<sup>28</sup>. we don’t get amazed if he did write in these fields because, he as someone says about him, “he is a man of deep thought. So well built in style, with attractive structure. Where he can get that sights which confirm the historical unity of humanity.” Thus, we are in front of a great artist, so distinguished in his activities in criticism, who had his own frank views in the contemporary thought”. That is what ‘Abd Allāh Aḥmad aš-Šabbāt wrote about him, he is a Saudi Arabian. Also, let us read what Muḥammad Ḥasan ‘Abd Allāh—the Egyptian professor wrote about him “he is the most productive essay-writer in Kuwait and he didn’t miss any event, and get his pen ready to react, and this quantity of essays was accompanied with his variety in writing for he had participated in almost every field of art written about in Kuwait.”<sup>29</sup>

The Bahraini thinker Prof. Muḥammad Ġābir al-Anṣārī wrote about him: “I have discovered in him a writer of so much clear thought, with spontaneous style together with his excellency of his opened mentality towards humanity, original Arabic, so tending towards development, and scientific courses with the philosophical analysis and examination.”<sup>30</sup> Al-Anṣārī wrote these words in his introduction to the book written by Al-Baṣīr in 1975. The book was called *Contemplations in Life and Literature*. It was noticed from the descriptions of Al-Baṣīr’s writings, that he was receiving a good deal of respect from the writers and artists. They admired his way of thinking and the high level of his education as pointed out from his cultural and scientific dimension.

<sup>28</sup> “Al-Bi‘ta”, vol. 1, p. 107.

<sup>29</sup> “Al-Bi‘ta”, vol. 5, p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> “Al-Bi‘ta”.

His friend ‘Abd Allāh Zakariyā al-Anṣārī said about Al-Baṣīr “that he had left a praised bibliography, a good memorial and many wonderful of figures of speech, that were the outcome of his artistic ability. He left also a good saying, rhetoric semantics connotations where he mastered the literal, political and social life. He wrote, taught, and offered the best for his country, and his nation as the best sincere and devoted man.”<sup>31</sup> Sa‘īd Farḥat, the Lebanese writer and critic said about Al-Baṣīr: “Mr. Al-Baṣīr, the secretary general of the Ministry of Information Library, the correspondence of the Arabic Language League in Cairo, the writer who coped with the cultural and literal renaissance in Kuwait and Arabic Gulf since its initials by his writings and essays since 1940s which dealt with different issues in the literal and ideological areas. His contributions were clear in these two areas among the cultural activities.”<sup>32</sup>

Al-Baṣīr occupied a wide space with his writings and essays in the Gulf area for more than half a century. He was an example of the committed writer of his nation interests, where he called people for freedom and peace. He dealt with the events analyzing the incidents of his country and the Arab World, and he got his own critic views of so much value where the official men hurried to react and answer his writings.

### Conclusion

That was how Al-Baṣīr was struggling against life, overcame obstacles and found in education the mean that restore him vision, and in press he found the mean that transmitted his ideas and opinions, so he started as a correspondent for Arabic magazines to end at the biggest writers of Kuwait and Arabian Gulf. He started in “Al-Bahrain” Magazine in the 1940s to reach writing in the biggest Arabian magazines. Was blindness a challenging mean in front of Al-Baṣīr? Or the openness of his mind towards culture and science had helped him to overcome humble education obstacle? Or is the aid he received from his teachers? Or are all these factors had determined Al-Baṣīr cultural path and made him to be outstanding as a significant writer at cultural field.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Abd Allāh Aḥmad aš-Šabbāt, *Udabā’* from the Arabian Gulf, Khubar, Saudi Arabia 1986, p. 139.

<sup>32</sup> Muḥammad Ḥasan ‘Abd Allāh, *Al-Ḥaraka al-adabiyya fī al-Kuwait*, Kuwait, n.d., p. 386.

We need to study again the impact of Al-Baṣīr, as we may discover out from what he had left, some information that could be useful for us to know how he had been outstanding in press field and why had selected as a mean for transmitting his ideas and opinions? As in some of his writings, what is pointing to that he was, grieving that he lost his eyes, and his old education. Another writings point to that he had received support from his friends and relatives, which helped him to cross some of problems he faced.