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THE EXISTENTIALIST PREDICAMENT
OF A MODERN MAN IN NAGUIB
MAHFOUZ'S SELECTED
NOVELS

ALI DAKHIL NAEM

THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY



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FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION
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DR. LAJIMAN JANOORY
PENSYARAH KANAN

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Dedication

To the souls of my late parents and brother

To my family: my wife, two daughters and only son

With Love and Gratitude



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Finally, my heartfelt love and gratitude is towards all my wife, brothers and sisters for always supporting, inspiring and encouraging me and bearing with me the burden of this thesis. I love all.





ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the existential predicaments of modern men in Naguib Mahfouz's selected novels. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, existentialist predicament is a dilemma of human existence in terms of despair, perplexity, crisis or moral chaos and its meanings. The study analysed four of Naguib Mahfouz's novels about Egyptian society faced with existential predicaments which were *The Cairo Trilogy*, *Midaq Alley*, *The Thief and the Dogs*, and *The Beggar* based on Jean-Paul Sartre's model. These novels were selected because they were related to existential predicament issues that beset the modern men. The study objectives included (a) to examine the moral chaos in selected novels, (b) to analyse the modern men's predicaments, and (c) to explain how existentialist philosophy is able to express the predicaments of the modern men. This qualitative study has utilised literary criticism as its research design. The underpinning theory was existentialism by Jean-Paul Sartre that focused on the ideas of freedom, existence, despair, moral chaos and the predicament of modern men. The predicaments in the novels were analysed and the key themes that emerged were compared. The findings of the study revealed that the predicaments of modern men in *The Cairo Trilogy* indicated a generational clash among the old and young generations. *Midaq Alley* captured the moral chaos in the shifting from traditionalism to modernity has led to the existential predicament of losing honour in order to survive in the colonial period. In *The Thief and the Dogs*, Naguib Mahfouz wrote about loneliness. Saeed was lonely after he was ostracised by the society because he was a former inmate and was rejected by his daughter. The last novel in this study, *The Beggar*, a character named Omer has been distressed due to his psychological dissatisfaction and moral dilemma. The study also found that the moral chaos is part of the modern men's predicaments in the novels. The modern men predicaments were portrayed in the characters who were in a constant struggle to find the true meaning of life. In conclusion, the main themes emerged from analyzing the selected novel of Naguib Mahfouz were moral chaos, generational clash, loneliness, social decadence, and moral dilemma. The implication signifies that existential predicaments can lead to meaning making within the context of perceived decadence of the contemporary post-modern era and the way to reaching the self-actualization and the purpose of existence.





KESUKARAN MEMAHAMI KEWUJUDAN MANUSIA MODEN DI DALAM NOVEL-NOVEL PILIHAN KARYA NAGUIB MAHFOUZ

ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji kesukaran memahami kewujudan manusia moden di dalam novel pilihan Naguib Mahfouz. Jean-Paul Sartre berpandangan kesukaran memahami kewujudan ialah dilema manusia yang berkaitan dengan rasa putus asa, kebingungan, krisis atau kekacauan moral dan maknanya. Kajian ini menganalisis empat novel hasil karya Naguib Mahfouz berkaitan masyarakat Mesir yang menghadapi masalah kesukaran memahami kewujudan iaitu *The Cairo Trilogy*, *Midaq Alley*, *The Thief and the Dogs*, dan *The Beggar* berdasarkan model Jean-Paul Sartre. Novel-novel tersebut dipilih kerana ianya berkaitan dengan masalah kesukaran memahami kewujudan yang menghantui manusia moden. Objektif kajian ini termasuk (a) untuk menilai kecelaruan moral di dalam novel-novel pilihan tersebut, (b) untuk menganalisis masalah manusia moden, dan (c) untuk menjelaskan bagaimana falsafah kewujudan dapat memberi penjelasan kepada masalah kesukaran memahami kewujudan manusia moden. Kajian kualitatif ini mengaplikasi kritikan sastera sebagai rekabentuk kajian. Teori dasar ialah teori kewujudan oleh Jean-Paul Sartre yang memberi fokus kepada ide kebebasan, kewujudan, rasa putus asa, kecelaruan moral dan kekacauan manusia moden. Kesukaran di dalam novel-novel tersebut dianalisis dan tema-tema utama telah dibuat perbandingan. Dapatan kajian mendedahkan bahawa kekacauan manusia moden di dalam *The Cairo Trilogy* mendedahkan pertelingkahan generasi di antara generasi tua dan muda. *Midaq Alley* mendedahkan kecelaruan moral semasa peralihan daripada dunia traditionalisme kepada dunia moden telah membawa kepada kesukaran memahami kewujudan dengan hilangnya maruah diri demi kelangsungan hidup dalam era kolonial. Di dalam *The Thief and the Dogs* Naguib Mahfouz menulis mengenai perasaan kesunyian. Saeed merasa sunyi setelah dipinggirkan oleh masyarakat kerana dia seorang bekas banduan dan juga telah disisihkan oleh anak perempuannya sendiri. Di dalam novel terakhir kajian ini, *The Beggar*, watak bernama Omer merasa tertekan kerana rasa ketidakpuasan hati dan dilema moral. Kajian ini juga mendapati kecelaruan moral adalah sebahagian daripada kekacauan yang dihadapi oleh manusia moden seperti yang terdapat di dalam novel tersebut. Kekacauan manusia moden digambarkan di dalam watak-watak yang sentiasa bergelut dengan cubaan mencari makna hidup sebenar. Sebagai kesimpulan, tema-tema utama yang terlihat hasil daripada menganalisis novel-novel pilihan Naguib Mahfouz ialah kecelaruan moral, pertelingkahan generasi, kesunyian, ketamadunan masyarakat yang merosot, dan dilema moral. Implikasi kajian menandakan bahawa kesukaran memahami kewujudan boleh membawa kepada terhasilnya makna di dalam konteks kemerosotan ketamadunan era paska-moden kontemporari dan cara mencapai aktualisasi diri dan makna kehidupan.



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



This chapter introduces the background of the study and delineates the history of the Egyptian novel and the prominent writers who are contemporary and prior to Naguib Mahfouz. An integral section of this study and the significant section is the statement of problem; it briefly discusses the questions to critically analyze Naguib Mahfouz's selected novels. It explains how the conventional system of the life of the common man and the impacts of the modern world have collided with the intellectual and the spiritual heritage of Egypt. Moreover, this chapter explains the research questions and objectives of the study. In addition to that this study is introduces the four texts by Mahfouz that carry within them the existential predicament of the modern man in Egypt. Existentialism is a tradition of philosophical inquiry which focuses on issues that pertains to human existence and value of the individual. It specifically attends to the





self, individual freedom and personal choice. The novelist Naguib Mahfouz was largely influenced by the existentialist point of view to the extent that most of his works have depicted the social Egyptian transformations and historical fluctuations from an existential perspective. The existentialist thought, which is commonly acknowledged to reflect the issues of life in the form of making choices, will and freedom had a dominant influence on the works of Naguib Mahfouz.

Given the multiple themes he wrote about, one might say that his literary works were also influenced by various social, political, and psychological points of view, and particularly the psychological "predicament" of the modern man's existence, where such a miserable situation of the individual was well portrayed in Mahfouz's fiction. The novel genre had only arrived in the Arabic literature quite recently. This was not an easy thing due to two reasons; on the one hand, the Arab audience was accustomed to the poetry genre and the Arab writers did not have much experience in the newly introduced genre. Moreover, The Arab writers were also not able to cope with the Western themes due to certain difficulties that pertain to traditions and religion, besides the intense censorship by the authority. Additionally, there was some problem that pertains to finding an equivalent term in Arabic that meshes with the genre of the Western literary tradition. For example, the Arabic words *riwaya* and *Qissa* are utilized interchangeably to describe novel as a literary genre. Yet, the usage of the term *Qissa* creates some confusion. While the Arabic literary critics use the word *Qissa Qasira* for short story, using the term *Qissa* for novels may suppose that the difference between short story and a novel lies only in length. However, these short stories (*qasas*) are distinguished for their incredible, didactic, and humorous sense. Once formed in





encyclopedias and handbooks, such witty stories had huge fame and had—beside the historical, heroic romances and pseudo-historical, a noticeable impact on the evolution and progress of the Egyptian novel in all over of the Arab world and countries.

The occupation of Egypt by Napoleon in 1798 represented a cornerstone in the relationship between West and East. Although the expedition of Napoleon did not succeed from a military perspective, the French occupation did bring about cultural alteration in the Egyptian society. Such dramatic changes did not only include improvements at the technological level, but also a new way of seeing the world. As regards to literature, the tendency shifted intensively towards the society and its issues. After Napoleon's defeat and the withdrawal of France from Egypt, Mohamed Aly decided to import European military techniques.



Rifa'a al-Tahtawi (1801-1873) was sent to Paris as 'imam' to accompany a group of students sent to study arts and sciences at French universities (Allen, 2000: p. 5). Husayn Haykal (1888-1956) studied in France, where he composed *Zaynab* in 1913. *Zaynab* is considered by most Arab critics as the first Egyptian novel. In her essay titled *The Arab Laureate and the Road to Nobel*, Salma Khadra Jayyusi, is one of Palestine's most distinguished literary personalities, who spent her life taking Arab literature to the world. Palestinian poet writer, translator and anthologist, Salma Khadra Jayyusi, fondly remembers the '50s as a time that saw the emergence of several female Arab poets and critics. She writes about the hardships that faced the birth of the Arabic novel:





During the first few decades of the twentieth century, the Arabic novel was highly experimental, imitative, and unsure of itself. In its growth toward modern maturation, it depended on Western examples and on the intermittent efforts of a handful of experimentalists, mainly in Egypt. Because of its hesitant beginnings, it took more than half a century for the novel to become a serious genre employed by many writers and sought by a good-sized reading public (Beard & Haydar, 1993: p. 11).

It was only with the help of Naguib Mahfouz that the novel advanced to a serious genre. On the thematic level, Mahfouz had imparted fresh themes into Arabic prose. The issues of women in a male-dominated society had not been tackled by his predecessors.



Mahfouz's literary attribution reconsidered the utter realities, called upon questions and aggravated disputes in a society that was dominated by tough religious feeling and a deep connection to entrenched norms and taboos. Mahfouz in his bold attempts to question society and religious establishment was able to examine what had been indisputable in the past. Despite the fact that the advancement of the novel owes quite much to artists who came before Mahfouz, such Taha Hussein and al-Aqqad, still it is Mahfouz who brought it to the highest level of maturity. According to Fedwe Malti-Douglas, Mahfouz "was (and is) the redefinition of modern Arabic prose and its relationship with centuries-long textual ancestry" (Beard & Haydar, 1993, p. 126). Salma Khadra Jayyusi elaborated further to show that the novel "was established by the disciplined dedication of Naguib Mahfouz" (Beard & Haydar, 1993: p. 12). From a different point of view, Mahfouz's prose represents a stylistic violation of the traditional





Arabic prose. Arabs used a dignified and an exaggerated diction in their poetry, but Mahfouz's characters behaved and spoke exactly as they acted in everyday life situations. The title of El-Enany's book on Mahfouz's literary career *The Pursuit of Meaning* summarizes Mahfouz's achievements. His long literary career is characterized by a constant struggle to establish the novel genre in the Arabic literature. His objective was not to imitate the Western novel. Mahfouz aimed for designing an Arabic novel with Arabic themes and Arabic stylistic features. The social and political disturbances in Egypt before and after the World War II have shaped the production of

the literary of the era. Mahfouz has a very intricate method of writing where he combines between realistic and historical narratives, including the partial symbols that may enter the dominant atmosphere of realistic work and the general symbol whose diversified meanings may result in several interpretations. His fictional works consist of different trends and schools, varying from critical realism to existential realism to socialist realism. Moreover, it includes surrealism, naturalism, and the absurd. Mahfouz started his literary writing about historical novels, such as *Abath al-Aqdar* (Irony of Fate, 1939), *Radobis* (Rhodopis, 1943) and *KifahTiba* (The Struggle of Thebes, 1944).

After finishing his third historical novel, Mahfouz shifted to portray the contemporary life in Cairo. The quarrel between antiquity and modernity in the *Trilogy* had just started to run in Khan al-Khalili. After one year of the publication of Khan al-khalili, Mahfouz published *New Cairo*, the novel that reflected his increasing attention towards social realism. In 1947, he also published his novel, *Midaq Alley* which derives its title from one of the streets in Cairo. In such novel, the novelist discusses the intense





conflict between the traditional values and imported values on Egypt post World War II. In *Mirage* (1948), Mahfouz seems to be interested in "the representation of a psychological rather than physical or naturalistic reality" (El-Enany, 1993: p. 61). In his novel *The Beginning and The End* in 1949, Mahfouz used events that cover the period between 1935 and 1939 in Cairo. In this novel, Mahfouz was still worried about the problems of the society and the individual, but this time Mahfouz introduced fate as a disturbing force to such relationship.

In *The Beginning and The End*, El-Enany remarks that "Mahfouz is obviously still agonizing over the theme of the past and present" (El-Enany, 1993: p. 68). Finally, a significant course in the literary career of Mahfouz and a milestone in the history of Arabic literature was the production of *The Cairo Trilogy: Bayn al-Quasrayn (Palace Walk)*, *Qasr al-Shawq (Palace of Desire)* (1957), and *al-Sukkariyya Sugar Street* (1957).

As regards Mahfouz's *The Trilogy*, it radically changed the whole balance of Arabic literature. The former intractability of the novel was broken, and the old timidity and sense of alienation that Arab creative talent had left toward that medium were gone. Mahfouz proved its accessibility, and after the trilogy many writers began writing novels, quickly learning the craft and realizing the possibility of a novelistic achievement. From this time on, the novel became an ever more desirable form.





1.1 Background of the Study

The researcher has selected certain works by Naguib Mahfouz for this study due to the fact that these texts are the most important works by the author, as they are rich with man's everyday problems in search of the meaning of existence and the ideal or desired identity, as the reader can consider the type of journey in the behavior of the characters like Hamida, Hussein, and Abbas. Most of the characters in the selected novels are searching for a new way of life. Naguib Mahfouz was the first Arab novelist to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. The writer occupies an exclusive position in the present Arab and world literature. His approach to fiction writing enormously spread out across the English-speaking world. His works are broadly fictional, and he has a variety of writings that stretches out from stories of myth and fantasy to historical and political ones. Mahfouz's works were characterized with realistic observations of the political, social and religious doctrine of the Egyptian way of life. His novels cover a huge spectrum of citizens and their concerns, like those denizens of Cairo, and they include an investigation of matters related to characters with fragmented and damaged spirit of the individual, subjugated women and the political detainees.

Mahfouz has significantly contributed to the Arabic literature. He introduced the theme of modern predicament of the individual, and his works and style were generally based on themes of existentialism, whether this was in the form of an everlasting sense of search of the real sense of existence, or in the form of misery, agony and the predicament of the modern man with the sense of absurdity. A handful of studies have tried to examine the similarity between Mahfouz and other artists like





Franz Kafka, George Eliot, and Joseph Conrad. An outstanding example of those studies is Al-Sarayrah's comparison of Naguib Mahfouz to Albert Camus and William Faulkner. Mahfouz's writings concentrate on various hardships that the Muslims encounter today under the shadows of globalization, Western influence, and depiction of everyday people who resided in Cairo and Alexandria and vacillate between their traditional culture and the effects of Western colonizers, or between the existential and spiritual enquiries that come along with change for modern Egypt. The use of art in his characterizations, the novelist proves that there are external factors that had led to the destabilization of Egypt, particularly the spiritual and material struggle that the Egyptian individual went through. Mahfouz wrote the following:

Something extremely serious was no doubt underway, otherwise why



were Egyptians striking and banding together to clash with the soldiers? And what soldiers? The English! ...when a mention that name had once sufficed to clear the streets. What had happened to the world and to people? This amazing struggle was so overwhelming that its basic elements were engraved in the boy's soul without his having made any conscious effort. (Mahfouz, 1989: p.364).

A huge number of Mahfouz's main works sound as a reflection of semi-autobiographical, and a lot of their descriptions were made from the author's life, his family and his circle of friends. Memories are quite significant to the protagonist's characterization. But the idea of the existential predicament of man and his world occupied Mahfouz's writings the most.





1.2 Statement of the Problem

Many studies and researches have been conducted to cover the themes of Mahfouz's novels. However, the important affairs related 'man' and his predicament from the existential perspective is ignored in Mahfouz's criticism. Based on the review of literature, it is obvious that there is, to some extent, an affinity in some studies, yet the researchers in the past studies have covered the topic of existentialism in general. The researcher in the current study specifically examines the predicament of the Egyptian characters in Mahfouz' novels and shows the readers the existential elements on the personal levels in different characters. Thus, the studies on existentialism in Mahfouz works were general and not specified as in this study to involve the predicament on the account of the characters so far on the theme of gender and class in the works of Mahfouz. The current study significantly aims at critically exploring these things in Mahfouz's works and to bridge the gap left by other criticism of Mahfouz. Thus, this study juxtaposes the predicament of man along with the issue of existentialism.

The researcher analyzes how traditional synthesizing of everyday life and modern influence are reflected in Naguib Mahfouz's writings. Moreover, the researcher explores how the Egyptians face that predicament by the modern impacts of colonialism and occupation and how the Egyptians tried to resist such foreign influence in the phase of traditionalism. It appears that the influences of social, cultural, political, and religious changes that took place in Cairo and Egypt are reflected in Mahfouz's literature and the readers witness a transformation in Mahfouz's writings during such period of transformations.





Mahfouz depicts the socio-political atmospheres in Egypt and Cairo through occupation control and modernity, and discloses the fracture in Egyptian identity. The researcher, in this aspect, was interested in analyzing the Egyptian identity that appeared as a result of the impacts of foreign powers and how Egyptian society has been in a constant change. The researcher also illustrates the role of religious commitment to confront such waves that are being shaped by Western colonisers by examining how Egyptians and locals were impacted by foreign occupation. Additionally, it analyses how Islam was seen as a means of reform and independence in the Islamic countries in general and Egypt in particular. Naguib Mahfouz in *Palace of Desire* focuses on the prominence of the philosophical and religious issues:

The Qur'ān embraced everything, did it not? There was no cause for him to despair. He would find his subject one day. It was enough for him to know the size, shape, and style of annotation for the book. Surely, a book that would shake the world was better than a civil service position, even if the latter shook the world too. Every educated person knew about Socrates. Who remembered the judges who had presided at his trial? (Mahfouz 1989:32).

As mentioned earlier, Mahfouz's preoccupation is with man and his world and how it means. The tendency to find a better place, leaving the old-fashioned values, and the search of identity due to the changing trends of living in effect of the colonial existence have called upon the problem of the existential predicament that the majority of the characters in the works of Mahfouz. Based on the texts that are selected for this study





the main characters pass through a moral crisis that arises to be chaotic as the main character lead an immoral way of living in a society that is supposed to follow the religious discipline and doctrines. Thus, the researcher has identified these behaviors as an increasing problem that affects the Egyptian society in particular. And the interpretation of such mal-functioned way of living is drawn on the existential basis. The characters in the selected novels are in the predicament of living in a country that is freed from the colonial powers but the effects of the colonial existence still echo in the society which leads to the crippled and confused behavior of the majority of the characters. Hence this study investigates this problem by applying the lens of Existentialism as a theoretical approach to provide a reasonable justification for the problem of the study.



In essence, this study investigates the existential predicament of the modern man in Egypt in the selected novels by Naguib Mahfouz. It further examines the effects of modernism and post-colonial impact on certain characters based on the novels. The study is also designed to critically examine the dark human conditions and their influence on shaping the characters' behavior. The study aims to highlight the existential settings that the character's act within it. The problem that this study aims at addressing is the existential predicament of man in Egypt during the 1960's onwards, what are the effects of war, urbanization and democracy shadows on the modern Egyptians characters in the novels of Naguib Mahfouz? Although existentialists have profound doctrinal differences, they share the belief that philosophical thinking starts with the human subject. The novel *The Thief and Dogs* (1961) was the first work of Naguib Mahfouz that represents the theme of existentialism. Mahfouz is concerned





with the concept of fate, and the various philosophical problems of life. The main subject that dominated his work and influenced it was the existential instinct, and how humanity deals with his worldly lust and reconcile with the spiritual aspect of himself.

Naguib Mahfouz wrote novels and short stories that delineate the plight and experiences of the everyday man of Egypt right from the earlier years of the twentieth century. Such novels by the author have put forward the facts that the modern man is curbed by the circumstances around him, and the misfortunes of his free will. The essence of the present study is centered on the effects and the impact of the modern and postcolonial way on the life of the Egyptian individual, and how these conditions contributed to the predicament of man (and woman). The answers to questions of the current study are realized through the applications of certain texts that show how



misled, religiously and politically, modern men are.



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By analyzing Mahfouz's novels, the researcher would discuss how Egyptians dealt with these foreign impacts and how they were able to adapt to them. Apparently, the influences of the political and religious transformations in Egypt were discussed in Mahfouz's literature. The readers can trace a kind of journey in his novels during a period of several decades— cultural political, and social—that took place in Cairo and Egypt. The social and political environment within the area of Cairo through the colonial rule and modernity, as traced by the novelist, shows an affected Egyptian identity that is fragmented, damaged, and somehow lost. The researcher aims to analyze the sort of identity that appears in effect of external forces and ideologies.





As evidently shown in the selected novels, Mahfouz was not only a keen observer of the mundane and earthly temptations; he also reflected the crucial ideas of survival in the adverse settings of the modern city. Mahfouz displayed a constant and specific concern for questions like the description of insanity, the modern man's alienation and his search for comfort, and the religious role in contemporary communities controlled by humanistic values. Mahfouz, in a way, has utilized the city as the template to form and shape his fictional art. Thus, cities such as Cairo and Alexandria are predominant in his novels in shaping their event and stories.

1.3 Research Objectives



In light of the above research questions, three objectives are formulated and stated as follows:

1. To analyze a reflection of moral chaos in Naguib Mahfouz's selected novels.
2. To illustrate the serious consequences for the characters resulting from the predicament of the modern man based on selected novels by Naguib Mahfouz.
3. To examine the relevance of existentialism to human existence and progress in light of the theme of the predicament of man based on Naguib Mahfouz's selected novels.





1.4 Research Questions

While the world was rapidly moving towards modernity and modern living approaches, the literary works of Mahfouz were also influenced with such modern tendencies. The way that Mahfouz delineated the burdens and the complaints of his characters has reflected the plight that they were through. One can see the sense of endeavor to catch the real essence of life through the hardships and burdens in many of his novels. The existential novelists have prompted many questions that the present study attempts to address. These questions are formulated and stated based on the objectives of the study:

1. How is moral chaos reflected in Naguib Mahfouz's selected novels?
2. How does the predicament of the modern man result serious consequences for the characters based on selected novels by Naguib Mahfouz?
3. How can existentialism as a theory be expressed in understanding human existence in light of the theme of the predicament based on Naguib Mahfouz's selected novels?

1.5 The Significance of the Study

This study is an analysis of the predicament of the individual in the Egyptian society. There are some political indices in the general perspective of Maguib Mahfouz's writings yet, the researcher has paid full attention to the moralistic and psychological domains in this study. The importance of this study is in providing spaces for other





critics and researchers who are interested in the issue of existentialism as well as modernism to have a view on these two major movements in the Arabian literary context. The study also helps students of Arabic novels, particularly the Egyptian literature to understand the main issues that are reflected in fiction by Naguib Mahfouz as one of the most prolific novelists in the Arab world.

This study is conducted to assess some social problem in a particular society that is the heart of the Arab homeland, hence the main beneficiary of this study is the Arab countries, the readers will definitely find in this study interpretations to certain changing behaviors in the modern Arab society. Additionally, this study will add to the researches on Naguib Mahfouz as far as the critical examination is concerned. The study is open to further researches in the areas of feminism, as well as comparative



studies of Naguib Mahfouz with other writers from the Western world such as Samuel

Beckett or William Faulkner. There are many studies that are related to the theme of existentialism. Such works found a flourishing ground in the world after the end of the Victorian era and the consequences of the First World War. The European and the American experiences of the war have led to many works that touch upon the themes of despair, frustration, perversion and degradation. In many examples of the literary product of modernism and post modernism these topics have found a vent out in the works of James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Earnest Hemingway and William Faulkner. The importance of the research in the existential themes also is covered by the works Naguib Mahfouz who wrote about the struggle for identity, opportunity to find the real place in a competitive and alluring world of temptations Moreover, this study is thematically concerned with an existentialist predicament of the conflict between two binary





oppositions that are between modernity and traditionalism. The characters in the selected works are put to a stoic test to survive these conflicting planes. Psychologically, the characters in the selected novels are a vulnerable type of modern man / woman who is exposed to the temptations of the Western culture in a conservative community like Egypt. Hence, the researcher stresses the significance of this study from the cultural and social levels.

The study also helps students of Arabic novels, particularly the Egyptian literature, on understanding the main issues that are reflected in those fictions. The importance of this study is attributed to its psychological and social role in interpreting and examining certain behaviors, phenomena and practices in Egyptian society. The study lays more importance and emphasis on the psychological and the existential elements in the works of Naguib Mahfouz to help the reader understand the predicament of the modern man in an age of moral and social wasteland. Additionally, this study will add to the researches on Naguib Mahfouz as far as the critical examination is concerned.

1.6 Limitation of the study

This study is limited to four works by the novelist Naguib Mahfouz as they deal directly with the concepts of existentialism related to the study. Despite the fact that Mahfouz's style is rich with the existentialist influences; the researcher has suited his arguments to these texts as they are fertile ground for analysis.





This study is limited to four of the most prominent novels and stories that delineate the psychological and devastating existence of the modern Egyptian individuals. The first novel is *Midaq Alley* (1947) is the story of journey of Hamida into the new life that is better place than the alley, such a journey ends up tragically by the death of Abbas the other main character who also pursued a way out of the misery of the *Midaq Alley* by working with the British colonialism. The second novel is *The Cairo Trilogy* (1956-1957), which comes in the form of three consequential stories of the middle-class family after the two world wars, a time of wrenching transformations in Egypt. The Cairo Trilogy consist of three novels are *Palace Walk* (1956), *Palace of Desire* (1957) and *Sugar Street* (1957), the Arabic titles of three novels are taken from the names of actual streets in Cairo, the childhood and youth city for Naguib Mahfouz. However, such changes were physically and mentally agonizing, yet inescapable. These novels reflect upon the situation of the anti-colonial burden and documents the certain political revolution in a meticulous description.

The third novel that the researcher deals with is the well-known novels *The Thief and the Dogs* (1961) furnishes for the dilemma of facing the changes that resulted from the 1952 revolution in that terminated the Western existence. The vivid imagery and the realistic level of the novel reflect the traits of the psychological built of the main character and the circumstances that the Egyptian characters went through. Mahfouz was successful in portraying the stumbling and the devastating conditions of the individuals. He further built his assets of the novel on the betrayal and alienation as a result of the failure of the revolution to conceive the ideals it once stood for. The fourth novel *The Beggar* (1965) is an intricate story of despair and alienation. The protagonist





is incapable of achieving emotional rejuvenation in the era of Nasser's post revolution. He is a man who loses his family and job to a streak of immoral affairs which aggravate in him the sense of alienation. The Novel can be read as a passionate and hauling cry against the detachment.

1.7 Definition of the Terms

The term existentialist is directly under consideration of this study, it signifies that the researcher will use the theme of existentialism throughout this study with assistant of the existentialist theoretical view to support his evidences and examples of the plighted characters of the selected novels. Hence, it would be necessary to briefly define

Existentialism as the philosophy that deals with the most elevated and sophisticated thoughts of the human mind at a moment of skepticism, these thoughts are like Personal choices, Existence, essence, aesthetic stage, ethical stage, religious belief, truth, God, existential situation, freedom, authentic existence, inauthentic existence, existence precedes essence, and contingency.

Despite the fact that the intellectual background of existentialism is attributed to the second half of 19th century, it reached maturity during the 20th century as a philosophy that reflects certain features of the social, cultural, and political environment that decided the fate of individual who have gone through the traumas, dark conditions and horrors of the two world wars. Charles worth suitably depicts existentialism. "It was more an intellectual mood or atmosphere than a coherent creed or body of doctrine; more an outlook or mind-set than a philosophical party line; more a method or approach





than a school of thought. And it was very much a creature of the Waste Land that was Europe during and after the last world war." (Charlesworth 1976: p.1) On the other hand, the second part of the title addresses the individual, "man" who lives the darkest conditions which qualify him to "predicament", that is the most despairing and frustrating condition of man, whereas solutions and relief are hard to arrive at.

The term "Predicament" may sound broad and wide for interpretation yet, the context through which the researcher wants to channel his hypothesis is more individualistic and geographically concerning one area of the world that was disturbed by two major factors, war and the calls for independence. Hence, the Egyptian characters involved in the novels of the major novelist in the Arab world Naguib Mahfouz have these political and psychological predicaments, in form of enigma, anguish and the struggle, betrayal and miserable life. Meyers describes it as "Our human predicament stems not only from our vulnerability to external and internal pressures toward evil, but also from the foibles and fallacies of our thinking." (Meyers, 1981: p.45). Hence, the particular area of this study is the personal burdens, difficulties and the psychological dilemma of the characters involved in the selected novels. The modern man is the one who seeks to find out his real existence and the value they represent throughout their life. For example, a main character named Saeed in *The Thief and the Dogs* feels despair and frustration about the instability taking place in Egypt. Mahfouz has portrayed the revolutionist anarchist as part of the main theme of futility and anarchy in the modern times. Choice is related to subjectivity and situation too. The concept of freedom by Solomon encompasses a situation in which the individual is no more restricted by the pressures and forces of a value system. Thus,





based on this viewpoint, Guthrie has noted that "one is genuinely free by virtue of acting in accordance with what will be done" (Guthrie, 2011). Eventually, Sartre's well-known saying "Man is a useless passion" collides with one's will. The choice perhaps implies his biased behavior as the certain favorable thing in life that appeals to a man who will inevitably get tangled in a web of options. Thus, the modern Man's misery grows from this, as man chooses one choice after another and holds only the minimum among all the different potentialities of the existential desired things and lives with and for this minimal discernible of the Midaq Alley. She demonstrates the personal will and choice, whether to stick to her religion or to freely break with it.

Existentialism determines one's individual existence as one always has a choice, which is a definition of an existence in the world towards an object outside of itself.



Choice is all that one has without confirmation of one's act, one never knows what is right to choose. The doubt of one's acts together with the contingency of existence, leads to several experiences in life. This is one freedom humans are gifted with and is considered a major component of existentialism. The existentialist may be atheist or believer, moral or immoral, believing in fate or in free will. For example, Kierkegaard, a religious philosopher, was an existentialist.

The work of Nietzsche, an anti-Christian, was characterized by an existential line that elevated the value of man until he reached the level of Superman. While Sartre, the most famous philosopher of existentialism, was an atheist. Camus was also an atheist. Thus, we see that existentialism, as a philosophic trend, has included a wide range of theological orientations. *The Thief and the Dogs*, which was published in 1961,





is the first work of Mahfouz's existentialism. Mahfouz was concerned with the concept of fate, destiny and various philosophical issues of life. The main subject that dominated his existentialist work was how humanity ran after worldly materialistic gains in a way far from God.

Fate vs. Free will is one of the major themes in most of Mahfouz's novels. It's a perfect example of fate and free will, and how each person chooses their future: whether they let fate decide and go with the flow, or break away and make their own desired choice. Free will is the ability to make choices that are not controlled by fate or God or freedom of humans to make choices that are not determined by prior causes or by divine intervention. For example, in the vacuum of traditional and religious power that characterized this transitional period in Egypt's history after independence, veiling thus became a consequence of a woman's individual free will rather than of custom, tradition or direct coercion. It is this element of choice that after the fall of the Egyptian elite classes. Indeed, women will freely take up the practice of veiling as part of the larger Islamizing movements in Egypt that replace class-based traditions.

1.8 Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the political and cultural events in Egypt during the era of traditionalism, colonialism, and the age of modernism, as well as providing a glance at the development of the novel as a new genre in the Arab world and especially in Egypt. The chapter also provided an outline of the new historical tendencies that





show how the Egyptian individual was constantly exposed to change, and how the Egyptian tradition has been reshaped by Western-inspired influences. Additionally, it stated the historical sequences of the development of events which made the literature of Naguib Mahfouz a corner stone for new Arabic literature and made Mahfouz as a notable Arab writer on the world stage. This chapter has laid out the objectives and research questions as well as the significance of the study. The chapter has also discussed the limitations of the study.

