Introduction

Najib Mahfouz is an outstanding figure in the realm of Arabic Literature. No other writer of the Arab world has attracted the attention of such a wide range of readers and critics as Najib Mahfouz. In the last two decades there has been a spate of books and articles on him in almost all the major languages of the world including English, Russian and French. Among the well-known writers of the Arab world Najib Mahfouz occupies an eminent place in the development of Arabic novel like that of Mahmud Taymur in short stories and Tawfiq al-Hakim in drama. He was the first Arab writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1988. His contribution to the genre of Arabic novel laid the ground work throughout the Arab world. His stories were widely filmed in cinema. His imprint of genius and literary talents trace out in his novel. The novels of Najib Mahfouz fill with rich emotionalism and at the same time a realistic portrayal of the poor and middle class people’s common family problems such as polygamy, the marriage of young girls to old men, adultery, drunkenness, and the compelling by law of a wife to remain in the home of a husband she hates. In fact his novels are a microcosm of Egypt. Mahfouz is very shocked by this type of societal decadence, creates 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.”

The Trilogy (al-Thulathiyya) is the most celebrated novel of Najib Mahfouz, published between 1956 and 1957, in separate volumes taking their titles from street names in Old Cairo where some of the characters lived: Bain al-Qasrain (Palace Walk), Qasr al- Shawq (palace of Desire) and al-Sukkariyya (Suger Street). It traces the fortunes of a middle class Cairene family over three generations, beginning in 1917 with the growth of the nationalist movement that
culminated in the 1919 revolution and ending in 1944, during the Second World War.

The first volume of *The Trilogy, Palace Walk*, focuses on the family of Sayyid Ahmad al- Jawwad from 1917 to the outbreak of the 1919 nationalist revolt led by Sa’d Zaghlul. It introduces the members of the family, the external characters, and the many questions they have with respect to religion, politics, and moral behaviour. The children in *The Trilogy* represent different walks of life; they represent the nationalist movements, religious fervour, and questions of belief that illustrate the colliding ways in which religion in quotidian Egyptian life is a complex and fragmented aspect of identity. Kamal, plays a pivotal role in the novel; he provides a view into the many events and changing dynamics of the family.

In the second volume, *Palace of Desire*, covers the period from 1924 to Sa’d Zaghlul’s death in August, 1927. The readers are introduced to the colliding worlds of religion, politics, and modernity. More importantly, the father or patriarch of the family is seen for who he really is; the duality of his nature is discovered in his late nights with women and his hypocrisy as a Muslim. These are very disappointing discoveries for Yasin. His father has lost his respect and he no longer feels he can trust anybody. When Kamal is older, Yasin lets him in on the secret that his father is a womanizer and visits women late at night. Kamal’s father becomes just another impression. Kamal no longer sees him as someone with “the divine attributes that his bewitched eyes had seen in him in the past.”¹ The novel depicts the impacts of the presence of the colonizers on Egyptian culture, and the deep impact on the different generations of a family built on traditional Islamic patriarchy.

Finally, the last volume of *The Trilogy, Sugar Street*, covers the period from January 1935 to the summer of 1944. It represents the demise of the patriarchal father and the beginning of new ways. What is physically destroyed, such as homes, is symbolic of how old ways are destroyed. The death of the father represents the ousting of old tradition to make way for modern Western ways.

It is a well-known fact that every writer is a product of the age in which he is born and bred, and in which he works and creates. 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. The author minutely observes the people of his nation 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 also depicts the poverty, hunger, tensions and pretensions, caste politics, inter-racial relations, tradition and modernity, and changing values of the modern civilization. Mahfouz records all the changes in his monumental *The Trilogy*. While these are the various ingredients we find in Najib Mahfouz's novel *The Trilogy*, the present research work aims to explore the main elements in relation to social consciousness.

This Ph.D. Thesis has been divided into five chapters keeping aside the Introduction and conclusion.

In the first chapter entitled *Arabic Novel and Najib Mahfouz*, a modest attempt has been made to trace the development of Arabic novel in Egypt, taking into consideration the substantial contribution made by the distinguished novelist, Najib Mahfouz to the development of Arabic Novel in the history of Arabic literature.
The chapter second *Life, Works and Age of Najib Mahfouz* is devoted to discuss the life of Najib Mahfouz along with his outstanding literary output. This chapter also highlights the shaping influences that contributed in the making of Najib Mahfouz as one of the famous novelists of the modern era.

The chapter third *Critical Study on The Trilogy* portrays the various stages of human life of a Cairene family like- childhood period, adolescence period and adulthood or manhood period etc. It also deals with the various roles and relationships played by the family members of Ahmad Abd al- Jawwad.

In the fourth chapter entitled *Social Consciousness in The Trilogy* a modest attempt has been made to depict the different images of 20th century Egyptian society in relation to social consciousness. It is a fact that 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*. Mahfouz is traumatized by this type of societal decadence, creates public awareness against the same. The chapter also throws a significant light on how the Egyptian men and women, through their rebellion, achieve liberation and emancipation.

The fifth chapter entitled *Thematic and Stylistic Study in The Trilogy* deals with different themes like social, political and religious themes against the background of 20th century Egypt. The chapter is also to highlight how the celebrated novelist Najib Mahfouz uses the different devices of good prose are discussed in a proper manner.