

CHAPTER: IV

STYLISTIC STUDY OF AL-QAHIRA AL-JADIDA

Najib Mahfouz was Egypt's foremost novelist and the first Arab to win the Noble Prize in literature. He had wide influence the author in the Arab world and was the author from that area best known to the west in the latter half of the 20th century. He broadened his knowledge of French, English and other European literatures, and returned to Egypt for the creation of a new Egyptian theatre and adequate forms of expression for the modern short story, novel and other literary works. He was convinced that literary independence is inseparable from political independence and he, therefore, saw the creation of indigenous literature as a patriotic task contributing to the shaping of the national identity and the articulation of its aspirations and goals. His stories which attempt to capture various facts of life's contradictions and depict truly Egyptian

characters played a significant role in providing the newly emerging genre with a clear sense of purpose. He had created and developed the techniques of using symbolic action.

Mahfouz was aware of the fact that a good writer needs to understand not only the subject and the limits and the nature of his writing, but also all the social rituals, details of life and so on. In his writing the tragic elements were interwoven with the rituals of everyday life. He does not confine himself to the urban middle class and touches the very spirit of Egypt and explores the undercurrents of Egyptian social life. Mahfouz excels in portraying the details of background and presenting of panoramic views. His characters are

1) V.P.Abdul Hamid, *An Introduction to modern Arabic literature*, P-126.

vivid and his plots true to life. A touch of humour pervades his writing.

If Mahfouz has rarely shown the stylistic and technical brilliance in Arabic of Ibrahim Abdul Qadir al-Mazini or the natural simplicity of Tawfiq al-Hakim, he has demonstrated a tremendous and deft mastery of the Arabic language, in its vast potential; his works resemble an enormously complicated pipe organ. Even so, Mahfouz is more noteworthy for his psychological penetration and his ability to make even minor characters convincing and appealing, no matter how disgusting, than for the poetry of his language. In his more recent fiction, Mahfouz, who has been amazingly prolific through the years, has tendered to throw out the detailed social realism that first made his reputation, favouring instead experiments in more quick delivery of

stories exposed to their psychological core or attempts to return to a more traditional, Islamic form of storytelling. Yet, from the very beginning of his career with his first historical novel set in ancient Egypt, Mahfouz has been experimenting with different literary forms.

Among the Egyptian thinkers who made an impact on Najib Mahfouz is Salama Musa, the great intellectual who propagated interest in the pharaonic legacy of Egypt. Salama Musa's ideas on socialism shaped the political ideology of Mahfouz who wrote on socialism long before it was accepted in Egyptian circles.

An affirmed disciple of the pioneers of the literary Renaissance of the early 20th century such as al-Aqqad,

2) A journalist, writer, advocate of secularism, and pioneer of Arab secularism.

Salama Musa, and Taha Hussain, Mahfouz—unlike his mentors and many of his peers—never studied abroad, and indeed rarely travelled outside of Egypt. Taha Hussain's and al- Aqqad's liberating ideas also inspired him with free thinking. Therefore, his knowledge of the West and Western literary forms came primarily from his copious readings. Mahfouz, who is sometimes referred to as the 'Balzac of the Arabs', was a dedicated admirer of the Russians classics. Mahfouz's momentous source of inspiration also came from Russian writers like Gorky, Chekov, Turgenev and Dostoevsky.

Mahfouz represents the new liberal spirit in Arab thought and his ideas on literature and life influenced the Arab greatly. He showed the path to a new style in modern Arabic literature. He has mastery in language

and command in style. In fiction, Mahfouz used his skill of dialogue which he showed in his plays. He was able to write it in vivid description with witty language and his assimilation of different influences, which aided him in a short span of time to catch up with the latest improvements of the novel as an artistic form. Mahfouz's satirical and witty language described rural officialdom of his time. He was one of the leading figures of this art who had played an outstanding role in its development.

Mahfouz studied the socio-political ills of his society with full analytical power afforded him by the best techniques of realism and naturalism. What emerges for the sum total of the novel, *al-Qahira al-Jadida* is a very bleak picture of a cross section of Egyptian urban society in the twenty or 30 years

between the two world wars. Mahfouz delineates his characters skillfully, especially Mahfouz whose changing lifestyle is drawn in detail from his college days and life at the student hostel, to the one room tenement he takes up when he is out of funds and he counts every *qirsh*(Egyptian paisa) to the aristocratic apartment where he lives after his marriage. There are two characters of women depicted in *al-Qahira al-Jadida*. One is Ihsan Shihata, who hails from a poor family, and as a beautiful daughter of the insolvent couple she is considered as an asset who must be translated into wealth. She was victimized by the unkind social and economic condition and corrupt social relations surrounding her. And the second one is Tahiyya Hamdis,

3) Fatma Moussa, *fi'l Riwaya al- Arabiyyah al- Mu'asira*, pp.49-50.

who is introduced to the reader as a young girl, primarily a daughter of a rich family, highly educated and haughty. This sketching portrayal of aristocratic females is to be repeated over and over again revealing Mahfouz's disdain towards aristocrats through direct or indirect comments on their behaviour.

What is to be regretted is that each of these women, beautiful and many as they are, has one or more men hanging about her. Most of them speak French fluently and they are partial Muslims.

The aristocratic woman is used either to criticize the aristocracy or to propagate modernity with little or no effort to make them an integral part of their setting. He is the most successful in portraying the urban poor, the middle class and the mother types. This is mainly because his early life and upbringing were closely

associated with these three types of Egyptian females from the early 20th century up to the advent of the Egyptian Revolution in 1952.

Mahfouz used every possible facet of the social, economic, political, and cultural circumstances prevalent at the time to elucidate, develop and breathe life into his characters. In their actions and reactions, as well as in their convictions, speech, fears, and hopes they appear to the reader as part and parcel of the then existing reality. None of the characters exceeded her social limits, while each one of them emerged, developed, matured, and finally withdrew or faded away in the novel without any redundancy in description or lack of adequate setting. Several artistic techniques such as direct description, dialogue, internal monologue, dramatic action or suggestive language

proceed hand in hand to shed an ever increasing light on the emergence, development, growth, withdrawal, or disappearance of the character.

Mahfouz's faithfulness to the literary languages is still sometimes an obstacle to the creation of life-like dialogue and prevents the differentiation of one character from another. In Mahfouz own attitude to language, the literary language (*fusha*) is superior to the colloquial (*ammiyyah*) , both because it is common to the whole of the Arab world and it has been the vehicle of religion and culture from ancient time. This view is shared by many inside and outside Egypt, but it has had relatively little influence on the practice of Egyptian novelists treating contemporary subjects.

Mahfouz's writing style, and techniques helped him to develop his literary talents and because of that

he got the Nobel Prize for literature in 1988. He had become the most famous Egyptian novelist, dominating the fictional scene for more than two decades. Unlike his pioneers, Mahfouz felt called to devote himself to the genre of the novel, even to the extent of abandoning an incipient academic career because he felt it was irreconcilable with the claims laid on him by literature. He introduced some new ideas of literature to Arabic which he learned from the study of European literature.

Mahfouz's style combined the elaborateness of classical Arabic with simplicity of the modern. In his writings, particularly in *al- Qahira al- Jadida*, Mahfouz followed the western writers' style and techniques. His writing style and techniques are panoramic with a photographic description and details of background.

4) M.M. Badawi, Modern Arabic Litewrature, p.239.

He uses very ambiguous and complex sentences. He knew western languages and philosophy, whereby he established a good relation between the Arab and western cultures. Mahfouz felt it was important to build Arabic literature on the firm foundation laid down by the French, English, Greeks and others. He studied the modern western literature and their literary principles and their views of the Islamic and Arabic civilization. He exhibited great skill in writing novels, short story and plays in modern Arabic literature.

Here are two excerpts from this novel that serves as indicator of Mahfouz's style.

(1)

ولبت على طه فى حجرته حتى مالت الشمس الى المغيب، وكان يجلس الى النافذة وعيناه الى شرفة دار صغيرة قديمة، تقع عند مدخلها دكان سجائر، تقوم على ناصية شارع رشاد باشا من ناحية عزبة الدقى. فيما يواجه دار الطلبة. كان مرتديا ملابسه الا طربوشه، متأثقا كعادته، يحسب الناظر الى منكبيه العريضين أنه من هواة الرياضة البدنية، وكان فتى جميلا ذا عينين خضراوين، وسعروضارب لصفرة ذهبية، ودلالة واضحة على النبل، لبت ينظر الى شرفة الدار الصغيرة القديمة بعينين تتحير فيهما نظرة انتظار ولهفة حتى دبت فيهما حياة ويقظة بدخول فتاة الى الشرفة، فنهض ملوحا بيديه، فابتسمت اليه وأومأت الى الطريق، فلبس طربوشه وغدر الحجرة ثم الدار، وانطلق الى شارع رشاد باشا، ومضى يتمشى متمهلا فى الشارع الكبير قامت على جانبيه الأشجار الباسقة تقبع ورائها القصور والفيلات، وجعل يرسل الطرف فيما وراءه بين لحظة وأخرى، حتى رأى. على ضوء الغروب الهادئ. صاحبه الشرفة قادمة تخطر. فدار على عقبه خافق الفؤاد من سرور، واتجه نحوها مورد الوجه، حتى التقت أيديهما، فاشتبكت اليمنى فى اليسرى، واليسرى فى اليمنى وغمغم الفتى:

أهلا..

فغمغت ووجهها يشرق بابتسامه لطيفة:

مساء الخير.

(11)

فتوقفت الفتاة عن المسير، ورمقته بعين داهشة، وتبينها على ضوء الطريق فوجدتها
ديدة السمرة كاعب الثديين فاضطربت أنفاسه، وحدجها بعين نمر مفترس .. وأفاقت
تاة من دهشتها فسألته باستهانة :

. ماذا رأيت؟

فأجاب محجوب وغيناه تقولان لها ((برح الخفاء)) :

. شجرة التين .. البواب ..

فسألته بنفس اللهجة الدالة على الاستهانة :

. وماذا تريد؟

فقال بصوت مضطرب :

. مثله.

. أين؟

. ليكن نفس المكان.

فدارت على عقبها، ولكنها قالت قبل أن تهتم بالمسير، وبصوت يدل على الإنذار:

. ثلاثة قروش!

فغمغم بارتياح :

. جميل.

Mahfouz travelled to various countries in Europe, where he absorbed the literary trends of Europe besides studying 19th century Russian literature. His services to literature are widely recognized. He is widely recognized as the founding father of Arabic novel. Mahfouz was an uncompromising democrat and pacifist who obtained the same distinguished position in the development of Arabic novels as Mahmud Taymur in the case of the short story and Tawfiq al-Hakim in the case of Arabic drama. The Egyptian nation bestowed on him its highest honors: the State Prize for Literature and the Collar of the Republic.

By the time he received the Noble Prize in 1988, which made him the ideal representative of literature in

5) Roger Allen, *The Arabic Literary Heritage*, p.306.

the Arabic language in the eyes of the world and simultaneously raised the genre to unparalleled eminence, Mahfouz had long been the embodiment of Egyptian literature. From his birth on the eve of the First World War to the dawn of the 20th century, he followed, and sometimes took part in, the fate of a region affected as no other by the upheavals which did not die down with the transition to a new millennium. Throughout Mahfouz's fiction there is a pervasive sense of metaphor, of a literary artist who is using his fiction to speak directly and obviously to the condition of his country. His work is imbued with love for Egypt and its people, but it is also utterly honest and cynical. Mahfouz's work is freshly nuanced and hauntingly lyrical. The Noble Prize acknowledges the universal significance of his fiction that Mahfouz presents us

with a different concept of the world and makes it real. His genius is not just that he shows us Egyptian colonial society in all its complexity; it is that he makes us look through the vision of his vivid characters and see people and ideas that no longer seem so alien. His own fate is a summary of a people and century, and his books remain endless sources of discovery, happiness and pleasure.

Mahfouz's importance should be measured not in quantitative but in qualitative terms. He succeeded in chronicling human relationship in Cairene society during a specific period of time, from the first decades of the 20th century to the last quarter of that century. He is the historian of what traditional academic histories exclude. He also succeeded in generating new modes of literary writing, the realistic and the

historical. For the cursory reader his style might seem old fashioned and repetitive; he did, though, develop important techniques on which new trends were founded. Mahfouz will remain a model hard to emulate; proof of this is his sizeable output which required a lifetime of perseverance.

No one expects young Mahfouz to have been a philosopher with mature ideas. He was an intelligent young man with a keen, inquisitive mind, trying to fathom the world around him. He was fascinated by philosophy and literature, and hoped that they will give some answers to the eternal questions about God, humanity, and the universe that have obsessed the minds of human beings since the world began. His interpretations of the ideas about the writers he had read became firmly fixed in his mind and were later

reflected in his writings. In *al-Qahira al-Jadida* his lonely childhood, his Islamic upbringing, and the influence of his authoritarian father and loving mother are symbolized in many of his characters. His early reading of Arabic classics, masterpieces of Western fiction, and the fictional works of the preceding generation of Egyptian writers played a decisive role in shaping the literary career of this Nobel Prize winner.

Right from the beginning of his literary career, Mahfouz has insisted on using the standard language in his fictional works, rejecting resort to the colloquial language as a means of expressing dialogue. In this novel, he uses the standard literary language free from colloquial expressions. This has not prevented him from developing a pliable language of dialogue that replicates many of the structures of colloquial Arabic

and indeed occasionally includes colloquial words. It is in the process of adapting style to narrative purpose that Mahfouz's craftsmanship as a writer may be most prominently seen.