Chapter- 4

Social Consciousness in The Trilogy

Social consciousness is consciousness shared within a society. It can also be defined as social awareness; to be aware of the problems that different societies and communities face on a day to day basis; to be conscious of the difficulties and hardships of the society.¹

It is a well-known fact that when a nation diseased with social evils, there are always some people who stand out to condemn and attack the evil phenomena. They make a strategy to oppose the situation in different ways. One of the strategies they use is the literary work. In the Arab world, it is Najib Mahfouz, a lively social critic, sees himself in a socio-political climate laden with various forms of perverseness and deviation. Mahfouz minutely observes that most of the people in his nation leading depraved life, especially a large number of Muslims whose life styles are contrary to the faith they profess. He has taken an equal observation in the individual, family and the nation as a whole. His novel depicts the hypocrisy, patriarchy, oppression, corruption, sexism, class-consciousness etc. In fact his novel is a microcosm of Egypt. Mahfouz is traumatized by this type of societal decadence, creates public awareness against the same. In this regard he rightly holds the view believing that “literature should be more revolutionary than revolution themselves” and that writers must find the means to continue to be critical of the negative elements in the sociopolitical reality.”²

The Trilogy is a masterpiece of Arabic Literature. This is an evocative, sensual, provocative and overwhelming account of Egypt moving towards independence. Most of the interesting aspects of The Trilogy are domestic and

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_consciousness
² Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar, Naguib Mahfouz from Regional fame to Global Recognition, (New york: Michael Syracuse University press, 1993) 65.
national transitions and how al-Sayyid Ahmad's second and third generation adapt and refuse the changes going on. This very novel takes place in Cairo and it reflects the period in which it is set. One of the eminent writers rightly hold the view that "no writer can escape the influences of his environment- social, cultural, political and intellectual, every writer is a product of the age in which he is born and bred, and in which he works and creates."¹ Najib Mahfouz is no exception. Before independence many social changes gradually took place in Egypt and it had profound influence on Mahfouz. After all, in Cairo at the turn of the century traditions were intractable, social reforms unheard of and male dominance unquestioned. Mahfouz records all the changes in his magnificent novel The Trilogy. He also records the changes in the status of women for example, the changing relationship between fathers and sons, the changes in tastes and styles, 'Plumpness plus'² and so on.

4.1. Hypocrisy in The Trilogy:-

At the outset of Bain al- Qasrain (Palace Walk), the first part of The Trilogy, it is Ahmad Abd al- Jawad (a merchant and shop owner) who acts in his home like a faithful Muslim. He is very serious and sincere in his prayer, and fulfills his religious duties to God like prayer, fasting, or alms giving. He frequently visits the shrine of al- Husayn on Friday with his sons believing that visiting the shrine of al- Husayn itself is a blessing and protects him and his family from evil. He also recites the short suras (chapters) of the Holy Qur’an. These qualities make him so dear to his friends and at the same time convince his children to think that he is not only gentle and graceful but an upstanding and exemplary man whose moral conduct is impeccable.³

With like disposition, he delights in the pleasures of life—delicious food, choice wine, pretty faces. He pursues each of these pleasures with gaiety, joy, and passion. Wine and women in his extracurricular life are inseparable and complementary. He enjoys himself to the fullest as long as there is life, without suffering any conflict between his piety and sensuality. His conscience is never weighed down by his guilty feelings or anxious scruples rather he congratulates himself for his finesse in managing his two faces. Nobody knows about his secret matter except his few friends. One of his friends, Shaykh Mutawalli Abd al-Samad criticizes his behaviour and asks him if his obedience to God is “by word or deed”. He responds in a tone that does not hide his distress -

باللسان والعمل معا بالصلاة والصيام والزكاة، بذكرى الله قائما وقاعدًا، وما على بعد ذلك إلا روحه عن نفسي بشيء من الله الذي لا يؤدى أحدًا أو يغفل فريضة، وهل حرم محرم إلا لهذا أولاً؟

By word and deed both, by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, by remembering God whether I am standing or sitting. Why is it wrong for me, after that to refresh myself with a little fun, harming no one, or for me to overlook one rule? Is nothing forbidden save these things?

The Shaykh disagrees with his reply and mutters, “what a perverse defence!” Again, Ahmad Abd al-Jawad rejoins that God is clement and merciful, and that even his vengeance is mercy in disguise.

It is worth mentioning that Al-Sayyid Ahmad, according to his representation, holds prayer, fasting and almsgiving as the atonement for his profligacy while he continues to glory in it. Yet the Holy Qur’ān is quite clear on the essence of prayer:

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1 Najib Mahfouz, Bain al-Qasrain, (Cairo: Maktabat Misr, 1956) 44.
3 Ibid., 43.
Recite that which has
Been revealed to thee of the Book,
And observe Prayer. Surely, Prayer
Restrains one from indecency and
Manifest evil; and remembrance of
Allah, indeed, is the greatest virtue.
And Allah knows what you do. (Al-Ankabut 864).

So the reprobate Al-Sayyid Ahmad reorders the scriptural context to suit his dissoluteness.

Al-Sayyid Ahmad has two personalities that serve two different bodies. One is reserved for friends and lovers, the other presented to his family and the world. It is this second visage that sustains his distinction and respectability, guaranteeing him a status beyond normal aspirations. Yet his caprice conspires against the respectable side of his character, threatening to destroy it forever.

At home he gets angry for the most minor reasons. He is affected by his short temper, which is not held in check at home by the brakes of civility that he employs outside his household. His irritation at home, is understood, gives him some relief from the effort he exerts with other people as he tries to exhibit self-control, tolerance, graciousness, and concern for other people’s feelings and affections. At times he realizes the unreasonableness of his domestic rage, but even at that, he does not regret it. His belief is that getting angry over trivial matters will prevent serious ones. For example, when Fahmi falls in love with Maryam and wants to get her marry, Amina is requested to give this message to his father. After hearing this matter Al-Jawad as his manner is, blurts out: “What are you saying, woman?…Repeat what you [have] just said.” “What are you saying, woman?…Repeat what you [have] just said.

“It is just a question, sir, with the decision left entirely to you…” Amina mumbles.
"He [replies] in an explosion of anger: 'What is this spineless pampering?...But a mother like you could well ruin her children. If you were the kind of mother you ought to be, he would never have dared discuss such insolent nonsense with you' "1

Rasheed El-Enany condemns the character of Al-Sayyid Ahmad, describing in his book *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit of Meaning*, that he

Is a bundle of contradictions: a stern, authoritarian, much feared patriarch at home, but a cheerful witty, much-loved friend and businessman outside; a true believer and pious worshipper in daytime, but at night a devoted libertine given to drink, women and merrymaking. Yet, all these contradictions live inside him in a harmony worthy of a god.(81)

There is a saying that nothing remains hidden forever is well demonstrated in this case. Ahmad Abd al- Jawad’s secrecy does not remain hidden for long time. One day it is open when Yasin, the first son of al- Jawad, who becomes the customer of Zanuba, is informed that his father always makes passes to a woman who takes to drinking and dancing music. This information makes him so curious and finally with the co-operation of Zanuba discovers his father enjoying with Zubayda. After seeing his father Yasin is suddenly struck with astonishment and tells himself,-

"What an amazing situation! It would never have occurred to me. Here I am with Zanuba and my father is in a nearby room with Zubayda. Both of us in the same house!"3

After discovering his father Yasin does not control his emotion and soon informs his younger brother, Fahmi discloses all the secret stories in detail. He blabs-

"My father goes to Zubayda’s house to drink, sing and play tambourine...My father allows Jalila to tease him and be affectionate with him...My father gets drunk and commits adultery." Completely stupefied the listener wonders, "Is my father depraved or is licentiousness a virtue?"  

The news of Ahmad Abd al- Jawad’s hypocrisy spreads through women’s quarter. It also passes from mouth to mouth until it reaches the mother, Amina as well as Khadeejah and Ayshah.

Another beautiful example of the household’s hypocrisy has been described in Bain al- Qasrain. On the day of Ayshah’s wedding, Ahmad Abd al- Jawad arranges a big party where he invites the eminent singers and dancers from his dark world except Jalila, the folk ensemble leader with whom he has long physical relation. But al- Jawad leaves her beginning a new relation with Zubayda. She does not mind it but resents the fact that he tries to appear as a respectable man in public. So she wants to revenge against him and enters the party without being observed at the time singing is going. Her sudden appearance attracts the attention of nearby eyes, as all the people know about her outbursts. She begins to chide Ahmad Abd al- Jawad for having ended their long, passionate affair. He becomes astonished to see her and tries to hide her. He asks her- “didn’t you think about the suspicions your visit might arise in the minds of those who saw you?” Then she addresses his companions disclosing the hypocrisy of Abd al- Jawad, for example —“Is this the best welcome you have for me?” She also says-

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"Gentlemen, you’re my witnesses. Observe how this man, who used to be unhappy if he could not stick the tip of his moustache in my belly button, can’t bear the sight of me."

The guests are shocked to hear a shoddy woman like Jalila accuses Sayyid Ahmad’s adultery. Yasin, however is delighted, realizing that she is only one of his father’s many conquests. He feels proud about his father’s relationship with Jalila, as he did when he saw him with Zubayda. But her accusation shocks Fahmi, who cannot believe Yasin’s account of his father’s adultery. His mother and sister, however, accept it resignedly, understanding their precarious position in a society dominated by rules.

As the novel develops, Al-Sayyid Ahmad is in a difficult position to effect discipline. Since he is the head of his family, he has simply divested himself of the right of role modelling. It is not enough that he has a domineering influence or an awful attribute. Rather, he stands likely to be challenged by any erring member(s) of the family if he tries to enforce discipline. Yasin and Fahmy, who incidentally know of their father’s other side, happen to be libertine themselves. For example, Fahmy has two whores he visits regularly at their different brothels. It is known that Yasin’s passion for the women he encounters (is) an incurable malady. He is known “not discriminating between fine ladies and women who sell palm fruit and oranges on the street.”

It happens that after he has married and divorced two women, the third one—Zanuba—who was one of his father’s concubines, is the one he lets stay. Yasin’s second marriage was

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1 Najib Mahfouz, Bain al-Qasrain, (Cairo: Maktabat Misr, 1956) 256.
dissolved when his wife noticed that he had been taking their maid (Nur) to bed. This was after he had sexually assaulted the family’s servant—Umm Hanafi.

It is astonishing to see a man who is false not only to other people, but also to himself. It is the height of falsehood and hypocrisy. He manages his double dealing, damming scruples. Al-Sayyid Ahmad evinces knowledge of his vicious personality and yet he expects to harvest corn where he planted thorn. Thus shamelessly he pontificates:

I do what I want and still I’m al-Sayyid Ahmad. That’s all there is to it. What a fine idea it [is] for me to try to rear my sons to be outstanding examples of rectitude and purity, since it [will] be difficult for them to balance my lifestyle with my honour and rectitude. But, alas, my effort [is] in vain with this son by Haniya.  

However, it is a mere wishful thinking, an exercise in futility, because giving a good advice, but showing a bad example is worse than useless. No wonder Yasin lashes the conscienceless father, asking him to discipline himself first, to give himself some advice. He asks him if he has forgotten the Zubayda, Jalila, music, and wine episodes. Zubayda and Jalila have been Al-Sayyid Ahmad’s secret sweethearts. Yasin reminds his father how he, Al-Sayyid Ahmad, had been appearing before them (his family members), wearing the turban of the most authoritative Muslim legal scholar—the Shaykh al-Islam—and carrying the sword of the Caliph, the Commander of all Muslims. Yasin reminds him that he should leave him alone, for he is not a child anymore. Yasin advises his father to rather look after himself.

Mahfouz presents this outburst and allegation process to expose and condemn the cloak of dishonesty, which some men wear in their social life. He

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2 Ibid., 410.
intends that this piece will call them to good conscience, enabling them embrace the principles of moral code for more meaningful and dignified life.

A hypocrite cannot be sure of where the game of two-facedness will land him, since one facet is played mainly in the dark. Unfortunately darkness is precarious. Al-Sayyid Ahmad has a bitter experience during one of his nocturnal, amorous adventures. One day, after midnight he leaves the home of Umm Maryam (Maryam’s mother)—Maryam later becomes Yasin’s wife—concealing himself in the darkness. It has been like that every night since the English soldiers set up camp there. This particular night is different because the sentry halts and seizes him, forcibly turning him around, and shoving him in the back. A policeman takes him to a trench where he spends the rest of the night, digging pits along with other night adventurists like himself. Before dawn, he has been completely exhausted, having laboured all through without rest. Feeling humiliated, he regrets his dishonesty that has subsumed his faculties.

4.2. Patriarchy in The Trilogy:

Apart from hypocrisy, the truthful picture of patriarchal system is portrayed in Bain al-Qasrain. It is Amina who is confined to the house by her husband. She is not allowed to counsel her husband on any issue. She keeps herself busy from morning until it is midnight. Amina begins her day after the dawn prayer and prepares breakfast for the family that she carries to the dining table where the men are sitting around. She stands in the room by the water jug waiting to obey any command where the women are allowed to eat only after they have left the house. At night she catches only few hours of sleep and wakes at mid night to wait her husband’s return from his evening entertainment and serves him until he goes to sleep. Amina gets worried by this regular habit

and one night she ventures a polite objection to her husband’s coming home late. As a result of it he seized her and said authoritatively with a loud voice-

أنا رجل، الأمر الناهي، لا أقبل على سولوكي أيّة ملاحظة، وما عليك إلا الطاعة،
فحاذرى أن تدفعينى إلى تأدبيك١.

*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.*

Amina is disappointed by the threat of her husband and becomes so conscious while speaking to her husband. She has come to know how to obey and fear her husband, whom she always addresses as “my lord” with great respect and reverence. She also realizes that her only duty is to make him happy and comfortable and not probe into his private life. It is worth noting that her duties make subservient to her husband. She helps him from dress to undress and fetches water and a basin when he bathes. Apart from respect, she neither sits beside him while relaxing on the sofa nor speaks to him unless asks. Amina accepted all these oppression silently and asks God to forgive him. She, however, does not make any polite objection against her husband although he regularly drinks wine and comes home at midnight. Amina is so bothered by the activities of her husband which she cannot bear with. So, one day she discloses all her grief to her mother. Her mother consoles in this way-

لقد تزوجك بعد أن طلق زوجته الأولى، و كان بوسعه أن يستردها لو شاء، أو أن يتزوج ثانية وثالثة ورابعة، و قد كان أبوه مزوجاً، فاحمدى ربنا على أنه أبقاك زوجة وحيدة٣.

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1 Najib Mahfouz, *Bam al- Qasrain*, (Cairo: Maktabat Misr, 1956) 8
He married you after divorcing his first wife. He could have kept her too, if he wanted, or taken second, third and fourth wives. His father had many wives. Thank our Lord that you remain his only wife.¹

After that Amina becomes very aware in the sense that she might be divorced in any moment by her husband. Under such type of egoistic husband, Amina’s personal freedom has been suppressed severely by her husband for there is a tradition prevailing in Egypt that no women are allowed to leave home without the consent of her husband. Sometimes, if they are allowed they will leave secretly, dressing in shabby clothes, in order to conceal her identity.² The same thing is happened to Amina for after twenty five years of marriage she has never gone beyond the walls of their compound except a few visits to her mother in the Kharan fash quarter, always with the company of her jealous and possessive husband. As it is seen that while al- Jawad is very serious about preventing Amina at the same time she keeps an utmost desire in her mind to visit the shrine of Al- Husayn in order to get the Imam’s blessing. One on occasion, when her husband is on a business trip, Amina with the co-operation of her children, ventures to visit the shrine of al-Husayn. And finally she visits the shrine accompanied by Kamal where she discovers the new world enjoying the natural beauty. She becomes more emotional to the extent that she is unable to believe her eyes and whispers with true devotion, “Our Lord al-Husayn.” On entering the innermost part, close to the sanctuary, she feels that her soul has been transported to the heavens.³

Unfortunately, Amina’s visit in the shrine is not without mishap. She is hit by a car and suffers a broken collarbone, which necessitates a stay in bed to recover. The whole families are frightened by the accident and want to conceal the matter from the house hold. But on the arrival of al- Jawad at home he

²Al- Ghazzali, Ihya Ulum al- Din, 255-57.
makes out about her accident and becomes very angry. As a result of it she is punished severely by her husband and expelled from the house, saying only-

"Leave my house immediately"\(^2\)

True to Al-Sayyid Ahmad's command, Amina immediately leaves the home where she has lived with him for twenty-five years. While she is away, Al-Sayyid Ahmad has some moments of reflection. In each case, he convinces himself that the issue of forgiveness does not arise. He thinks that if he yields to the appeal of affection, which he longs to do, then his prestige, honour, personal standards and set of values will all be compromised. He feels that he will lose control of his family, and the bonds holding it together will dissolve. His belief is that he cannot lead them unless he does so with firmness and consistency. He puts a stop to any further contemplation of mercy, because, as he thinks, if he forgives, he will no longer be Al-Sayyid Ahmad but someone else he can never agree to become.\(^3\)

The patriarch had similarly broken off his marriage with his first son's (Yasin's) mother. Out of pride and authoritarianism, he descended on her when she evinced a spirit of rebelliousness, insisting on visiting her parents from time to time. The beating was so merciless that the woman had to flee to her parents. Consequently, Al-Sayyid Ahmad, thought that the best way to discipline her further was to leave her for a time, and to go for her later. Unfortunately, the relationship failed to be renewed.

Ahmad Abd al-Jawad's patriarchal authority also affects his children because he neither believes his wife's judgment nor her handling of the children. For example, when Ayshah attains her age she falls in love with a police officer,

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\(^1\) Najib Mahfouz, *Bain al-Qasrain*, (Cairo: Maktabat Misr, 1956) 185.

\(^2\) Ibid., 185.

\(^3\) Ibid., 194.
Hassan Ibrahim, a friend of Fahmi. One day the police officer informs Fahmi about his desire to marry his sister and requests him to communicate in the family. When Fahmi conveyed this message to his mother, she becomes happy and dare to inform her husband. But al- Jawad forbids Ayshah’s marriage to Hassan Ibrahim because of many reasons. At first he thinks that the police officer may have seen her in person, breaking a social taboo which he considered as serious offense. He also believes that because of it there may have suspicion to his honour as well as his family etc. But the real fact behind his objection is that Ayshah’s marriage is not consulted with him at first that he considered as a first violation of his patriarchal authority. So, when al- Jawad is informed about the intention of police officer, he gets worried and says his wife loudly-

لَن تَنْتَقِلُ ابْنَتِي إِلَى بِيْتِ رَجُلٍ إِلَّا إِذَا ثَبَتَ لَدَى أَنَّ دَافِعَهُ الْأَوَّل إِلَى الْزِّوَاجِ مِنْهَا هُوَ رَغْبَتِهِ

الخاصة في مساهرتي أنا ... أنا ... أنا ... أنا ... أنا ... أنا ...

No daughter of mine will marry a man until I am satisfied that his primary motive for marrying her is a sincere desire to be related to me ... me... me... me.....”

It is worthwhile to mention here that under the patriarchal system, the mind of patriarch becomes the mind of his family, for his wish is their command. In Bain al- Qasrain the same thing is happened to Amina who loses her own opinion, power and trust on her husband’s opinion. The reason is that her weak personality has been submerged by the domineering personality of her husband. For example, when Amina conveys the news of Ayshah’s marriage proposal to her husband, she is asked to give her own view on the matter, then she replies in this way-

\[1\] Najib Mahfouz, Bain al- Qasrain. (Cairo: Maktabat Misr, 1956) 151.
"My opinion is the same as yours, sir. I have no opinion of my own. "If that was so, you wouldn't have mentioned the matter to me at all." "Sir, I mentioned it to you only to keep you informed about the new development, since it's my duty to let you know everything that affects your home, coming from near or far." "Who knows...yes, by God, who knows? You are just a woman, and no woman has a fully developed mind."

The harshness of the patriarchal system does not spare the children in the household. In so many ways the children are badly affected. For example, when Al-Sayyid Ahmad drives his wife Amina, away from his home, their children suffer the psychological effect. The patriarch does not realize that his strange action wounds their children’s sensibilities. The children, adults and minors alike, dread him beyond measure, because of his fickleness, and unpredictability. For example, when his youngest son, Kamal dares to ask him to bring back his mother, it “[leads] to a beating so fiery that smoke [pours] from the boy’s ears.”

The patriarchal system is very powerful and employs every means to maintain itself. The paradox is all but too obvious: the unlimited power of control which the patriarch exercises, and the gospel of freedom, which has become fashionable in his age. This is the question Mahfouz addresses.

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3 Ibid., 220.
4.3. Class system:

It is a well-known fact that class and sexism causes discriminatory tendency. This system categorizes people according to their individual stations and history of origin. A people’s class-consciousness involves their insight of the differences in the individual social and economic situations. For example, based on economic parameters, there are the bourgeoisie and the proletariat class. In the social context, the level of literacy and the field of career are strong parameters. However, and excellence in any of these variables may or not change an individual’s standing in the society. On the other hand, “Sexism” according to Doob in his *Sociology: An Introduction* "is a set of beliefs emphasizing that actual or alleged differences between men and women establish the superiority of men. Sexism is a rationalization for political, economic, and social discrimination against women" (272).

In *The Trilogy*, Faud al-Hamzawi, the son of Jamil al-Hamzawi becomes an important government attorney. His father has been al-Sayyid Ahmad clerk in his business for many years. Al-Sayyid Ahmad is a successful merchant and of the higher class but Jamil al-Hamzawi is not. Hence he, Hamzawi, while expressing the intention to have his son Faud marry Al-Sayyid Ahmad’s granddaughter, is uncertain of what his master’s reaction will be. Pleading most humbly, Hamzawi quickly adds,

لست قد المقام طبعا... فلم يسع السيد إلا أن يقول:

أستغفر الله يا عم جميل، نحن أخوان من قديم الزمان...

"Of course, we’re not of your class..." Al-Sayyid Ahmad found himself forced to reply, “May God forgive us, Uncle Jamil. We’ve been brothers for ages.”

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This follows that even though his son is now an achiever in his own specialty, he does not yet see that as an important factor changing their status.

Similarly, Al-Sayyid Ahmad’s family members do not see their father’s clerk’s social class as having changed because of his son’s attainment. Hence, while they are discussing Hamzawi, and his son’s marriage proposal, one of them, Abd Shawkat (Al-Sayyid Ahmad’s son-in-law) makes reference to “the baseness of Faud’s origins” while Al-Sayyid Ahmad’s daughter, Khadeejah remarks:

"But if this marriage takes place, Na’ima [Al-Sayyid Ahmad’s granddaughter] may find herself mixing with people who are beneath her. Family origin is everything."  

Pride and glory are two key elements of class distinction – no “mixing with people who are beneath.” The class syndrome precludes even old affection. Mahfouz exposes the ambivalent class system – its self-centeredness, pitilessness, as well as how it confesses love that is only skin deep.

Similarly, sexism underestimates women. It makes men feel that women are nonperformers, unequal with them in intelligence and strength. The concept of male superiority causes men to deny women the right to certain opportunities, including education. For example, in Sugar Street, Yasin and his wife, Zanuba, have a moment of making an important decision concerning their daughter, Karima. The husband and wife air contrary views as to whether or not their daughter should go to school.

1 Najib Mahfouz, Al- Sukkariyya, (Cairo: Maktabat Misr, 1957) 22

2 Najib Mahfouz, Sugar Street, (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1994) 22.
Optimistic that their daughter will have every opportunity to be educated, Zanuba tells her husband –

ما دامت تنجح في ابتدائي فستنجح في ثانويّ، البنات أضمّن اليوم من الصبيان...

"If she does well in elementary school, she’ll succeed in secondary school too. Girls today are a safer bet in school than boys."

This statement sounds strange to Yasin and he does not fail to re-join: “We don’t send our girls to secondary school. Why not? Because they’re not going to take jobs.” Certainly, the phenomenon of sexism lays hold on men’s subconscious leaving them to individual notions. Hence, Yasin’s explanation is that they don’t allow girls go to school because they’re not going to seek employment. Yet many a man has different reasons. For example Ibrahim Shawkat, Yasin’s brother-in-law, who expresses concern about girls, gives a different reason. He says:

“The effect the exertion of studying has on girls concerns me. Besides, a girl is going to end up at home.”

The concept of sexism is so powerful that even when a man is well able to train all his children, he does not consider it worthwhile sending his daughter(s) to school. He sends the boys only. If however, a man sends his children to school, including the female(s), and his lot plummets making it difficult for him to cope with their tuition, he automatically withdraws the female one(s). For example, in Palace Walk, the prominent merchant, Al-Sayyid Ahmad, is renowned for his prosperous business. He is a liberal man and many people come to him to meet their needs. He sends his three sons to school but leaves his two daughters home; he rather grooms them for marriage.

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1 Najib Mahfouz, Al- Sukkariyya, (Cairo: Maktabat Misr, 1957) 151.
2 Najib Mahfouz, Sugar Street, (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1994) 151.
3 Ibid., 151.
4 Ibid., 162.
to a form of absolute rule hidden behind a counterfeit parliament. At the end of
this experiment, we’ll find that Faraq’s as powerful and tyrannical as Faud, or
worse. And all this is the fault of some of our compatriots.”

The elections were rigged. Everyone in the country knows that. All the same
they have been recognized officially, and the country will be governed
according to their results. What this means is that people will become
convinced that their representatives are thieves who stole their posts that the
whole government is bogus and fraudulent, and that theft, fraud and deception
are legitimate and officially sanctioned. So isn’t an ordinary man to be excused
if he renounces lofty principle and morality and believes in deceit and
opportunism?.

In *Sugar Street*, bribery and corruption are important elements in the
running of offices, and they hold sway in the government departments. They
wield power over time and tide, influencing decision-making on several matters,
including staff promotions and disciplinary actions. For example, during one
promotion exercise in the Ministry of Education, Yasin Afandi becomes the
management’s choice for promotion to the position of a sectional head. While
the workers are speculating who is going to be promoted, Yasin, having been
well connected to the decision makers and secretly received assurance,
dismisses his colleagues’ view that “the selection should be based on merit, not
influence.” He blurts out “What strange ideas you have! Isn’t influence

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necessary to obtain any position in this world?" True to his series of vaunts, Yasin is promoted. Announcing the promotion, the director of their department tells Yasin-

"You've been promoted to the sixth level." Relieved and delighted, Yasin replied, "Thank you, sir." In a rather dry tone the man continued: "It's only fair to tell you frankly that someone else deserves it more than you do. But strings were pulled on your behalf."

Similarly, when Yasin has a case that attracts disciplinary action, a well-connected personality steps into it. The matter is that Yasin has a fight in Massage Alley with a whore. As a result, a police report is filed, and a copy reaches the Ministry. Consequently a disciplinary panel decides to transfer him to Upper Egypt. However, Yasin's father without delay meets with acquaintances who are in parliament or distinguished in other ways and asks them to intercede to stop the transfer. Eventually he succeeds and the transfer is cancelled.

4.5. National Movement:

Najib Mahfouz through his novel *The Trilogy* draws a highly detailed map of Egypt's political orientations. He emphasizes the national role played by

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futuwwa during the popular uprising against the British occupation as well as their part in suppressing the wafd, the nationalist anti-British, pro-democratic party arisen from the ashes of 1919 led by Sa’d Zaghlul Pasha (d. 1927).\(^1\) He also describes the political unrest in Egypt and the outbreak of the nationalist revolution, the struggle of the Egyptian nation to annihilate autocratic rule and to obtain independence and establish democracy. It is worth mentioning here that after the end of World War I, British occupation over Egypt intensified. Intellectuals and revolutionaries yearned for Egyptian independence. The 1919 revolution led by Sa’d Zaghlul and others from politics, business and literati leaders of the 1919 revolution met at the Café to plan their strategies. Many people from different walks of life took part in demonstration and the novelist Najib Mahfouz portrayed all the pictures in a good and excellent manner. He also tries to show the strength of nationalism and the affect of the British occupation on the Egyptian people.

It is Fahmy who plays a significant role in the novel. He is the best educated member of the family and the first to attend college as a law student with the promise of a bright future. He is an idealistic, decent young man whose personal conduct appears above reproach. Above all he is an ardent nationalist. He represents the rising, better educated generation committed to the liberation of Egypt from the British, the first generation after world war I to take up national struggle against foreign domination.

At the outset Mahfouz offers only a glimpse of political events. It is Sayyid Ahmad who complains about the prices that have been driven up by the war and the Australian soldiers who have spread through Cairo like insects, playing havoc with the people, then praises prince Kamal al-din for refusing to succeed his father sultan Husayn Kamil, noting that sultan Ahmad Fuad [later king Fuad] has accepted the throne with British blessings. Amina who knows

little of events and, seeking to please him, comments “God is able to restore to
us our Afandi Abbas.” The Sayyid responds with no little disappointment, “who
knows when Abbas will be restored?”

Elsewhere Mahfouz tries to mention the war and the impact of the British
soldier’s behaviour toward the people. Though all the family members of Sayyid
Ahmad support the national struggle against British domination, Fahmy is the
only one actively involved. He declares the German cannot be defeated, while
Yasin insists that the Egyptian must rid themselves of the British and restore the
Caliphate to its past glory. Later Shaykh Mutawalli Abd al-Samad is accosted in
the moski quarter by two Australian soldiers apparently bent on the robbery.
When the protests that he has only a jug, one grabs it from hand and smashes it,
while outer tears his turban and shawl and throws them in his face. The helpless
victim can only ask god to destroy the British as they have destroyed his
belongings.

Mahfouz focuses on the political unrest in Egypt and the outbreak of the
nationalist revolution. Fahmi tells Yasin that a delegation [Wafd] led by
Zaghlul, with Abd al-Aziz Fahmi and Ali Sha’rawai as members has called on
Sir Reginald Wingate, the British high commissioner, to ask for termination of
the protectorate and the proclamation of Egypt’s independence. Yasin, less
interested in national politics than in women, has heard of Zaghlul, the president
of the legislative assembly, but not of the others. Here Mahfouz seeks to show
that few young people knew who Zaghlul really was. Although some considered
him a great national leader, others thought he was British lackey. Yasin
considers the nationalists’ request mere wishful thinking. But Fahmy is more
enthusiastic, feeling that the Wafd’s plan to travel to London and open
negotiations represents the first step toward getting the British out of Egypt.

Amina simple and ignorant as she appears elsewhere in the novel makes a
surprisingly logical comment. She cannot understand why Sa’d Zaghlul and his
colleagues should travel all the way to England to ask the British to get out of Egypt. This she says, is most discourteous; how could someone visit her at home while he intends to expel her from his own home?\(^1\) Thus Amina observes with surprising logic that this action seems unwise, and Zaynab agrees. Yasin also argumentatively discusses with Fahmy and expresses his confusion. Unlike, Sayyid Ahmad and Shaykh Mutawalli Abd al-Samad exchanges their feelings that “It’s impossible! ---it’s impossible”; the English will not leave Egypt without fight. On the other hand the nationalist political aspiration gradually began to increase among the people; suddenly one day, one of the bosom friends of Sayyid Ahmad namely Muhammad Iffat appears into his store with anxious feelings. He comes to him bringing an authorization petition and tells him to read with a smile, for example-

نحن الموقعين على هذا قد أبينا عن حضرات سد زغلول باشا و على شعراوى باشا و عبد العزيز فهمى بك و محمد علي طوبية بك و عبد اللطيف المكابتي و محمد محمود باشا و أحمد لطفى السيد بك ، و لهم أن يضموا إليهم من يختارون ، في أن يسعوا بالطرق السلمية المشروعة حينما وجدوا السعي سبيلًا في استقلال مصر استقلالًا تاما.\(^2\)

"We the signatories of the document, authorize masters. Sa’d Zaghlul Pasha, Ali Sha’rawi Pasha, Abd al-Aziz Fahmi Bey, Muhammad Ali Alhuba Bey, Abd al-Latif al-Makabbati, Muhammd Mahmud Pasha and Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid Bey, and those persons they choose to include in their hum her, to strive by all legal and peaceful means available to them to achieve the total independence of Egypt".\(^3\)

After reading this petition he becomes astonished and does not understand what this paper means. Then he says him to put his signature in favour of their mission. After putting his signature he expresses his feelings with intense interest, "it seems the matter is serious". In this way many enthusiastic people

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\(^{1}\) Najib Mahfouz, *Bain al- Qasrain*, 308- 09.
\(^{2}\) Ibid., 313.
\(^{3}\) Najib Mahfouz, *Palace Walk*, 313.
begins to wander elsewhere of the country; and urges the people to join the national revolution and to get the English out from Egypt. Fahmy, an ardent nationalist, distributed handbill among the people to provoke anti-national feelings. As a result of it, the political situation of Egypt began to change rapidly. Many from different sectors take out demonstration to end the autocratic rule of British and to establish democracy. When the situation went out of hand, the high commissioner eventually had to call the British troops from Syria to crush the revolt.

But the British authorities realized that force could not settle the Egyptian problem, so they released Zaghlul and his colleagues and allowed them to present their grievances before the peaceful conference in Paris. From there Zaghlul traveled to London to plead Egypt’s case with the British government. In December 1919, the British government delegated Lord Milner to investigate the situation in Egypt. But Milner’s commission returned three months later without success, and the next year anti-British demonstration continued. This time the British deported Zaghlul to Aden, then Gibraltar and finally to Seychelles. The situation was somewhat eased on February 22, 1922, when the high commissioner issued a unilateral declaration ending the protectorate and promising Egyptian independence. In April of the next year, a constitution was issued and amnesty was granted to Zaghlul, who returned to Egypt and soon became the head of the political party. In January 1924, the new party won a decisive victory in the national election, establishing the Wafd and Zaghlul not only as the dominant political forces in Egypt, but also as the symbol of Egyptian nationalism.

In Bain al-Qasrain, the head of the family Sayyid Ahmad is partially interested in politics. He often talks about politics at home and at work, and even hangs Zaghlul’s picture in his shop. But, as many Egyptian he does not act on his professed believes. He discusses the activities of Zaghlul and other national
leaders but apparently avoided involvement in politics.\(^1\) The outbreak of the revolution, however, affects the lives of all the members of his family, and their reactions constituted major part of the novel.

Fahmy, like many students of his fellow law students, is active in the national movement and often meets with friends to discuss the current events. He contends that the protectorate was imposed by the British government as a war time measure, without the consent of the Egyptian, and therefore had no legal basis. He is in fact echoing the circular Zaghlul and his colleagues sent to Sultan Fuad after they initially were forbidden to plead Egypt’s case at the peace conference. Unfortunately they were arrested by the British and exiled. This information broke the heart of the Egyptian people. The Sayyid’s family reacts passively to Zaghlul’s arrest, while Yasin commented in this regard “It’s sad affair”. After receiving this news Fahmy exclaimed passionately, for example-

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\text{يا لهم من أوغد هؤلاء الإنجليز! فنذكم باللغة التي كانوا يستعطفون بها الناس في}
\]
\[
\text{محتهم في جيوب بالإذادات العسكرية والنقفي والتشريد.\(^2\)}
\]

“What rogues the English are! –We address them in the same terms they used to again sympathy during their ordeal and they answer with military threats, exile, and banishment.”\(^3\)

When Fahmy becomes so upset, Amina tells him not to be so upset. She also says that politics is not the business of the ordinary citizens, and Fahmy should not put at risk his career and his life. Sayyid and his pleasure companions are saddened but hardly surprised to learn that the British have arrested Zaghlul and other national leaders and deported them to Malta. They wondered whether they will remain in exile forever, and whether the national hopes today will be lost as in the past. They have met as usual to drink and have fun, but news forces them to face the bitter reality that the British have once more humiliated their

\(^1\) Al- Ghitani, Najib Mahfouz Yatadakar, 14.
\(^2\) Najib Mahfouz, Bain al- Qas’rain, 336.
\(^3\) Najib Mahfouz, Palace Walk, 336.
countrymen. None of them has even the vaguest idea of what to do; they dare not even express their indignation by joining the demonstrators and can only turn to the most merciful God for help. Their sheer fatalism is typical of Middle Eastern people. They seem to have forgotten that God helps them who help themselves, while their adversaries call on the same God to strengthen their foothold in Egypt. After some casual discussion tinged with remorse, they decide to alleviate their sorrow by drinking.

Fahmy is greatly enraged by Zaghlul’s deportation. He considers the British are villains, answering the Egyptian with threats instead of civility. He says tearfully, if the Egyptians do not counter their terrorism, they will never enjoy peace, and Zaghlul who has offered ransom the country, will continue to suffer. His mother and Yasin express sadness at Zaghlul’s exile, but they care little about politics and the national movement. Zaynab comments about Fahmy after getting his strong nationality that why he rages so strongly against the British, as if Zaghlul were his own father and mother. She seems to blame Zaghlul and his colleagues for Egypt’s plight and their own, contending that if they had held their peace like other people, the British would not have deported them. Although she belongs to the new generation, like Amina she is uneducated and his little understanding of politics. Her utmost desire is to have a loving husband who will share life with her. But Yasin while declaring he is sad at Zaghlul’s deportation decides it is time to gratify his carnal instincts and leaves the house, most likely to the nearest bar.

Fahmy senses that the situation in the country is abnormal, and that some cataclysmic event is about to happen. Arriving at the law school, he finds some student calling for a strike, excitedly shouting, “Down with the British protectorate! And long live Sa’d Zaghlul!” after discovering the procession of students, the British advisor to the ministry of justice comes to advise them to

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mind their business and return to classes. At that point one of the student protests his advice, for example-

ان آباءنا قد سجنوا ، ولن ندرس القانون في بلد يداس فيه القانون.  

"Our fathers have been imprisoned. We won’t study law in a land where the law is trampled underfoot”  

It makes clear about the strong national feelings of the law student and Najib Mahfouz focuses it in a proper manner. The law students, however, took out the demonstration to the streets, joined by others from the schools of engineering and agriculture. The revolution has begun, and none feels happier than Fahmy. When the peaceful protests are met with force, he is not afraid of dying. He feels that he is fighting for the freedom of his country. According to him the demonstrations, supported by Egyptians from every walk of life, represent a new hope, the dawn of a new era that will shake the foundations of the Nile valley. 

During the strike time, Mahfouz gave a real nationalist feeling through the character of Kamal. The revolution affected Kamal’s freedom of movement between home and school which was a trivial thing to grown-ups but not to a ten-year old. The British soldiers make tents in front of their house, and spread out almost all the streets of Cairo. Kamal frequently used to visit the British troop’s camp, when he gets back school. He has spent half an hour each afternoon at the camp, where he makes friends with some of them, especially young Julian. He imitates their activities by forming a model of a military camp on the roof of his house. He makes tents out of pieces of cloth, using pencils as poles. Pieces of wood become guns, wooden shoes are trucks, and date kernels are soldiers. Near the camp he spreads pebbles to represent the anti-British demonstrators, meanwhile singing English songs. Then he moves on to the

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Egyptian camp, arranging the pebbles in an offensive position, and shouts-
"Long live Sa’d Zaghlul! Down with the British protectorate!"

With friends like Julian on one side and his brother on the other, Kamal experiences an intense internal struggle after which he finally declares the Egyptians the victor.¹ Thus the revolution make a deep impression on Kamal. While Fahmy is indignant and militantly anti-British, Yasin is passive, sympathetic to the popular cause, but unwilling to let the revolution interrupt his pursuit of pleasure. Kamal hears his kindly mother asking God to purify the hearts of both sides and establish peace between them, but he also hears Zaynab pouring invective upon Zaghlul and blaming him for all the trouble in Egypt.

Thus, Kamal found his freedom of movement restricted and perplexed by the political situation and the attitudes of various family members. He sympathizes with the revolution, but cannot explain why. When Azharite demonstrators pass by his school and urge the students to join them, he falls in narrowly escapes death; later returning home, he encounters Fahmy, who begs him not to reveal his involvement, lest he incur the Sayyid’s wrath.

After then Mahfouz turns to discuss about Fahmy regarding his serious involvement with politics. As the demonstrations continue and the casualties increase, the Sayyid discovers by sheer chance that Fahmy is deeply involved in nationalists’ struggle. As he and his sons are coming out from the mosque on Friday, an Azharite student pointed out Yasin and accuses him of being a British spy. Fahmy instantly retorts that Yasin is his brother and is not a spy. A young man steps forward and, recognizing Fahmy as one of the national fighters, asks the group to release his brother. The Azharite retreats with discomfiture and other apologize for the unfortunate incident. At home the Sayyid questions Fahmy and learns that he is a member of a national committee of the national

fighters and has been distributing nationalist circulars. He cannot believe that Fahmy his favourite son would expose himself to danger, when God has ordered the Muslims not place their lives in jeopardy. Fahmy tried to justify his actions by saying that God urges the believers to engage in jihad (holy war). When his father objects that God means by jihad is the struggle for his holy cause, Fahmy answers that fighting for the homeland and fighting for God are one and the same. But the Sayyid wants his son to cut his ties to the national movement and stop distributing circulars.

After then Fahmy thinks himself what should he do? He is too deeply committed to the national cause to retreat from it, yet he loves his father and does not want to displease him. He must choose between obeying his father and fulfilling his duty as a citizen. He also thinks that to join the revolution is noble, but to disobey his father is disgraceful. He decides to tell his father he will give up his role in the national movement, while in reality he plans to continue the struggle. Finally he tells his father he will obey his order. The Sayyid, wants some assurance, asking him to swear on the Qur’an that he will give up his role in national movement. Fahmy is astounded. Now his faith and his integrity are at stake. If he lies, he will compromise his moral standards. Seeing his hesitancy, his father suddenly bursts into rage, shouting that Fahmy is lying to him, like the rest of the family. Vowing not to be fooled, he insists that his son take an oath on the Qur’an. Fahmy refused and says tearfully that he cannot let down his friends with whom he is working. He is no better than they, nor than those who were martyred by British fire. National principles and personal responsibility have finally overcome his father’s authority.

Mahfouz shows the British presence in Egypt as not only a denigration of national dignity but a source of humiliation to the people. Throughout the novel people complain about the behaviour of Allied troops, particularly the Australians. The humiliation of Sayyid Ahmad, however trivial it seems, is
especially significant. While demonstrating students and others are dying, the Sayyid sneaking out of Umm Maryam’s house at midnight is intercepted by British soldier. He wonders why he has been stopped, since he is not a demonstrator or an agitator, or even active in politics. The soldier nearly knocks him to a ground, and then takes nearby building where many people from all walks of life are working in the yard. At that time, the Sayyid recalls brutality of the British at the village of Dinshawy in June 1906. The villagers had asked some British officers hunting pigeons nearby to leave, and when they would not go willingly, drove them out. Unfortunately, a captain who was slightly wounded in the skirmish lost his way, wandered into the desert and died of sunstroke. The British authorities accused the villagers of killing him in cold blood, tried them summarily, and hanged them in the village square. The Sayyid pictures himself a similar fate. There is a deep hold in the buildings yard, and the soldiers prod the detainees to fill it dirt. One soldier pushes the Sayyid, ordering him to get to work or face severe punishment. What humiliation for this authoritarian figure, feared by both family and friends! How could a businessman of social standing and dignity be so humbled? He has never done a day of menial work in his life nor taken orders from any one, and British soldier orders him to fill a hamper with dirt and carry it to fill the hole in the yard. He cannot believe that he and others have been insulted. He wants to cry, but cry is not worthy of men. He wishes he were home in his comfortable bed, but home suddenly seems far away.

Eventually, the Sayyid is released and he returns to his house and work, but he cannot forget that Fahmy has for the first time challenges his authority. He wishes the revolution would end soon; he does not mind contributing money to the national cause but fears that someone close to him may become the casualty. Unwilling to show any sign of weakness, he returns to himself that
when the British soldiers forced him to dig dirt, he wished Fahmy were there to save him from his plight.

Shaykh Mutawalli Abd al-Samad, a friend of Sayyid Ahmad, surprised that Fahmy would disobey such a disciplinarian, urges the Sayyid to admonish his son to stay away from trouble. In this context he recalls the activity of the British at the village of al-Aziziyya and Badrashin. Hundreds of armed British soldiers, he says, attacked the villages at night, stormed the residences of their mayors, and violated their women, dragging them from their homes by the hair. They beat the men and pillaged everything they could put their hands on. Finally they set fire to the houses, made mostly of straw, and the villages went up to flames. He asserts that Fahmy should not become involved, for God alone can destroy the British, as in the past He destroyed nations that disobeyed Him. Here, Mahfouz reflects beautifully about the strong belief of Middle Eastern people upon the almighty God. He says a poor Muslim Shaykh like Abd al-Samad to view the British presence as pragmatically as a politician; but he is like many Middle Eastern people, both Muslim and Christian, who believe firmly that a just omnipotent God alone can avenge them against their enemies.

Sayyid Ahmad and his friend Jamil al-Hamzawi, seem to see the nationalist movement and the demonstrations as primarily the activity of the younger generation. According to them, reckless youths act irrationally, and the adults suffer the consequences. Al-Hamzawi says these crazy days have perverted the minds of youngsters that even his own son Fuad wants to join the demonstrations. These men of older generation seek only a quiet life and see no benefit in defying the British, who nevertheless treat all the Egyptian people harshly and try to eliminate those who oppose them. Among their targets is Abd al-Hamid Bey Shaddad, the son a leading dry goods merchant in the al-Abbasiyya quarter, deported from Egypt when Khedive was deposed.
When the situation becomes out of control and the British Authorities realizes that military force could not subdue the Egyptians, they released Sa’d Zaghlul from exile on April 7, 1919. The news is received with great joy and high expectations; the Egyptian people from every walk of life welcome this news and congratulating each other.

Shopkeepers celebrated by giving soft drinks to passersby; women paraded in the streets, dancing and saying patriotic song like- “O Husayn, it was only an ordeal, and it is lifted!” The muazzin groups to the balconies of their minarets to give thanks, pray, and shout. But no one was stirred more than Sayyid Ahmad, who shouted in this way-

إله أكبر، إله أكبر، النصر للمؤمنين! 

“Allah Akbar!” (God is the greatest!) And victory to the believers!"^1

Now Sayyid Ahmad cares less about Sa’d Zaghlul’s release than about Fahmy’s safety. He thinks peace will come, and there will be no more casualties. But Fahmy, seeing Zaghlul’s release as a surrender by the British, believes that Zaghlul will return from Paris with Egypt’s independence, and April 7 will forever symbolize the victory of the revolution. His enthusiasm is contrasted with Yasin’s passive attitude towards the national movement. Yasin says that he joined the student at his school in demonstrating joyfully; when Fahmy doubts this assertion, he protests that he is no less nationalistic. The difference between them, he says is that he does not condone violence as a means of achieving national goals. He wants to harmonize his love of country with his desire for safety. When Fahmy gets approval from his father, he becomes so happy and leaves his house to meet his colleagues of al-Azhar University. They are discussing arrangements for the enormous, peaceful demonstration, where Fahmy is given to supervise the group of students from

^1Najib Mahfouz, Bain al-Qasrain, 406.
^2Najib Mahfouz, Palace Walk, 406.
secondary schools. It has two hours remaining to start the demonstration. He takes his place at the spot assigned to him, the door of the railroad station. There is no one in the square except for supervisory personnel and scattered groups from various religious factions. The weather is mild, but the April Sun poured down on the exposed to its scorching rays. Each group goes to location where its banner is displayed. Fahmy sets off to work with pleasure and pride.

Now Cairo is filled with masses of demonstrators moving like waves from the square of the city to another. When they reach Azbakiyya garden, suddenly and without the slightest provocation British soldiers open fire, where Fahmy is shot dead. Mahfouz describes the great ardent nationalist’s death in interior monologue in this way—


After Fahmy’s death, Mahfouz describes the greatest national feelings of Kamal. Sayyid Ahmad is informed about the sad news when he is sitting in his shop. He cannot believe it, he thinks that the time of killing has gone forever and peace is established. The Sayyid who has spent his life pursuing pleasure, feels the merciless pangs of grief. Not only is his son dead, his bright future is

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1 Najib Mahfouz, Bain al-Qasrain, 470.  
2 Najib Mahfouz, Palace Walk, 470.
vanished, and with it the nation’s dream. As he returns home, hears the following song having national feelings from his son Kamal-

"Visit me once a year. It would be a shame if you should forget me completely."²

Fahmy’s death stands in sharp contrast to the death of other heroes and heroines in Mahfouz’s novels. Their deaths are a confusion of defeat and despair, while Fahmy’s death is really a victory in defeat.³

4.6. Practise of Religion:

Religion is the service and worship of God. It influences people’s way of thinking and manner of life, transforming their spirituality to a higher realm toward God. Mahfouz observes that most of the people in his nation leading depraved life, especially a large number of Muslims whose life styles are contrary to the faith they profess. He also notices, that sensuality and materialism have subsumed their spirituality, leaving them as mere hearers and not doers of the word of Allah. Mahfouz had expected that believers would impact society with their faith and good works, but, they are no different from others. He therefore concludes that religion has lost its place in the scheme of things.

Mahfouz is worried with the wrong interpretations given to some Qur’anic texts and some wrong notions about Allah. In *Palace Walk*, there are a number of occasions whereby people have interpreted some verses of the scripture out of context to excuse their indulgence. Yasin, for example, rationalizes his habit of marrying and divorcing women, one after the other, He

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¹ Najib Mahfouz, *Bain al-Qasrain*, 476.
claims: "Religion supports my view, as shown by its permission to marry four
wives, not to mention the concubines with whom the palaces of the Caliphs and
wealthy men are packed. Religion acknowledges that even beauty itself, once
familiarity and experience make it seem trite, can be boring, sickening, and
deadly." Apparently Yasin is referring to a text in the Qur'an, which says:

And if you fear that you will
not be just in dealing with the
orphans, then marry of other women
as may be agreeable to you, two,
or three, or four, and if you fear
you will not be able to do justice,
then marry only one or marry what
your right hands possess (Al-Nisa 4.4).

Yasin feels neither shame nor disgrace in divorcing his wives. His
unbalanced interpretation of Qur'an, together with his indifferent attitude
towards marriage, is typical of many other men's position on the issues of
marriage, and religion. Mahfouz condemns this anomaly and many other
dignitaries have severely criticized it. Having had two broken marriages, Yasin
misinterprets the scripture to justify his naughtiness. What he does not realize is
that no portion of the Qur'an encourages any man to sack his wife. Rather, the
scripture condemns it vividly. Thus, the Holy Book, after explaining the
conditions that may give rise to polygamy declares: "If however, in any of the
above cases a husband divorces his first wife [or any], it would be a shame and
disgrace to him" (Al-Nisa 4.4.560).

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Mahfouz also raises the issue of homosexuality in Muslim culture, tying it to the teachings of Islam. His magnificent *The Trilogy* present among other things, a picture of social ills, including licentiousness. Mahfouz’s presenting of homosexuality is noteworthy because the topic is deeply objectionable to the Islamic tradition in which the novels [Trilogy] and their author are rooted. In the Qur’an (7:80-81), as well as in the Hadiths of the prophet, in the writings of early Caliphs and of medieval jurists, there is repeated consensus that homosexuality is a sin, and that the homosexual is a deviant who will meet with divine punishment (Matar 294).

“If you find anyone committing the deed of lot,” the Hadith of the Prophet states, “kill him and the other upon whom the deed is done” (al Dhahabi 55). Also Sha’aar 119 and Yahfoofi 171 condemn homosexuality in the severest terms.

Homosexuality is prohibited in Arab society: by religious tradition, it is a heinous and unnatural act. In *Sugar Street* as discussed earlier Mahfouz retains his definition of homosexuality as a perversion and a sin. Yet he discusses it in such a way that there is neither divine retribution nor social punishment of the homosexual. By this way of representation, Mahfouz wants his readers to understand that even though “Islam condemns homosexuality, the Muslim society of Egypt seems to tolerate it” (Matar 296).

Mahfouz is also concerned with the insincerity that moulds some people’s prayers. They fear to establish any reverential awe in their relationship with God because they are unwilling to let sinfulness depart from their lives. For example, although Al-Sayyid Ahmad knows “beyond the shadow of a doubt that repentance is a necessity and that he cannot be pardoned without it,” he does not ask for repentance; his fear is that if he repents of his sins, he will miss the pleasures of life he dearly loves and life will become meaningless¹ In the

mosque when the preacher’s words reach his ears, he prays mechanically, limiting his request to pardon, forgiveness, and mercy. His thinking is that God is too merciful to cause a Muslim like himself to burn in hell for transitory lapses that harmed no one.\(^1\) The novel mentions that-

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"The preacher himself is no better than Al-Sayyid Ahmad. In fact he is quite certainly more debauched... 'He believes in two things: God in heaven and adolescent boys on earth.'\(^3\)

This statement indicates the preacher’s interest or involvement in homosexuality. Mahfouz wonders how a man who has no faith in what he is doing can effectively teach others to keep the faith.

In this way Mahfouz has made vibrant descriptions on the problems of time and change, human suffering, injustices, alienation, cruelty and loneliness – all aspects of the human conditions of Egyptian society through his novel \textit{The Trilogy}. He, however, has presented his society’s custom and values the way he sees them and also given his opinion.

\(^2\) Najib Mahfouz, \textit{Bain at- Qasr\if\arabic{footnote}a\fi\textasciitilde'}, 391.