

## **Social Issues In The Novels Of Naguib Mahfouz: A Discussion**

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### **Abstract:**

Through the fiction and writing of more than six decades, Naguib 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 Taha Hussein, Abbas Mahmood al-Aqqad, 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".

Keywords: Naguib Mahfouz, Socio-cultural issues, Arabic Novels, Egyptian Society etc.

### **Introduction:**

Mahfouz is a great personality of the literary practice of intersexuality. Mahfouz was a part of Egyptian context unlike the other Egyptian novelists. He responded to the outside circumstances of Egypt and actively tried to improve it. Nobody can better understand Egypt without Mahfouz and his characters, with whom every reader of Arab or non Arab can introduced. Before Mahfouz, the novel was not a part of Arab culture it was just literature and literature was like a map to understanding. Therefore, Mahfouz uses his stories and writings as a source to bring knowledge and reform the society. The researchers have shortly discussed concerning Mahfouz's writings in their contemporary debates, criticisms and books. Egypt has been lagging behind like many Arab countries in terms of gender equality and social justice. Arab women have been suppressed to might of gender and class. Besides, they have been suppressed to the name of colonialism, the

system of modernization, and the oppression between religious and secular addiction. Therefore, the most potential cause in the history of the movement of Arab women may have been its engagement in the strive for freedom from imperialism before it involved on the effort for women's liberation within Arab societies.

### **Brief Life Sketch of Naguib Mahfouz**

Naguib Mahfouz was born in 11<sup>th</sup> December, 1911, in the Jamaliya of Egypt. He spent his childhood in the Jamaliyya neighborhood, where in he experienced the most important events of his life. During that time the British were ruled over the Egypt. Mahfouz was still a young boy and highly impressed by the revolutionary spirit. The subjects of personal and political events lead him to the field of writings. Mahfouz said about the 1919 revolution, "I was highly influenced by it and more eager about the cause. I knew everybody of the Wafd Party and was free from colonization. Later I involved in the political life as a very clear follower of Saad Zaghlul Pasha. I still consider that involvement is one of the most important things I have done in my life."

After the 1919 revolution, in 1920 Mahfouz went to Abbasiya district along his family. In the period of his primary school level, Mahfouz was absorbed in the detective novels of Hafiz Naguib. In high school, he studied the writings of stylistic and political innovators like Taha Hussein, Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti, and Muhammed Hussein Haykal. Then he kept his reading and writing at university, Mahfouz chose to study philosophy, not literature.

Mahfouz began to read philosophy in 1930 at the University of Cairo, after obtaining his graduation degree he continued his study and initially planned to do doctorate degree with Mustafa Abd al-Raziq on Islamic mysticism, but he did not carried it out. He was appointed at the secretariat of the university in 1936. In 1939, Mahfouz joined to the Ministry of Religious Endowments and began his career as a civil servant. He served in various government positions including Egypt's head censor until his retirement in 1971.

### **Thematic Aspects of Mahfouz's Novels:**

In his novel, Mahfouz depicts 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 characters mostly suffer 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.

In this way, the prostitute discloses the dualistic nature of the personal and the society. While she is in the out of poverty the prostitute is inside negligible and outside marginalized as an adulterous. This dualism makes the image of prostitute as the site of struggle between gender and class. Motherhood and wifhood are another images of women depicts in his novels. The novelist's tender-hearted dealing of women in such images provides the mother figure a leading role, and the wife-image a defending voice. As a prominent Egyptian writer, Mahfouz's writing is essential and gives a message to the many women whose stories have not been told, whose silence has been oppressed, and whose honor has been broken. In such a way Mahfouz focuses the female characters in his selected novels and it efforts to show the way of class categories influence of such images.

Mahfouz also depicts in his novels the relation between family and society. He criticizes the very bourgeois system, which works by depending on 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 novels.

Although Mahfouz is well known for his novels, critics have praised his prolific produced of novels for its thematic complication and wide use of such literary design as symbolism, allegory and empirical narrative techniques in which he examines the realities of present-day Egypt. In his novels, Mahfouz also efforts to produce realistic characters to experiment political events, social, spiritual, and cultural aspects in contemporary Egypt. He provides us with various idea of the world and makes it real. His efficiency is not only shows us Egyptian colonial society in all its complexity but also it makes us look through the vision of his intense characters and thoughts of the people that no longer seen so external. Mahfouz's writings bring about the most negative issues of the society, which cause the hardship of human beings and lead to corruption in their lives. His

works are regarded as reliable record of the people of the middle and lower classes of Egyptian society. Shortly, Mahfouz is a distinguished social critic who criticizes his society and its suffered cultures and customs. His works are repeatedly set in the urban abode of Cairo while his characters are mostly ordinary people efforts to face modernization of society and the enticement of Western values. He assigns his art to capture the summary and drama of Cairene culture in the early twentieth century. His characters, personal struggle focuses the social, political, religious, and cultural aspects facing his country.

Matti Moosa has discussed in his book “The Early Novels of Naguib Mahfouz: Images of Modern Egypt”, about the early works of Mahfouz. In this book Moosa starts his analysis with those works of Mahfouz's by which he made his literary career, especially with his nonfiction writings. Then he concentrated to the historical and contemporary novels, which have reflected many issues of socio-political and cultural life. Moosa has also illustrated Mahfouz's dealings with social and religious aspects versus background of modern Egypt, as like the controversy of generations, the status of women, and the inefficiency of bureaucracy. More notably, he has explained how Mahfouz elaborates Islamic culture and its status in a modern world. Moosa has explained Mahfouz's works from social and historical points of view indicating that Mahfouz has written his historical novels just for exploring the concept of national identity. Therefore, Moosa has focused Mahfouz from a historical and social points of view exposing how the echoes of the Egyptian society reflected by Mahfouz as he lived in and witnessed it.

### **Conclusion:**

In fact, Mahfouz endeavors to put together the all Egyptian history in a series of books. His dissatisfaction is always reflected in his works with the social realities and they give indication in strong metaphors to the hopes and frustration of his nation. During the late forties and fifties, Mahfouz has focused on the themes of psychological impact of the social change on general people. This is clearly exposed in his realistic novels which published during that time in which Mahfouz has portrayed vividly the suffering of the people in Cairo during and after the war. He is perhaps the only authentic novelist who covered the feelings and touched the heart of all Arabic speaking peoples; yet he remains Egyptian at the heart and soul.

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