CHAPTER-FOUR

SIMILARITIES AND DISSIMILARITIES OF WOMEN’S CHARACTER IN THE WRITINGS OF NAGUIB MAHFOUZ AND QURRATULAIN HAIDER
To compare one author with another, one literature with another, one literary genre with another, literature itself with other arts, is the traditional activity of the literary scholars and the critics and till the emergence of faculties of national literatures the scope of such comparisons cut across linguistic boundaries. In this process, most people end up with it in some way or other from different points of view. Sometimes, they start their journey with a desire to move beyond the boundaries of a single subject area that might appear to be constraining, at other times a reader may be impelled to follow up what appears to be similarities between texts or authors from different cultural contexts. And some readers may simply be following the view propounded by Mathew Arnold in his lecture at Oxford, in 1857. He said:

Everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration. No single event, no single literature is adequately comprehended except in relation to other events, to other literatures.¹

Henry Remak attempted to define *comparative literature* as he puts:

Comparative Literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature on the one hand, and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts (e.g. painting, sculpture, architecture, music), philosophy, history, the social sciences (e.g. politics, economics, sociology) the sciences, religion, etc., on the other. In brief, it is the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression.²

Thus, comparative literature is essentially a search for some unity in this fragmented world. It envisages a comparative study of
various literatures — allied or even otherwise, with a view to underline the elements of unity in diversity.

Just as Naguib Mahfouz has often been credited with being a pioneer figure in modern Arabic literature, Qurratulain Haider has been unanimously accepted as the most powerful Urdu writer and a trendsetter of the corresponding period. 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. In the previous chapters, the two authors have been studied and analysed with respect to their views about women in the light of their overall contributions. The thrust of this chapter, however, is to distinguish similarities and dissimilarities in their works.

Naguib Mahfouz and Qurratulain Haider are products of the twentieth century — an era of great upheaval, change and transformations. Both the writers belong to somewhat similar situations when their respective countries were passing through drastic changes and reforms and new conditions and institutions were emerging. They have depicted the hopes and despair, agonies and ecstasies, through their characters. How the changes affect men-women relationships and how confusion prevails due to the lack of definite norms and values are the main concerns of both the writers.

When Mahfouz and Haider were starting their literary career, they were faced with similar conditions vis-à-vis politico-economic and socio-cultural environment. Both Egypt and India were third countries and colonies of the British. At both places people were swayed by the nationalist aspirations which led them to fight against the British. People dreamt for a new modern nation and wanted to transform the socio-cultural environment of their respective countries.
Against this backdrop, Mahfouz and Haider penned their works and dealt mainly with social relationships taking shape in the changing cultural context. Naguib Mahfouz chose common family problems, the marriage of young girls to old men, adultery, drunkenness and forced living of wife in husband's house as the crucial elements for his work. Qurratulain Hiader has portrayed in her writings independent women characters and uncovered their mental and psychological world. Thus, the issue relating to women's status in India and Egypt formed the main theme of Qurratulain's as well as of Mahfouz's literary creations.

It is worth mentioning that Mahfouz has been committed to the social issues through which he had enriched the Arab thought in his oeuvre and declared that his thoughts had drawn their fertile roots from the reality and these are natural outcome of a productive living. So, his thoughts spring out of the reality that inspires and motivates, as it is very difficult to assume a writer without commitment or obligation or even a citizen without this. The obligation as terminology means the commitment to a progressive stand about life.

Naguib Mahfouz's views on events, or his interest in them, were influenced by his upbringing. His stories and novels indicate an urban upbringing which made him more acquainted with life in the city than in the countryside. It is a Cairene upbringing that allowed him to know more about Cairo than about other cities – perhaps with the exception of Alexandria.

Between 1939 and 1944, Mahfouz wrote three historical novels, afterwards he turned to novels of contemporary life. Tony Barnstone & Willis Barnstone write:

Mahfouz brings into his fiction an almost journalistic and sometimes surreal view of life, love, death, and despair, in his depictions of picaresque
Cairo types and political prisoners and men and women with broken dreams. He is obsessed with time, with glamorous dancing girls and their shattered ambitions, with life in the coffee houses and tyranny in the home as fathers enslave, with those around him, and, especially, with women.3

Thus, it was again natural for him to be so impressed by the works of novelists like D. H. Lawrence for whom sex had deep philosophical overtones. Lawrence’s impact on Mahfouz is felt throughout his career in the predominance he gives to sex in his novels. This impact is so strong as to lead to the production of a novel which all critics have agreed to consider as unique in Mahfouz’s output. In his presentation of this theme, he was evidently influenced by Lawrence’s treatment of the same subject, for Mahfouz was not simply presenting the Oedipus Complex in its Classical or Freudian framework, but in its Lawrence version.

To Mahfouz, love and sex is an essential human activity which cannot be ignored or overlooked. It is a way of fulfilment and self realisation. He calls for an open admission of this part of nature which moral hypocrisy has, hitherto, forced to be ashamed of. Man must have the moral courage to face and accept all aspects of his nature. When we come across a woman with a complex personality who is motivated by individual goals that have nothing to do with men except as instruments of her advancement, we label her amoral. We gloss over the intricacies of her evolution in the plot, all the while commending Mahfouz for having drawn a credible woman among a panoply of paper dolls.

The love in Mahfouz’s writings is presented as a very violent and sharp romantic emotion. This love is parallel to the world of bodily lust in the rights of music and joy, which he talks at a broad length in his novel. We find, this emotion has many facets and axis, surrounded and attached to the human heart in his joy,
sorrow, despair and hope, in his burning memories which burn in
the soul as the paining memory of lost love mourns the bygone
days. The love in his novel is not a decorative mood to ornament
the story-telling sketch, but it's an integral part of the whole novel
body:

With the same ardent, overflowing, vitality, he
opened his breast to the joys and pleasures of life.
He delighted in fancy food. He was enchanted by
vintage wine. He was crazy about a pretty face. He
pursued each of these pleasures with gaiety, joy,
and passion. His conscience was not weighed down
by guilty feelings or anxious scruples. He was
exercising a right granted him by life, as though
there was no conflict between the duty life gave his
heart and the duty God entrusted to his
conscience.4

Mahfouz paints the emotional life in his most genius way of
his mastery and artistic brilliancy whenever he depicts the two
meeting eyes. He is also brilliant in showing the effect of love on the
lover, paying his attention to those huge life hurdles of hire
coercion or compulsion of social conditions and poverty, class and
belongingness, and impact of all these on the destruction of
emotion and crushing the lover under its debris.

Similarly, Qurratulain Haider is the leading novelist of
today's Urdu literature. A pioneering writer who lived through the
universal reality of the despicable female lot, she would not be
thoroughly comprehensible in her context unless she spoke with
dignity. She truly reacts to women's unfortunate situation with
quiet solemnity. She is aware of the dire plight of the Indian women
to be just politely indignant.

To Qurratulain, love and sex are a natural asset and not the
objects of exhibition. Without an angle of lust and promiscuity, a
kind of deep feeling of love and affection works between men and women in her writings as an act of dignified and elegant love and friendly relation or attachment. However, sometimes, such attachment leads to the sexual relations which were dealt with slightly and with some glances towards their depiction and explanation. That is why, we find a lot of self control and tolerance and deterrence in the Qurratulain’s female characters. Only a very few lustful and promiscuous women who use their sexual gratifications as a means to lead luxurious life or to exploit their opposite sex, find place in her fictional world.

In his description of characters, Mahfouz tends to emphasise the naturalistic law of heredity in both physical and psychological features. As for the physical description, he gives primary importance to the physical description of characters and setting. He aims at giving as full and elaborates a picture of the physical, psychological and moral features of his character as possible:

Nur appeared at the entrance. Unprepared, she stopped in amazement as soon as she saw Said, remaining a few steps away from him. He smiled at her, but looked closely. She’d grown thinner, her face was disguised by heavy makeup, and she was wearing a sexy frock that not only showed her arms but was fitted so tightly to her body that it might have been stretched rubber. What it advertised was that she’d given up all claims to self-respect. So did her bobbed hair, ruffled by the breeze.

Mahfouz is also excelled in picking up the psychological feelings which rage in the heart of his characters at the moment when the two eyes meet with each other provoking some emotions and creating some feelings. He describes the psychological feelings of Fahmi who comes onto the roof, perhaps, to succeed in a look of Maryam, his neighbour. Mahfouz says:
Fahmy watched her appear and disappear until no clothes were left to separate them. She faced him, her small hands rising and falling, her fingers slowly and deliberately grasping and realising what she held, as though she was dragging out her work on purpose. His heart guessed it was on purpose, although he was torn between doubt and hope. He did not fight his feeling of being liberated to the farthest horizons by his happiness. He was conscious of noting but dancing melodies. Although she did not glance up at him, her demeanour, the blush on her cheeks, and her avoidance of looking at him all betrayed how intensely conscious she was of his presence, or the impact he had made on her feelings.

Naguib Mahfouz, on the one hand, describes men-women relationships as a part of larger family and societal relations, on the other hand, Haider is concerned with the details of human feelings and emotions taking larger socio-cultural conditions only as a background. Therefore, we find that while the former does not take men-women relations in deep sense and is preoccupied with the whole gamut of social relations in general, the latter focuses and dives deep into men-women relationships.

However, the themes and issues like low status of women, their exploitation by men, their struggle and a search for a dignified life can be discerned in the stories and novels of both the authors. It is these similarities and dissimilarities that make the comparison of the two possible.

The female characters of Haider generally belong to upper middle class and are nostalgic about their past. They are educated and cultured but stubborn. They have a kind of romanticism and emotion and want to create their own world going to any extent for
achieving their known realities which were discovered by them. But as it happens, they lost their inherited assets, wealth and prestige, because the world where these characters want to have their influence is still the world of men and all the slogans of gender equality raised by the modern civilisation become hollow ones.

In her early writings, Qurratulain traces joys and sorrows, facts and fantasies of the same culture-escape and time period and provide a fascinating insight into the panorama of life of that period with sympathy and well-balanced pathos, the material, moral, and spiritual problems of petty bourgeoisie society. However, she tries to maintain some distance in these early writings, but could not remain unaffected by the emotional attachment with the feudal vim and vigour. Criticising her Ismat says:

The capitalists' agents find communists crouching in every corner. The government hits out directly with lathi charges and bullets at the starving communists. But Qurratulain satirises communism with dazzling beauties in highly romantic surroundings. When her pen, dancing to the rhythm of Kathakali, Manipuri, and the Rumba, and sniffing the fragrance of jasmine buds, writes the word “communism”, it starts hissing like a black cobra. It vomits out in the same breath the Catholic Church, Communism and Yoga, and thus unmasks the reality of its own class. And then it becomes evident what ink it is filled with and in which firm the nib has been manufactured.7

Naguib Mahfouz, too, is labelled by critics (and perhaps rightly so) as the writer of petty bourgeoisie which was to be known due to the emergence of capitalism in Egypt before the national revolt of 1919. The aristocracy, the upper middle class, the working class which struggle to assert themselves and the peasantry forms
no part of his customary scene and when individuals from those groups make an occasional appearance in his fiction or come to look for an individual solution because of its contradiction to the common social solution, they are usually portrayed from outside and through the eyes of the petty bourgeois protagonist. He writes about their tragedy but does not go beyond that. We believe, it is an exaggeration about the writer, because we see when we review the examples of Mahfouz's protagonists, we find the spirit of social obligation running in the veins and words which represent the stand of the protagonist.

Perhaps, what enraged the critics is the fact that Mahfouz's realism is not connected directly with any political ideology or left ideology reflecting its pre-doctrined meanings on his art, but stems from his self convincing and personal feeling of his responsibility as an artist who suffers the tragedy of his people.

For example, we can find it in his collection of short stories “Hams al-Junun” [Whisper of Madness]. In the story “Awakening of Mummy”, he provokes the feeling of meanness and humiliation and exposed us to the blasphemy and disgusting conditions in the society as the country was occupied and distributed among its enemies, then, the Mummy shouts protesting against the conditions of peasants. This, of course, is the symbol of Egypt. He says:

What happened to you? What befall on the land, which has made the noble/ respected law, humiliated and changed the lords to slaves...? O slaves, how do you dare against my sons? Did you hit them and provoke their brethren to hit them, because they are hungry? Do the sons of Egypt will starve her?

In his novel “Al-Qahira al-Jadida”, we see the rise and awakening of the nation in the condition of crisis which were
prevailed on the noon of the end of Second World War. We see him in “Khan al-Khalili” also going deeply in the political and ideological dimension resulting from the disasters of the war which has his all. We find him destroying the putridity and stink which is blowing and diffusing within fiefdom and capitalism.

Moreover, does expressing the view of a particular class in society in any way detract from the writer's literary excellence or his political and intellectual merit? Of course not. He has chosen from these classes the character of a patriot who believes in freedom, education and social justice. He has also made a choice of groups that are hesitant and sometimes corrupt or sinful, to focus on the different modes and conflicts that exist among these groups.

Similarly, Qurratulain's novels and short stories are arresting for their complex examination of the cultural inextricability of the Hindu and Muslim cultures in terms of literature, poetry and music, and the forces of history like Colonisation, Independence and Partition as well as sociological movements like abolition of Zamindari [serfdom], and their conflicts with the flow of individual lives.

After 1950, when 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. As a result she made a serious move towards human instinct and social realism. The departure can be seen in her novel "Aag Ka Darya" and the later writings, for instance, her short story "Housing Society" but the glimpses of that society still exist.

In the era when her books first appeared, Haider's work scandalised several of her contemporaries. It was an era when
women were just beginning to think about their right to live their life on their own terms and were beginning to try and understand and deal with their sexuality. But her work also prompted many to think about rules that defined society then.

Mahfouz has depicted among his vast cast of women strong moral individuals who have been able to survive despite male opprobrium at their trespassing on “men’s turf”. But he has also portrayed weaker women who have not been able to overcome the obstacles. He has satirised men who respond in stereotypical fashion to women’s new, unexpected roles. He has pained the canvas of Egyptian society, always striving to get the whole picture, either by proliferating characters or by embedding a single character in a vivid social context.

Considering Mahfouz’s vast and varied oeuvre, we can say that he also writes as a feminist, because he has opened up the deprived and angry lives of women in the poor and not-so-poor areas of Cairo. He has written of the changing reaction to women’s education in the course of half a century. He has focused on changing marriage customs; he proceeds from a time when neither men nor women could see their prospective partners, to a time when they were introduced through a photograph, to a still more recent time when women propositioned men. He recognises that economic freedom also entails emotional freedom – that women have earned the right to choose whom to love and especially whom not to love.

Haider differs in her themes from feminist writers like Ismat Chughtai in that the feminist impulse is but one separate strand that is subsumed in the broader sweep of history, and also from the progressive writers group of Manto, Bedi, Bhisham Sahni and Chughtai in her refusal to stay leftist and her nostalgia for the aristocratic zamindari life. She is contrasted both to the earlier,
Romantic school in Urdu poetry, and to the Ismat Chughtai's approach towards women issues which was culminated in a movement with the publication of "Angare".

The anti-class attitude of progressive movement has helped in bringing the women issues in the fiction more obviously but at the same time the dominance of ideas of class conflict and economical freedom has eclipsed the voice of women freedom and its loudness. However, the women issues, consciousness of secondary status and subjugation of humanity had been expressed especially in women's writings with one way or another. In this regard, the contribution of fiction has been immense and more important than other genres. And Qurratulain Hiader, among the fiction writers, has felt more strongly about this issue and tried to present it more artistically.

Though we can't confine her works in the limit of feminism only, it is hard to ignore this distinct quality, among ideological and artistic qualities of her novels and short stories, that she took the fate of women, her helplessness and exploitation as her preferred topics. More often, she tries to see the hostility of fate towards human beings and the defeat of human ambitions and adventures before the unbridled power of the time in context of women misery and helplessness. If we do not consider this intention, we can try to assess the value of outcomes of that trend with feminist point of view.

Qurratulain Haider's writings capture vital flashes of the human predicament. The immediacy with which the narration affects the reader's mind speaks for the stark authenticity of the experience presented. While they are all deeply rooted in their specific socio-cultural contexts, the spirit of her stories transcends to a realm where human connections are easily perceived. Somewhere in the constitutional make-up of each of Qurratulain's
female characters, exists a woman who is not merely a nameless adjunct of the household machinery, but who while asserting her independence, shakes to the core, if not demolishes, time-honoured values and customs.

Mahfouz's women do not live in a world apart where they suffer independently; his men and women are part of the same universe. They are locked into mutually dependent relationships in which one's behaviour influences the other. Mahfouz creates memorable women whom readers grow to love or hate as though they knew them personally. Some are educated, some illiterate, some kind and some mean, some chaste and some loose.

Qurratulain's female characters have the same status, they have dignity and self-esteem but also restless. The anxiety is not confined to educated and modern women who are in a great number in Qurratulain's fiction but all kinds of women with different levels of intellect belonging to old generation or new generation suffer from the same anxiety which makes many of them dissent and revolutionary, and when it calms down, turns them philosopher and saint.

And yet, one gets the impression that, encased in a societal mould, the woman's prototype instigated by a storm inside her, is inclined to spill out from it. As a result, there emerges a new impression on the surface of the prototype's mould. The prototype may come out from its fortified world and get moulded into a variety of other characters.

Such a transformation of the woman's prototype in Qurratulain's stories is discernible on the first reading but on reflection, one can also see that her female characters repudiate the old concept of character in fiction. The old kind of characters because of their physical appearance or mental make-up, are different from ordinary humans. Often compared to her
contemporaries and great writers Milan Kundera and Gabriel Garcia Marquez for the brilliance of her prose and her way of describing events, Haider was awarded the Bharatiya Jnanpith, India's highest literary award in 1989.

Mahfouz has pluralized the actors on his urban Egyptian stage to portray men and women for the rich, the petty bourgeois and the destitute classes. The heterosexual relations he portrays are paradigmatic of relationships of power pertaining throughout Egyptian society. In their relationships with others, Mahfouz's male characters are constructed according to the binary model of master or salve.

Qurratulain Haider chronicles different forms of women with historical perspective from ancient period to modern times in some of her novels. She prefers to women's destiny, their helplessness and exploitation in her writings. Very often, she 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 her fictions neither revolt against men's oppression nor relate their tale of woe to them. However, she discloses and presents effectively such characters, feeling of womanhood and women's plight before her readers.

Most critics have asserted that Mahfouz's women are images — the symbols of good or evil in Egyptian society. The symbolisation of Mahfouz's women persists because the study of women's roles in men's literature has been confined to the discussion of images in isolation from their impact on the evolution of the male characters. If a woman made only brief appearance, critics did not feel she warranted much of their discursive space. But Mahfouz's women are much more than symbols. They are as critical to the development of the plot as are male protagonists.
While Mahfouz's men need women, his women would like to — and quite often do — escape their need for men.

Generally, the female characters acquire central place in Qurratulain's fiction and have their own set of ideals. Of course, they all have a role to play. They are not only men's rivals but also their partners and companions. There is a good sense of equality between the characters of both sexes. They don't travel in a parallel and colluding course and do not engage in sexual conflict though they all are endowed with their gender qualities and have sexual ingredients and attributes.

However, the female characters make a lot of influence on their male partners and companions and have a say in their lives. It is another matter that they don't get married to the men of their choice. So, we can say the women of Haider's fiction are always in search of fulfilment and union. They suffer from the misery and hostility of unfavourable life situations or from their own conscience and ideals.

Mahfouz is deeply influenced by Joyce's depiction of his alienated hero. He is also equally fascinated by the manner in which Joyce delineated his hero's inner crisis of isolation, through following his stream of Consciousness. Thus, Mahfouz started to adopt his technique in some of his novels. The most remarkable of these novels is Al-Liss wa al-Kilab which can be legitimately considered the first Arabic novel where the technique, 'stream of consciousness' has been used. Trevor Le Gassick in the Introduction of Mahfouz's "The Thief and the Dogs" puts:

Mahfouz uses the stream-of-Consciousness technique for the first to the mental anguish of his central figure consumed by bitterness and a desire for revenge against the individuals and the society who have corrupted and betrayed him and brought about his inevitable damnation."
In this novel, he shows his full awareness and full assimilation of the various techniques of the stream of consciousness employed by James Joyce. As an example of this, there is the way Mahfouz presents the character of Ra'uf Alawan. We never get an objective, detached description of him. We first hear of him when Said reads one of his articles in the newspaper:

But what was it that seemed to be inspiring Ilwan now? Said found only comments on women's fashion, on loudspeakers and a reply to a complaint by an anonymous wife. Diverting enough, but what had become of the Rauf Ilwan he'd known? Said thought of good old days at the students' hostel and particularly of the wonderful enthusiasm that had radiated from young peasant with shabby clothes, a big heart, and a direct and glittering style of writing. What was it that happened in the world? Did things happen that were similar to what took place in the al-Sayrafi Lane? And how about Nabawiyya and Ileish and that dear little girl who rejected her father.10

Similarly, the narrative devices used in Qurratulain's novels are broadly those of the stream-of-consciousness technique. The streams of the characters' thoughts move freely from one epoch to another and have their raisond'être in their effectiveness to build up a cohesive picture of Indian ethos over the ages. Time itself assumes the dimension of a character and seems to participate in the action of the novel. More often, she presents her story through 'stream of consciousness' as Tanweer Fatima of Patjhar ki Awaz expresses her deprivation despite all her pleasures and enjoyments:

I keep lying on bed silently with open eyes in dark nights. Science has revealed to me many secrets of the world. I have read numerous books on
chemistry and I have pondered for long but I am scared. In the dark nights, I become terrified a lot.
Khush Waqt Singh, Khush Waqt Singh. What concern do you have for me?

In terms of technique, range and sweep, Qurratulain’s novels are a tour de force in Urdu and possibly in Indian fiction as a whole. The ‘stream of consciousness’ technique, which she often employs, was first introduced in *London ki Ek Raat* by Sajjad Zaheer and has been perfected by her.

When we compare Mahfouz’s *Zuqaq al-Midaqq* and Qurratulain’s *Sita Haran* with socialism of Charles Dickens and naturalism of Emile Zola, we find that both the writers are following on their footprints in studying the Egyptian society during the World War II and Indian society during the Partition respectively. The two novels comprising vivid characters give the impression that they are wonderful creative description about sensitive areas of conflict and tragedy in the lives of the two societies passing through a period of fast transition.

Both the writers want to emphasise the dramatic aspect of time and conditions. The importance of Midaqq appears with Hamida’s view because the social condition of Midaq combines with Hamida’s psychology reproducing dramatic touch and pushing the events to the decisive end. On the other hand, Hamida is born with more ambition than her social and material capability. From here, the discerning friction of the tragic protagonist becomes visible. Then, it continues harassing him either to take definite legal actions or keeps away from existing morality of the society. This friction plays the role of fate that can’t liberate the individual.

Mahfouz deepens the dramatic line represented by the character, Abbas. He also tries to make deeper the parallel line represented by Hamida. So, she sinks into viewing the
psychological proposition about clothes and vessels. Then, the luxurious clothes stirred in her greedy and ambitious mind bewitching dreams of power and influence. The writer proceeds saying:

“She was convinced that it was the magic key to the entire world. All she knew about herself was that she dreamed constantly of wealth, of riches which would bring her every luxury her heart had ever desired. In spite of her fantasies of wealth, she was not unaware of her situation. Indeed, she remembered a girl in Sanadiqiya Street who was even poorer than she. Then fortune sent a rich contractor who transported her from her miserable hovel to a fairy-tale life. What was to prevent good fortune from smiling twice in their quarter? This ambition of hers, however, was limited to her familiar world, which ended at Queen Farida Square. She knew nothing of life beyond it.”12

On the other hand, Qurratulain’s Sita can be seen by sharing the feeling of emotional exile and uprootedness. Her culture is deeply linked with her soul. She migrated from Sindh to Delhi following the tragic incident of Partition in 1947 and tries to mould herself according to the present social paradigm. However, the feeling of displacement haunts Sita again and again taking the events to the decisive end. Thus, she experiences repeatedly solitude and loneliness:

All of a sudden, she came to realise that she has no friend. In this vast world, in this great scintillating capital and in this milling crowd of acquaintances, she has no companion. Why not? What wrong she did with them?13
This uprooted Sita wants to go back to her roots with the intention that she can obtain integrity of her body as well as her soul. In this process, some hidden desire pushes her one after another to different men but not in a single one amongst them she finds solace for her soul.

Mahfouz’s Hamida is always busy in comparison, exploration and thinking about the best opportunity for marriage. Hamida had never known the life of a simple respectable girl. She had no happy memories of the past and was now quite engrossed in the enjoyable present. Her case was different from Sita who had been forced by necessity or circumstances into their present life and were often tormented by remorse. Hamida’s dreams of cloths, jewellery, money, and men were now fulfilled and she enjoyed all other power and authority they gave her.

Hamida still felt strangely restless and dissatisfied. Not entirely ruled by her sexual instincts, she longed for emotional power. It was perhaps because she knew she had not achieved control over her lover that her attachment to him increased, along with her feeling of resentment and disillusion.¹⁴

In fact, Hamida is a rebel to her social condition as a destitute woman. Her indignity ends as she departs the alley with the help of a suave pimp and joins whore industry. The symbolism of Hameeda’s parting with alley is brought out through the narrative’s harping on the motif of past and present where she makes up her mind to run away from the alley for ever:

She did not feel very much the burden of the tug-of-war between her past and present.¹⁵ Is there a way to escape the fetters of the past except through that man who lit the fire of her imagination?¹⁶
She turned her back on the past and no longer thought of anything but the future.\textsuperscript{17} Her body gave in to the feel of the car as it sped away from the whole past.\textsuperscript{18}

She conceives her journey as one towards 'light, wealth and power and in her imagination addresses her 'seducer' in these words: 'I'm coming unto you. Let my strength meet yours and let us forever wrestle happily together'. (p. 215) So fraught are the words with meaning and so dense is the texture of the narrative with suggestion that Hamida and her escape cross in the reader's mind the demarcation line between realism and symbolism and a whole new world of meaning erupts into existence: this is not merely a novel about a poor girl dazzled into a life of sin by her ambition and her lust for life – it is as much a novel about a nation at the crossroads, torn between a cultural past that is her very identity but no longer viable, and a modern world which will not accommodate her unless she is ready to shed all vestiges of the past.

One day Hamida recalls how miserable she had been the first time when Ibrahim Faraj said he did not want to marry her. She had asked herself if she really wanted to marry him. The answer, in negative, had come immediately. Marriage would have confined her to the home, exhausting her with the duties of a wife, housekeeper, and mother, all those tasks she knew she was not created for. She now says how farsighted he had been.

However, Sita becomes submissive to every man who carries any kind of power and influence. Perhaps, celebrities, intellectuals and artists are her weakness. The writer says:

Projesh Kumar Chaudhry.......the great painter of the country.......world fame expressionist artist.......whose pictures she had noticed in exhibitions, in magazines and books. On them, she
had read articles in American art magazines. At this hour, Projesh Kumar Chaudhry was standing before her in person. Thinking that she is having conversation with the most famous painter of India, she felt a wonderful sensation. Being impressed with famous personalities was her biggest weakness.\(^{19}\)

Sita is a product of treacherous civilisation and a creature of a bland culture. She has a series of dreams one after another but all of them are shattered before they are fulfilled. At the end, she becomes a symbol of deprivation and frustration. She establishes relationship with different men in search of security which provides her love as well as recognition. Perhaps, Projesh understands this fact. He says:

Sita Devi, you are so a strange girl in this world that you will hardly find the happiness that you are looking for.\(^{20}\)

In both cases, Hamida and Sita make their own choices and take the decision as an individual with complex interests and goals. They choose their ways by themselves. Hamida chooses prostitution because her choices are limited, not because she is forced whereas Sita herself is responsible for her plight because some hidden desire pushes her in unbridled and indiscriminate sexual experiences in the face of vagaries of time. However, her sexual experiments don’t have any justification and her confession and declaration of sins give only a statement of defence. So, we feel sympathy towards her lot and at the same time consider her as admonitory and warning.

Hamida has rejected her destiny as a traditional Egyptian woman for whom marriage is the sine qua non for social acceptability. She is not condemned by her circumstances to sell her body – she is engaged to a respectable young man and has a
secure, though poor and unexciting, future in the Alley. She chooses to emulate the Jewish factory girls whose economic freedom gives them the means to dress well and the appearance of control over their lives and their bodies. Hamida craves this freedom, despite the pain she inflicts on all who care for her. Freedom from the alley means more, much more than security in an oppressive world.

In fact, Hamida’s decision mirrors and participates in a stage of Egyptian feminism, does not mean that she should be reduced to yet another kind of symbol. This symbol would be of the morally reprehensible influence of Western notions of equality and women’s rights at the expenses of community. Hamida emerges out of a milieu in which there is almost as little freedom for men to act out new patterns as there is for women.

However, the character of Sita can be described as negative in the eyes of feminist movement, despite her all artistic qualities she has. As the title gives a context of mythological symbolism to the story of kidnapping Sita, wife of Rama, it seems that it is based on woman exploitation but the reality is different altogether. Doubtlessly, Indian society has been patriarchal since centuries and all the efforts to understand and allocate the status of women have been by-product of gender discrimination consciously or unconsciously.

Thus, relying only on this notion, we can not put blame on the men and patriarchal society for the emotional and personal weakness of some independent female characters in fiction. Of course, introducing such independent women characters like Sita Mir Chandani in Urdu fiction is an extraordinary effort and a severe blow to the male dominance. This revolutionary attempt of presenting such female characters though as fictitious is nothing less than clearing a great hurdle in the way of feminist movement,
which had been made the eastern women unaware of those heroic struggles launched by their counterparts in the west. This trend makes a fertile ground for the feminist movement in East.

In brief, both the writers do not present society as uncomplicatedly oppressive. They only wish for human aspect bestowing them authority on the transitory social aspect. They want to say that the ambition is human instinct from the very beginning and remains the same till the end. Yet, Mahfouz takes refuge of stipulative style and does not indicate whether Hamida is happy or not. He leaves the matter of character to the matter of critique and Qurratulain’s story ends at a tragic note.

As Mahfouz’s magnum opus is usually said to be his Cairo trilogy which traces generations of a Cairo merchant family, Qurratulain’s Aag ka Darya is also known to be her masterpiece. In the trilogy Mahfouz traces the history of an Egyptian middle-class Muslim family between 1917 and 1944 and the family history is given against a background of politics and politicians, with much discussion of political as well as family matters in the coffee houses which loom so large in city social life in the Arab world. The Trilogy is concerned with the examination of the changing conditions of life for individuals and society across a succession of generations in a given family.

It is a powerful novel of Naguib Mahfouz that shows us the duality of its characters’ lives in a tantalizing world of harsh realities and gossamer spirits, at once severe and alluring, and in a society moving from tradition toward modernity. In the second part of the trilogy Qasar al-Shawq, Abd al-Jawad, a stern patriarch who rules his household with unrelenting rigidity, abstains from his pleasures and permits his wife her little outings.

Amina, the wife of Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad, reconciles herself to a type of security based on surrender, a willing prisoner
in a society where it is forbidden for a virtuous woman ever to show her face to any man outside her immediate family. Her relationship with her husband is characterised by total and unquestioning acceptance of his authority. The imperturbable serenity of her temperament, like her husband's unique ability to accommodate his contradictions in a state of harmony, should be seen as another manifestation of the world-view behind it.

In fact, the objectification of women protects men against their own weakness and allows them to weave fragile delusions of power and control. No wonder then that when, after twenty-five years of this protected, blindfolded life, Amina decides to venture out only as far as al-Hussayn Mosque in the immediate vicinity, the contact with outside reality is catastrophic in its consequences: she is hit by a car and has a broken collarbone which confines her to bed for three weeks. A yet more serious consequence was her temporary exile by her husband/God as a punishment for tasting of the forbidden tree-of knowledge-of-the extra-domestic.

In the very first year of their marriage, Amina had asked very politely about the patriarch's repeated nights out. He had strongly reacted and seized her by the ears telling peremptorily in a loud voice:

"I'm a man. I'm the one who commands and forbids. I will not accept any criticism of my behaviour. All I ask of you is to obey me. Don't force me to discipline you."21

In fact, men who cannot control their own lives or the lives of insubordinate men, turn to women as objects over which they can have dominion. The relationships Mahfouz's men initiate with women are always explicitly grounded in Asymmetric power. Women's insubordination—any hint of autonomy—threatens these men's fragile identities and represents the final stage in their
alienation. They cannot confront, and therefore they escape, women’s challenge, thereby, stunting any possibility of growth.

Qurratulain’s Aag ka Darya is invaluable in presenting a version of Indian history up to the 1950s, and particularly the initial troubled times after independence. Mind-boggling in its span and scope, Aag ka Darya (River of Fire) is essentially a study in the absorbing culture and civilisation of India over the ages. The reappearance of the four central characters in every epoch and their predicament underscore the recurring patterns of human experiences which are universal and timeless and contribute to the unity and centrality of the vision projected by the novel.

In this novel, Qurratulain Haider makes an effort to present different forms of women with historical perspective from ancient period to modern times. In the novel, the character of Champa is an attempt to present the same sequence. Champa is a metaphor of Indian women who was the daughter of the Royal Priest of Ayodhya and in spite of her sense and sensitivity she was compelled to marry an aged Brahmin against her will. And then:

She had undergone her own transformation: she had done what a mere woman was required to do — she had accepted her "fate" and perhaps, this was her duty...... It was Champak's religion that she must worship him and attend on him because he was her husband. She used to attend on him as thousands of housewives used to do. She was one of them and there was nothing special with her. She was holding her baby in her lap.22

In the Middle Age, the same Champa became Champawati who loves Abu al-Mansour. But Abu al-Mansour was preoccupied with his victory and forgets Champawati who devotes her whole life to loneliness and oblivion waiting for him. Sometimes, this Champa in"Aag Ka Darya" searches her identity in brothels of Lucknow
while Champa of modern era is living lavishly and has all kinds of luxurious amenities but she cannot express her feelings to her ideal Aamir Raza. As a result, she is destined to eternal solitude.

Beside writing novels, Naguib Mahfouz and Qurratulain Haider have created a cast of men and women whose actions and beliefs affect each other in their short and longer stories. If they had not written any of their novels, they would still have merited a place of prominence in their respective languages only on the basis of their short stories. In the longer works, Mahfouz explores heterosexual relationships in depth. In the shorter fiction, he relies more heavily on allusion. The intensity of women's relationships with men rather than their symbolisation of larger forces makes Mahfouz's portrayal of women exceptional.

In Qurratulain Hiader's stories, Hasb Nasab (Honour) and Carmen, the female protagonists meet the same fate. Chhammi Begum of Hasab Nasab keeps waiting for her would-be husband who gets married to a whore while Carmen's heroine of the same name is not aware of the fact till the end of the story that her lover has married another girl and has a child. Both Chhammi and Carmen remain loyal to their lovers but their feelings are not honoured by their respective lovers who are, of course, men. Both women become victims of male treachery and betrayal. Chhammi Begum's and Karmen's situations are also similar. One faces partition of the country, death of parents due to cholera while another has to toil with her sick father in the times of war.

In the story "Patjhar ki Awaz" [the Sound of Falling Leaves], Tanweer Fatima develops relationships with a score of men during her lifetime in pursuit of joy. But, at the end she is not able to understand the gains rather she can only realise loss. Fatima is a well educated woman believing in the value of freedom of the modern society. Qurratulain portraits Fatima's sorry state which
results from her freedom in a male dominated society. In the story, Tanweer Fatima's search for identity, clash of old and new values and men's never-ending superiority has been beautifully brought out.

The character of Tanweer Fatima in Patjhar ki Awaz is echoed in Mahfouz's story Al-Ziaf (the counterfeit) where the women protagonist's love affair with a celebrated poet becomes a matter of ridicule. Tanweer Fatima's inclination towards different men and her eventual loss of peace is reflected in Al-Ziaf.

Moral degeneration obtaining in men-women relationship has been described by Naguib Mahfouz in Raud al-Faraj, Khiyanatun Fi Rasa'il (Treason in Letters) and al-Marad al-Motabadal (The Alternate Disease) like stories. Qurratulain Hiader, though does not make moral degeneration her main concern, she subtly describe change in values and arising confusion through her characters. She emphasises, rather, the role of corrupt men and struggling women through the ages. Thus, her male characters like Aiju Bhai in Hasab Nasab, Agha Shab Awez Hamadani of Agle Janam Mohe Bitya Na Kijyo, Jamshed of Housing society who considers women only as business materials and a source of enjoyment, symbolise the immoral segment of society in the stories of Qurratulain Haider.
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