Preface

If Naguib Mahfouz is regarded as the most distinguished novelist of modern Arabic language and one of the few of world stature, with a formidable body of works behind him, Quratulain Haider is known as the leading Urdu novelist and is instrumental in providing Urdu literature with a new vitality and direction not only for the fabulous contents of her writings but also for the sharp political and social remarks. Naguib Mahfouz was awarded the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature and the nation bestowed on Quratulain Haider the country’s most prestigious literary award, Jnanpeeth, for her contribution in Urdu Literature.

Thus, both the writers attract the immediate attention of the readers as they tend to reflect minutely the social, economic and political happenings at hands. However, the social condition of Egypt and India cannot be considered as an exact parallel but both put up strong similarity. In the same way, the writings of both may not resemble each other in their political and social nature but bear a close proximity. Their concerns about the society in general and women in particular are striking features of their writings. It is, therefore, natural that one might feel tempted to select Mahfouz and Qurratulain as representative authors of two streams of culture in order to develop a comparative viewpoint.

Naguib Mahfouz draws pictures of social and individual behaviour in particular circumstances, such as alienation, loss, betrayal and failure. His highly controlled objectivity helps him to give full expression to his characters and themes as he imagines
them enacted on the social scene, and he fanatically avoids adding a sympathetic note to his characterisations. Although many of his characters do not arouse our sympathy or affection, they nevertheless increase our consciousness by their actions.

Liberty is the central theme of Mahfouz's works and this central theme relates to two major themes in his work. There are relations between civilian and nations, as well as between the son or daughter and the father and between man and woman.

Mahfouz creates vivacity by introducing the unexpected into a mundane character. His most interesting and creative women characters, however, are prostitutes. Thus, all of his works that contain prostitutes as main or subsidiary characters, we see that they have in common not so much a commoditisation of body for survival but an urge for independence.

On the other hand, Qurratulain Haider perceives women issues very seriously and presents them very artistically. She prefers to describe women's destiny, their helplessness and exploitation in her writings. She very often, observes irony of fate, and defeat of human determinations against despotic time in the reference of women's vulnerability and misfortune. The women's characters of Qurratulain Haider's fictions neither revolt against men's oppression nor relate their tale of woe. However, she discloses and presents effectively such characters, feeling of womanhood and women's plight to her readers.

When Qurratulain Haider started writing, her stories revolved around the feudal ambience of Awadh which was full of glamour and glitter of life. Her first collection and the first two novels trace joys and sorrows, facts and fantasies of the same culturescape and time period and provide fascinating insight into the panorama of life of the period with sympathy and well-balanced
pathos, the material, moral, and spiritual problems of the feudal society.

However, as she came out of her prime of life, dream and delusion, her attention reverted to human sufferings and social realities. For, she had witnessed the pangs of partition of the country, tragic exodus and communal bloodshed. On the other hand, harsh and bitter realities of life haunted her and the reverie of the beautiful mixed culture was shattered.

The very purpose of this research is to carry out a comparative study of the writings of both these writers and establish similarities and dissimilarities of women's characters in their writings. This will be served by a detailed analysis of their writings. Also, a life-sketch of both writers, incorporating the development of their style will be given. But, before this, a detailed survey of women's status in historical context of contemporary Indo-Egyptian societies would be given. In brief, the approach will be descriptive and a critical evaluation of the writings of both the writers will be also undertaken.