

A Study of Realistic Novels of Naguib Mahfouz with special focus on Cairo Modern

Dr. Arshad Laskar

Assistant Professor, Department of Arabic Lakhimpur College, Goalpara, Assam

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ABSTRACT

The realistic novels of Naguib Mahfouz deal with the socio-political and cultural aspects and issues. Naguib Mahfouz was a true nationalist as well as humanist of his time. Naguib Mahfouz, the Egyptian novelist who won the Nobel prize in Arabic literature in 1988. He is considered as the pioneer of the Arabic novel whose profession has almost brought the total collection of novelistic progress in the Arab world. Mahfouz expanded the dimension of his novel through the using of new and more suitable technique, and these are reflected in his novels. The Egyptian revolution was over by an atmosphere encouraging to original writing and the novel occupied a dignified position in literary circle. Many scholars in this field were influenced by the force of the times and integrated socio-political and cultural issues and their impact on Egyptian society. Naguib Mahfouz was a distinguished literary personality of Egypt. He made vital contribution and occupied high position in the field of modern Arabic literature through his valuable writings. More than 30 novels, about 350 short stories, more than 12 film scripts as well as some plays were written by Mahfouz. Here discussion has been made on his outstanding novel “*al-Qahira al-Jadida (Cairo Modern)*”.

Keywords: Naguib Mahfouz, Humanism, al-Qahira al-Jadida, Arabic novel, Egyptian Society, etc.

INTRODUCTION

The novel *Cairo Modern* comprises the different issues of life as humanity, equality, faith, love, and above all the purpose of life. The effort between man and woman is also an important issue of this novel. Mahfouz is mainly preoccupied with the freedom and makes the relation in touch with the general people to the state, of the man to the woman and of the child to the father. His main purpose was to show and as certain the identity of his country in his existing time and in the environment of himself. *Al-Qahira al-Jadida* is regarded as the satire of the existentialist.¹ In this novel, Mahfouz endeavors to focus the life and culture of a group of university students in Cairo. The main characters of the novel are four students as Ali Taha, Ahmed Badir, Mahjub Abd al-Dayim and Mamun Ridwan, all are in the age of between 20 and 25 years. They graduated from the arts college in the same year as Mahfouz, two of them were philosophy majors, their activation and attitudes were reflected by Mahfouz. Mahfouz also focuses the injustice, corruption and illegal power of upper middle class in the Egyptian government and society. The picture of the Egyptian society in the conflict between good and bad, between principles and ignorance of them and the reaction of different people of their struggle.

Objective

- To study socio-cultural aspects of the Mahfouz's novel
- To analyse humanism of the novel Cairo Modern
- To discuss social discrimination and diversity

METHODOLOGY

The study is analytical in nature. Descriptive analysis has been used to analyse the data collected from primary and secondary sources. Moreover, the paper is also written with the help of the books and related articles of the journals.

Humanism in Mahfouz's *al-Qahira al-Jadida* (Cairo Modern)

Al-Qahira al-Jadida depicts the ascend of an Egyptian intelligential, Many students had been brought to light to a diversity, of knowledgeable thought, since the university of Egypt established in 1908 that, were in most western and comprised materialistic philosophy and socialism, both of which were unknown to the existing Islamic traditions and customs. The British had acknowledged Egypt as independent imperial state in 1922; they took responsibility for its protection and for the safe of minorities and foreigners. The constitution offered the people independence and gave more power to the king. The environment was disgusted by corruption payola; gift and honor were the basic source of finding government job. In an underdeveloped country, the only hope of graduates where agriculture was regulated which left fully the peasants. Egypt was almost a caste society. Minority aristocrats were at the top social hierarchy the farmers were stood at the lowest and businessman and craftsman were in the middle.

Education was different one could not accept the impact of the old traditional religious leaving system at al-Azhar university. As a result the Egyptian society had witnessed for the conflicting, suspicious thought and behavior since the deflection of the century. On one side Muslim community invited the renovation of the Islamic thoughts, which have played a vital role in the Egyptian life contrary to this western educated Egyptian stood against them, who like secular thoughts, even some accepted atheism. Where was ardent patriot who forwarded the concept that Egypt is for the Egyptians. There were the selfish that could not care less about ethical national thoughts as long they could accomplish their own advantage. The controversy these thoughts and nation was exceeded by one of the evil institutional and financial crisis Egypt had ever suffered a notable change was the admission of female to the university, as event unrivaled in the Islamic society. It was the positive of the background of Cairo of 1934, while Mahfouz wrote *al-Qahira al-Jadida*.

The novel deals with the four friends involved in occasional protection about the new female students, their bodily appearance and talking weather they are envoys of learning or love. When one said that, God created them to be envoys of love. Another said that they are at the secular institution where God and love should not be spoken. The students argue whether female is male's partner with equal right and works, and then take over human ethics and whether they are important for man and society.

Mahfouz applies this discussion to express his characters, principle and knowledgeable aptitude. Mamun Ridwan in an Islamic fanatic and an atheist reader of books, trust there is nothing on the earth except Allah and Islam, on the other hand Ali Taha an infidel and self-centered, believes in science and technology; Ahmed Badir, a performing journalist, says that man should remain only viewer and never be engaged, and Mahjob Abd al-Daim, a leader says that religion and ethics have no meaning. Having proposed these four character, Mahfouz depicts a full statement of each, including his life, ethics, family, rapports with female and occupations. So, we observe from starting with no measurable, fully uplifted character whose works have prepared by the writer; there is no place for them to rise and open their changing behavior. It is mere attractive is that after producing them, Mahfouz casually puts away Mamun Ridwan , Ali Taha and Ahmed Badir to pay attention on Mahjob Abd al-Daim, while the other three are just seen sometimes in contact with him. Few years later, he recognized the important defect of the beginning with fully developed characters, directing their deeds and concentrated on the life and profession of only one of them.

Mamun Ridwan, a protective youth and a real Muslim, acquired vast knowledge regarding religion and ethics from his father. He is hardworking, noble and very active about performing his religious faith in to practice, so that some of his friends call him the awaited Imam Mahdi (*Mamun Ridwan is Islam's Imam for our age. In ancient times, Amr ibn al-As introduced Islam to Egypt, through his brilliance. Tomorrow Mamun Ridwan will extinguish in Egypt*). He abstains to take part in political activities and unlike his friends, denies the problem of casting off the British dominance and obtaining full freedom. Islam and Arabism is the main and only question

for him. According to him there are only three pillars of belief as God, Islam and grace. Mamun is not inspired by the tendency of modernization and secularism at the university. Mamun has raised a hot mood that in some examples leads him in to deserve of insignificance. Of course he inclines to do everything honestly and so exists as passionate. Yet he is simple, amiable and kind. He is engaged with a relative who possessed Islamic culture. He used to go to her only in the presence of her family members and never tries to meet her alone. Due to his desperation his friends do not understand him and listen to his argue for Islam. Instead, they are related to the Egyptian question, constitution of the 1923, and exclusion of foreign goods.

His colleague Ali Taha is as like as him in manner, but not in ideology. He is a good looking youth with a noble character, well mannered, educated, wise, social, dutiful, truthful and strong in his morals like Mamun. But he is also disbeliever who has accepted the view of materialism. According to him the origin of entity is matter; life and spirit are complicated mixed materialistic power. Religious Mamun always tells him that this view cannot resolve a single problem, but Ali Taha is steady in his philosophy. He is inspired by the philosophy of Augustus Comte and adopts his philosophy that there is only one God and one religion. He says that, the disbeliever has also doctrine and norms like the religious believer, and says God is more deeply existing in human than religion. He says that he was a good believer without reason, but now he is a religious free thinker who does not trust on tales. This means that Ali Taha had faith in his young age but after following the philosophy of great European philosopher, he adopted rationalism. In spite of his bringing up in an Islamic society and among religious men, his faith was not strong because he gave up it easily.

Moreover, Ali Taha always thinks for social improvements, wants for an earthly dream world but not heavenly. He suggests his friends to part in social activities but they ignore him. Mamun competes that Islam holds a logical type of socialism because it assigns the *Zakat*, which could guarantee the social equality if it fulfilled practically. If Ali Taha hopes a common order based on real pleasure, brotherly love and rightness, he says he should try Islam. The uninterested Ahmed Badir replies that he is a member of the wafd party, he has a capitalistic mind but not socialist. Ali Taha is a non-believer, a socialist an honorable and an ideal lover. It may produce unnatural that he is a socialist, in fact he born in a well to do family. His father gave him some money to publish a weekly magazine based on social develop; even he has gave up his job at the university library and dropped out from his master's degree, in order to dedicate his time and power to the effort for Egypt , to make it independence from salvation.

He loved Ihsan, a beautiful girl and he is attracted by her beauty though he is aware of her poverty. Her father, Shihata Turki is a small cigarette shop keeper and unable to lead his family well. Her major problem is her parents' ill manners and unsocial. Indeed, they want to marry her unethically to a rich man, they marrying their daughter only for money. But Ihsan rejected this disgrace and openly falls in love of Ali Taha and found it true. Her parents against to their affair thinking that Ali Taha could not able to care their daughter well, but she denies their opposition. Unfortunately, her relation with Ali Taha does not stay long and at last she breaks up their affairs for her own selfish advantage.

Mahjub is also malicious, unfaithful and self deceived, slandering his mishap on poverty. His father is a clerk, who is earns monthly only eight pounds and send three pounds of those to him for his monthly expenses. What a great and nice this poor father is! He fully supports his disloyal and disobedient son. But Mahjub always suffers from crisis of money, eats only punk Egyptian food. What mourn for him that he could not spend money for his fashion due to crisis of money. So he always annoying against society saying that why he comes from a poor family whiles others come from rich family. He aggrieves the inequality of wealth in his native town *al-Qanatir*. He thinks, if the devil could help him to achieve the necessity of his life and reach to the highest position in society, he will sell his soul to him. At last, he goes to the devil, who drive him to the top and it is the reason for fall down for him, his career concludes in a terrifying shame.

For Mahjub, everything go from bad worse. Crisis of money diminishes him to one time meal in a day, takes him to terror that he may die in hungry, yet he thinks it is depressing to ask his relative for lend. He meets al-Ikhshidi at his office and tells about his problems, al-Ikhshidi replies that if he knows French and English he should seek job as a translator. Salim will recommend to the editor to give work to Mahjub because the editor is his friend. But Mahjub wants money right now, not later. He becomes extremely violent and shouts "The

world give me only torment I am facing!” Hopeless, he moves to his friend and is released when Mamun Ridwan gives him some money.

Mahjub has yet to look actual life in a dishonest society where dog eats dog suppose to be the primary principle. If al-Ikhshidi and Hamdis could move forward from poorness to power, he thinks, why he could not do the same. So, after completing his Graduation, Mahjub meets al-Ikhshidi seeking his assist in getting a job, he told him that if he able to pay the price of job he can get. Mahjub wants any link for job, al-Ikhshidi told him about Abdul Aziz Radi, the powerful businessman, but he would pay a large amount of bribe. If Mahjub denies to pay this bribe, he should meet Dawlat, the popular songstress, but it is more costly to get job there than Radi. If he unable to pay to obtain a job he should go to Ikram Niruz, and it is a best opportunity for him. Ikram Niruz is a very wealthy and powerful high society woman, she has a strong relation with government but highly selfish, she is the founder of the Organization “The Blind Women’s society”. Mahjub should meet her and should write an article for *al-Nazma* magazine glorifying her performances on behalf of the blind woman may be the enchanting key to his dream for getting a government job.

In this point, in lieu of permitting the descriptive to keep up naturally, Mahfouz presents another machinate plot twist to move the protagonist to his destruction. Al-Ikhshidi says Mahjub, he has a new idea regarding him, so no need to write about Ikram Niruz decided by he. He promises to Mahjub, he will give him a job to the cabinet minister Qasim Bey Fahmi in a condition, if he will marry to Fahmi’s mistress. Mahjub the opportunist and unruly accepts this condition, not knowing that the bride is none but Ihsan, the ancient lover of Ali Taha. She had become mistress of Qasim Bey Fahmi, the powerful cabinet minister. Fahmi had an eye on Ihsan for a long time and was running after her day after day, seducing her for purchase her costly beautiful dress and ridding in his car. At last she consents to his pledge, mostly because of her greedy and unruly parents, thinking that Fahmi is rich and could put down their financial crisis, deceived them that he would marry Ihsan. Like Mahjub, undoubtedly Ihsan was dishonest, unethical, selfish, aspiring and sinful. Like Mahjub she neglected to her poorness and low position. Thought that, misery is the only way to occupy high position and fame.

Here, Mahfouz wants to depict the independent tradition of the upper and lower middle class in Cairo in 1930. The upper class has money, power and position but they are unethical. The lower middle class worked hard to develop themselves but found all the ways to improve closed if they do not accommodated and took after the upper class. From the beginning, Mahfouz shows us with a proper ethical discrimination between these two classes. One keep at consecutive social theory of morality and another is empty of ethics and morality. According to Mahjub, Ahmed Bey Hamdis, al-Ikhshidi, Ihsan and many other middle class members, social principles are the obstruction to the way of ambition.

Mahfouz shows us that Mahjub and Ihsan behave badly due to their poorness. This is rather invalid argument! People treat evil because they are unethical not because of their poverty. Mahfouz indicates that Mahjub’s parents are poor but they are not immoral. Likewise, other students are also came from poor families and strived for getting job and could get. Ihsan and Mahjub have no any honesty to use poorness as an indulgence for wrong doing.

We observe here the ethical problem of Egyptian society in the 1930, which Mahfouz endeavors to solve. The ethical environment is variable and looking replies in to their social and ethical dilemma, middle class people are seized by various confused concepts. Mamun Ridwan says that, the true believer of Allah will never behave evil like Mahjub. Ali Taha, the socialist says, the society entice people to do crimes and again protects like Qasim Bey Fahmi, who resigned his position but not given him punishment. Mamun Says, Fahmi ran away from justice because the rule of Islam no longer served. Ahmed Badir opines, society bears crime that is why Fahmi will be given some day another government position, so that he will continue his crime.

Mamun, the believer of Allah asserts all important question of man’s liability for his deeds. These question excited modern and ancient observers, who endeavored to decide if there are appropriate truth of justice, good and righteousness and if man is liable for his good or evil deeds. According to logician man is the possessor of all things; man is the final judge for his own deeds. According to Plato and Socrates, if justice and

righteousness are supposed to fantasy of man, then ethics, religion and society cannot be maintained. Obviously, truth does subsist and man is liable to the highest power of his deeds.

Moreover, Mamun says, since Almighty has evolved these wise and spiritual truths in the Quran and given man's rule formed on them, he decides alone what is truth and false. Man's deeds become matter to Almighty's rule, and if he denies them he must answer to God. Mamun asserts, Mahjub has disdained the ground of wrong and right. He has such like opinion regarding Ali Taha, who has exchanged Allah to socialism. He has lost the view of what is holy and devotion is to return to Allah. Though, Mamun knows that Islam is the only remedy for kinds of diseases of Egyptian society. He does not give any example to exhibit how it can serve as a tool for social reform.

Similarly, Mahfouz presents socialism as counterbalance of the religious faith of Mamun. Offering an effective metaphysics for special resolution to the problem of Egypt. Both Ali Taha and Mamun, idealist and social reformer, dream of a mythical world free from corruption. Mamun conceives a worldly heaven where belief and spirit can fight with immoral. Ali Taha, the pragmatist, sustains under the situation governing in Egypt. Society confides on luck and divine command. It is surprising to see that the infidel socialist tell about such strength of manner, saying very same God's command will be done.

So, Mahfouz depicts the desires and dreams of the students of the lower class of the university, who are fully sincere of their needs and goals and the problems of own society. Each of them raises a resolution that reflect his individual nation, but the behavior and offer of these rational youth are idealistic then realistic. The novel examines their complexity and deficiency of positive thinking. They accuse, comment and diagnose of the diseases of their society, but nobody seem to have an effective plan to fight against these diseases. The main problem is to switch the political corruption ruled by unethical, powerful people whom considered barrier to the development and reformation. It amazing that, Mahfouz suggests in the novel violence as a system of change. He installed great appeal to the literate class to produce the change but not show any practical solution.

Like his characters, Mahfouz also came from a lower class family; he completed his graduation from the university in 1934. When the plot of this novel set, Egypt was not only in the hook of British but also was in the clasp of a group of Turk aristocratic officials. An Egyptian writer calls these Turk-Egyptian aristocrats are powerful, rich and occupied important position in the government. They are foreigner to Egypt in both internal and external side. These foreigners brutally tormented the unhappy poor farmers and treat as slaves and used their semi Egyptian position to control both the people and government.

CONCLUSION

The novel shows, member of high bond class are closed to the members of middle class in society to say nothing about farmers. If somebody wants to join to this high society, he had to sell and sacrifice his own soul and morality to the rich and powerful, like Mahjab and Salim al-Ikshidi, who played as pimps and Ihsan who became fahmi's mistress. In short it was not easy to emulate the high born class unless one not only had the nature for guiltiness, but was fully fault. It is surprising that hardly one noble character is found in this novel. As Mahfouz presents in this novel, the high born class was corrupt, but all upper class could have morally bankrupt. Mahfouz depicts their bad behavior and negligence to the Egyptian people in showing a pot aggression, on which Ihsan and Mahjub join as member of aristocrats.

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