

Socio-Humanistic Perspectives Of Najib Mahfouz

Arshad Laskar

Research Scholar, Department of Arabic, Gauhati University, Assam

Abstract:

Najib Mahfouz was an Egyptian novelist who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1988. He composed 34 (Thirty four) novels, over 350 (Three Hundred Fifty) short stories, dozens of movie scripts and five plays over a 70 (Seventy) year career. He was a son of middle class merchant. Perhaps this is the reason for which the background of Najib Mahfouz's thoughts is bound by the middle class of Egyptian intellectuals with nationalism perspective, freedom and modernism, especially about women. Najib Mahfouz's concerns on women are a historical response to enlighten women by reviewing their functions and roles constituted in a cultural strategy. He questions again the existence of Egyptian women posed in his structured novel that illustrates the changes of three generations from the twentieth to the fortieth decades within the 20th century whose background is historical social structure. He describes one new world perspective particularly in middle class women reflecting the Egyptian society. Historic, social, and political condition on women as being the background of a process of creating Najib Mahfouz as obviously seen in theme message and characterization in novel *al-Thulathiyah* is all about social chaos, politics and women's social transformation that occurred after Egypt received its independence and Egypt's revolution in 1919. These conditions affect society's dynamics reflecting the battle between Egyptian nationalism and colonizers, England and Turkey. In the other side, there is a dynamics in the way of thinking from the traditional groups that keep holding their past inheritance values to the modern groups tending to freedom and western life style. The Perspective of group world that ties the thoughts of Najib Mahfouz about women and historical, social and political conditions that has happened have influenced the structuring of *al-Thulathiyah* that is manipulated in a friction of social group perspective, that is, traditional perspective and modern perspective seen in the theme and characters. *Al-Thulathiyah* is considered as the peak of Najib Mahfouz's literary work in the era of realism that materially shows symmetric relationship between symbolism of textual internal structure aesthetics and Egyptian historical facts. This paper presents a description of a complete social condition as a synthesis from group world perspective and social classes in Egyptian history from its author's social environmental background.

Keywords: Najib Mahfouz, Humanism, Socio-cultural thoughts, Arabic novel, Egyptian society, etc.

Introduction:

Najib Mahfouz is considered one of the foremost writers in modern Arabic literature. Born in the al-Jamaliyya district of Cairo, Egypt, on December 11, 1911, he was the youngest of seven children and lived there until the age of six. He began his writing career at the age of 17 (Seventeen). After graduating in 1932, Najib Mahfouz worked in the administration of Cairo University from 1936 to 1939, then at the ministry of Waqf, devoting his time above all else to creative writing.

He published his first novel in 1939 entitled “The Games of Fate”, and since that date has written thirty-two novels and thirteen collections of short stories. In his old age he has maintained his prolific output, producing a novel every year. The novel genre, which can be traced back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe, has no prototypes in classical Arabic literature. Closely associated with the development of cinema IN Egypt and his own stories have been widely filmed, Najib Mahfouz has been the Director of Censorship for the Arts and Director for Cinema Affairs at the Ministry of Culture. He was with the literary section of *al-Ahram* (i.e. the popular newspaper of Egypt still today), the nation having bestowed on him its highest honors: The State Prize for Literature and The Collar of the Republic. Literary output of Najib Mahfouz consists eighteen novels and six collections of short stories (till 1967). He also wrote plays.

Through the fiction and writing of more than six decades, Najib Mahfouz has filed modern Egyptian history in a chronological order and has expressed the issues Like-morality, gender, inequality, social change, politics, class conflict, discrimination, exploitation, and oppression. Although Mahfouz's stories are basically set on Egyptian issues but his themes remain universal. For his productive efficiency as a writer, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1988. Mahfouz's experience of life enabled him to record and criticizes the social realities of his time. During his studies of philosophy and Arabic literature, Mahfouz was influenced by many prominent contemporary scholars during his study life such as TahaHussain, Abbas al-Akkad, and Salama Musa, Mahfouz had learned from them to believe in science and socialism. Salama Musa, the main counselor of Mahfouz was responsible for introducing him to Friedrich Nietzsche, Charles Darwin, and Karl Marx. Therefore, Salama Musa had the major influence on Mahfouz's thoughts regarding science and socialism. Mahfouz believes in freedom of expression as he states, “I defend both the freedom of expression and society's right to counter it. I must pay the price for differing. It is the natural way of things”.

Mahfouz’s novels are categorized in to three categories:

(1) Historical novels: They are *Abth al-Adar*, *Radubis*, and *KifahTiba*etc.

- (2) Social Realistic Novels: set in modern Egypt include of *al-Qahira al-Jadida*, *Khan al-Khalili*, *Zudaq al-Midaq*, *BidayawaNihaya*, *Bayna al-Qasrain*, *Qasr al-Shawq*, *al-Shukriya*etc.
- (3) Post realistic novels: starting with *AwladHarithna*, *al-Liswaa al Kilab*, followed by six short novels including *al-Sumanwa alKharif*, *Thartharatfawqa al-Nile* and *Miramar*.

His Books translated into English:

- Palace Walk (Book 1 of the Cairo Trilogy)(originally published in Arabic 1956)
- Palace of Desire (Book 2 of the Cairo Trilogy) (originally published in Arabic 1957)
- Sugar Street (originally published in Arabic 1957)
- Children of Gebelawi (originally published in Arabic 1959)
- The Beginning and the End (originally published in Arabic 1956)
- Adrift on the Nile (originally published in Arabic 1966)
- The Journey of IbnFattouma (originally published in Arabic 1983)
- Midaq Alley (originally published in Arabic 1947)
- The Harafish (originally published in Arabic 1977)
- The Beggar (originally published in Arabic 1965)
- The Thief and the Dogs (originally published in Arabic 1961)
- Autumn Quail (originally published in Arabic 1962)
- Wedding Song (originally published in Arabic 1981)
- The Search (originally published in Arabic 1964)
- Fountain and Tomb (originally published in Arabic 1975)
- Miramar (originally published in Arabic 1967)
- The Time and the Place and other stories

His Opinion on Human life:

Although Mahfouz's novelistic technique has passed, as we have seen, through recognizable stages, one cannot say the same about his world view, the main features of which can be traced back to his earliest works. Mahfouz appears indeed to have sorted out the main questions about life at an early juncture of his youth and to have held on the answers he arrived at ever since, age and experience serving only to deepen and broaden but hardly to modify them. A socio-political view of man's existence is at the very root of almost everything that Mahfouz has written. Even in a novel with a strong metaphysical purport like "Al-Tariq" (The Way), the social message is aptly woven into the texture of the work: man is not meant to spend his life on Earth in a futile search and his only true hope of salvation is the exertion of a positive and responsible effort to better his lot and that of others. That Mahfouz has always been a socially committed writer with a deep concern for the problem of social

injustice is an incontestable fact. To him individual morality is inseparable from social morality. In other words, according to Mahfouz's moral code, those who only seek their own individual salvation are damned; to him nirvana is, as it were, a distinctly collective state. On the other hand, characters who are saved in Mahfouz's work are only those with altruistic motives, those who show concern for others and demonstrate a kind of awareness of their particular predicament being part of a more general one.

How he portrayed the world:

The picture of the world as it emerges from the bulk of Mahfouz's work is very gloomy indeed, though not completely despondent. It shows that the author's social utopia is far from being realized. Mahfouz seems to conceive of time as a metaphysical force of oppression. His novels have consistently shown time as the bringer of change, and change as a very painful process, and very often time is not content until it has dealt his heroes the final blow of death. To sum up, in Mahfouz's dark tapestry of the world there are only two bright spots. These consist of man's continuing struggle for equality on the one hand and the promise of scientific progress on the other; meanwhile, life is a tragedy. Mahfouz creates an intricate pattern of verbal irony which he weaves into the very texture of the novel and maintains throughout. This pattern of verbal irony engenders in the reader an awareness of the incongruity between the object and mode of expression, i.e. the realistic situation and the hyperbolic terms in which it is rendered. This awareness creates and sustains, all the way through, a sense of dramatic irony where the reader is, as it were, cognizant of a basic fact of which the protagonist is ignorant, namely that his obsession has misguided him. It is in the creation and sustainment of this pattern of verbal irony, and in the complete subjugation of the novelistic experience to a language order originally alien to it, that Mahfouz has achieved a feat unprecedented not only in his own work but probably in Arabic fiction altogether. In awarding the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature to Najib Mahfouz, the Swedish Academy of Letters noted that "through works rich in nuance - now clear-sightedly realistic, now evocatively ambiguous - (Mahfouz) has formed an Arabic narrative art that applies to all mankind." Mahfouz is the author of more than thirty novels. "He is not only a Hugo and a Dickens, but also a Galsworthy, a Mann, a Zola and a Jules Romains." - Edward Said, London Review of Books.

His Socio-humanistic thoughts:

Najib Mahfouz, throughout his novels tried to analyze different behaviors and actions of human beings. He was also interested in the psychological impact of social changes on ordinary people. Mahfouz was influenced by socialist and democratic ideas throughout his works. Mahfouz contrasted between the merits and demerits of Islamic extremism in his first two novels, *Old Egypt* and *Whisper of Madness*.

According to Najib Mahfouz religion should be interpreted in an open manner. He further said that God did not intend religion to be an exercise club so far his philosophy was concerned; preaching needs a scholar and not an ordinary person. He was against all those who claimed to be Islamists while in fact they are a bunch of hypocrites whose goal is to serve their personal interests by taking Islam as a means to reach a political position. He harshly criticized radical Islam as expressed by Muslim Brotherhood. He strongly stated that of all the forces active in Egyptian politics during his youth, he most despised the Muslim Brotherhood.

He also elevated science and believed that it shouldn't conflict with values of religions. He thought that religion is the ultimate resort for people who have been exhausted by life. He assures the importance of religion but considered it potentially dangerous. He was appalled by the fact that people are easily moved by religion and deemed it as a point of sensitivity in Egypt. When drawing a character sketch, he had always focused on the social, financial, emotional physical status of a character rather than how strongly or poorly religious is the character.

Marriage is an important theme in Mahfouz's writings. He believed that a marriage is like a company with equal partners. No one rules. If there is a disagreement, the more intelligent of the two should override, however, each family is different. Often the power depends on money; whoever makes the most money has the most strength. To him there are no fixed rules in marriage relationships. In *Palace Walk*, written in 1956, one of the series of *Cairo Trilogy*, Mahfouz depicts the marriage relationship between Al-sayed Abdul Gawad and Amina as an unhealthy marriage. He described the man as a superior, tyrannical husband who rules the household using dictatorship. However, the woman is described as a conformist, obedient and an inferior wife that has no rights whatsoever. Her role is to be an object of pleasure, give birth and do the house work. This is a true representation of how men perceived women at that time.

The female characters are very significant in Mahfouz's novels. They were very effective and played a very important role in the stability of the novel. They were depicted in various ways. Sometimes the figure of the woman is the prostitute who seduces all men just to get money to be able to cover her family's expenses; this appeared clearly in both novels *The Thief and the Dogs* as well as *Miramar*. Woman is also portrayed in some of his novels as the kind, obedient, conformist, feeble and immature like in part-i of the *Cairo Trilogy*, *Palace Walk*. On the contrary, in some of his novels woman is a symbol of hope, freedom, intelligence and strength like in *Sugar Street* and *Miramar*. Each of his characters is significant and deeply complicated. They were all a true representation of society.

In his novel, Mahfouz portrays the hardship of the people. Writing from the deepness of his society, he talks to the socio-political horrible condition of his country. His novels are the place of effort whose main purpose is gender, class, and religion. His novels therefore depict the suffering and the struggle of the people in pre and post-Independent Egypt. Throughout Mahfouz's novels, there is a spreading sense of metaphor of a literary artist who is using his works to speak directly and cleanly to the condition of his country. His

work is motivated with love for Egypt and its people, but it is also completely honest and insensible. Mahfouz's contest and objection against social discrimination and injustice in his society has made his novels thoughts rotate around poverty, which has a forbearing impact on the aspects of gender. As a recognized socialist, Mahfouz appreciates Marxism's promise of social justice, its belief in science, and its extensive human vision. His chief character mostly suffers from poverty, the straightforward and most clear incident of class inequality. In the interface between the imperious protective system and the deprived figures, Mahfouz's novels pull up the ground the hidden politico-cultural layers in the Egyptian society.

The other important issue of Mahfouz's novels is the sex. In spite of the fact that sex is central issue in his novels, Mahfouz also paid attention on capitalism, patriarchy and women's oppression. Patriarchal Arab societies traditionally protect women and children in a method that denies even the possibility of autonomy for women. Mahfouz's novels are also focus the negative image of woman that shows her as sexually fallen or sexually deviate. A prostitute is an identity by which class and gender are critically assembled.

Mahfouz also depicts in his novels the relation between family and society. He criticizes the very bourgeois system, which works by depending the other in its andocentric realm. The correlative environment of class and gender can be researched at two levels; the individual and the public to separate between the dishonest positions of women in Arab society. Therefore the novels of Mahfouz focuses on the social as well as familial gender and class based controversy. Through the analysis, it will be explore the ways Mahfouz uses these two primary social forms in his novels in which oppression of gender and class are remain the most remarkable axes. Thus, the idea of gender and class are critically explored in his novel.

Conclusion:

Najib Mahfouz, the father of Arabic literature is one of those controversial authors-like Norman Mailer or Salman Rushdie- whose biography and political views sometimes overshadow his fiction. Although Mahfouz fills a decidedly smaller stage than Mailer or Rushdie, he dominates it far more thoroughly than does any novelist here. His comments are sought on a huge range of subjects, his life is the stuff of gossip sheets, his influence is felt from thinking to movie studios, and politicians dare not ignore his views. He was not only the Egypt's most popular writer but also the literary conscience of his country. While a lot of people did not approve of his personality and his daring opinions, at the same no one denied his genius works of art and he is considered a pride and a sense of reverence to people all over the world.

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