



Mulk Raj Anand's *Punjab Trilogy* and Naguib Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy*: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

Writing about Mulk Raj Anand, Indian writer, and Naguib Mahfouz, Egyptian writer, is writing about two of the great writers who played major roles in developing the novel in their own countries. They succeeded in using novel to deal with the historical development in their respective societies. This study examines two of their best-known works *Punjab Trilogy* and *Cairo trilogy*. This paper investigates the way Anand and Mahfouz accomplish their construction of private and public lives and how they try to show a large picture of the society through the private lives of their characters. The significance of the study lies in comparing two great writers of two great nations that underwent similar historical development in the first half of the 20th century.

Keywords: Comparative study, Egypt, history, India, Trilogy

1. Introduction

There is a close connection between literature and history. In fact, literature is a good source of the historical, political, social conditions of the age in which they were written. Literature is an expression of the thoughts, feelings, and sentiments of the human mind influenced and conditioned by the age.

Societies have never remained unchanged. They have undergone consistent changes and literature, in particular novel, is a medium of recording these changes. In the 20th century, third world countries passed through transitional periods from colonialism to independence, from tradition to modernity. Chinua Achebe, one of the most famous third world novelists states that literature "must speak of a particular place, evolve out of the necessities of its history and destinies of its people"(1975, Morning p. 7) . Third world novelists have tried to chronicle the historical development of their countries. The economic, social, political changes have forced themselves upon the novelists' consciousness. Two of these writers are Mulk Raj Anand (1905 –2004) and Naguib Mahfouz (1911 –2006). This study aims to examine how these two writers used two of their major works, *Punjab Trilogy* and *Cairo Trilogy*, to chronicle the historical, social and cultural development in their countries during the pre-independence era.

Anand was an Indian writer who depicted the lives of the poor castes in traditional Indian society through his novels. His famous work *Punjabi Trilogy* includes *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1939), and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942). Furthermore, Naguib Mahfouz was an Egyptian writer and winner of Nobel Prize for literature in 1988. He wrote around thirty four novels. His *Cairo Trilogy* including *PalaceWalk* (1956), *Palace of Desire* (1957), and *Sugar Street*(1957) is a landmark in modern Arabic literature. Each book is named after a street in the old part of Cairo. *Cairo Trilogy* depicts two generations of a middle-class family from the 1919 "bourgeois" revolution against British rule to World War II. The two trilogies are valuable historical documents on India and Egypt in the first half of the twentieth century. During this period, the two countries underwent rapid social and political transformations which came at the expense of old ways of life. The two writers successfully depicted the conflict between modernity and tradition and captured the subtle transition in their societies in all dimensions.

Anand and Mahfouz combined intellectual and cultural influences from East and West. Anand was exposed to western culture and literature directly when he lived and studied in Europe. He even took part in the Spanish civil war. Mahfouz's exposure to the literature of non-Egyptian culture began in his youth when he enthusiastically read Western detective stories, Russian classics, and such modernist writers as Proust, Joyce and Kafka. Mahfouz has acknowledged the influence of French realists such as Balzac, Zola and Flaubert, but he was also influenced by James Joyce's use of internal monologue, surrealism (El-Enany, 1993, p. 8). Mahfouz, the young boy, studied the Holy Qur'an at the kuttab and was deeply influenced by its use of language (Al-Ghitani G., Mahfouz , 1980, p. 40). This experience contributed to the beautiful style in his novels especially in the use of Arabic expressions and combined with western influence resulted in the Mahfouzian style which has its unique nature.

A remarkable similarity between the two writers is that although they were influenced by western culture, they successfully combined it with Eastern culture and philosophy. Both writers were influenced by Marxist ideology but Marxian ideology had a more decisive influence on Anand than Mahfouz. Marxist philosophy shaped Anand's humanistic sympathy in a more decisive way than Mahfouz who came under the influence of socialism for a period in his long career. Both writers had ideologies that are fusions of different western and eastern philosophies and ideologies. Mahfouz states, "There is no escape from public life. The writer does not live in isolation, he is a citizen. ... The writer has to follow his conscience whatever the price. Creativity does not accept half measures"(Al-Ghitani G. *The Mahfouz Dialogs*, 2007, p. 40). Anand and Mahfouz are best remembered for their depiction of the poor classes of people in India and Egypt. Their writings are rich with the realistic and touching portrayal of the problems of the ordinary man. Their work is imbued with love for India and Egypt and their people. The career of Mahfouz and Anand synchronized with the most turbulent phase in the history of modern Egypt and India. It was a period of constant change, colonial rule and anticolonial struggle, social awakening and cultural change and wars. Their fiction gives a vivid and imaginative rendering of the dynamics of the age reflecting the hopes and fears, the sorrows and joys Egyptian and Indian societies. Both trilogies attempt to reflect typical developments in social history over a sustained period, and their events are connected with notably historic dates and events in Egypt and India.

2. Rural Setting and Urban Setting

The first difference between the two trilogies lies in the setting. While Anand uses a rural setting, Mahfouz uses urban setting as he did in most of his novels. The Village in the first novel of Anand's trilogy presents the picture of the rural life of India, especially typical Punjabi village in early twentieth century. Nandpur, the village in which the protagonist was born is presented with its superstitions, mythical beliefs, traditions, and landlord system. The second novel, *Across the Black Waters* is the portrayal of the picture of World War; where history and the story of Lalu meet to show how British colonial rule implicated India in a war in which it had no interest. The last volume of the trilogy *The Sword and the Sickle* is about the Lal Singh's return to home, to his country where he took active part in the struggle for freedom. In this part, Lalu sees the social evils of the Indian society and participates directly in the public events.

On the other side, Mahfouz's stories are set in the heavily populated urban quarters of Cairo, where his characters, mostly ordinary people, lived in a society that underwent various external and internal changes. The parts of Mahfouz's trilogies are named after streets in the old part of Cairo. According to Farida abu-Haider, in the Mahfouz's trilogy "the readers finds a society laid bare, where every detail of the way of life of the inhabitants of the Cairo popular quarters are lovingly and meticulously depicted"(Abu-Haidar, 1996 ,361) In *Palace Walk*, we see a society changing through the story of a patriarchal family. The transformations that the family undergoes are connected with the transformations in society. The dying traditions and the rise of nationalism are taken place within the family and at the national level.

3. The protagonists

A remarkable similarity between the two trilogies is that though the three parts in each trilogy are woven together through the central characters, Lal Singh in *Punjab Trilogy* and Kamal in *Cairo Trilogy*, each novel forms an entity in itself. In his article "The Source of Protest in my Novels" Anand says, "I wished to create the folk, whom I knew intimately, from the lower depths, the lumpens and the suppressed, oppressed repressed, those who have seldom appeared in our literature"(Anand, *The Indian Novel*, 20) In his trilogy, Anand traces out the transformation of his hero Lal Singh from an irresponsible Sikh youth to a committed revolutionary who carries on his shoulder the burden of liberating his nation from British control.

Lalu in Yadav's words "becomes a relentless crusader, a dedicated soldier and an arch revolutionary, gearing up his unbridled strength to galvanize the inarticulate masses into organized incendiarism against all forces of ruthless repression perpetrated by the new rich, landlords and religious fanatics"(Yadav, *Characterization*,p. 335).*Cairo Trilogy*, on the other hand, traces the development of the character of Kamal from childhood to manhood. The world is seen through his perspective which is to some extent that of his creator. According to El-Shamy,

All three parts of the novel begin and end with familial situations which involve Kamal. Mahfouz inaugurates his trilogy by presenting the milieu in which Kamal Lives- its characters, places, acts and abstracts. Kamal's attitudes towards these components are gradually revealed and defined.(El-Shamy, 53)

Kamal is a boy of ten at the beginning of the first novel and by the end of the last part he is a frustrated, unmarried man of forty years.

Unlike Kamal who rarely takes part in Public events, Lal joined the British Indian Army and participated in the war as a professional soldier and later took active part in India's struggle for freedom. According to Meena,

Lal Singh is shocked after noticing the various conflicts, tensions, greed and selfishness are the characteristics of Indian society, even during the days of Gandhian period. Lal Singh is moved towards wisdom and maturity after having such experience. (Meena, 2015, p. 100)

One can say that each character reflects the character of his creator. Anand was a social and political activist. Moreover, he took part in the war in Spain fighting on the side of the Republicans, worked for the Indian National Congress and

participated in India's struggle for freedom. Likewise, Mahfouz was against the British colonial rule, but he did not take part directly in political protest against the British presence in Egypt. It is important to point out here that Anand and Mahfouz were influenced by two of the national leaders in their countries. Anand was influenced by the philosophy of Gandhi while Mahfouz admired the national leader Sa'dZaghloul. Like Lalu who came under the influence of Gandhian philosophy, Kamal was influenced by the nationalist leader Sa'dZaghloul.

4. Presentation of Historical Events and Figures:

Both trilogies are masterpieces of social history because they chronicle the life of their protagonists in the first half of the last century against the background of the social, political, cultural and economic transformations that took place in India and Egypt at the time. Anand published his novels during the years 1939 -1942; a period of World War II and Gandhian struggle for independence. Yadav states that in the Lalu trilogy,

Anand delves into the historical part with a view to re-interpreting the significant events between 1939 and 1942. The trilogy gives an incisive analysis of the tense, fear ridden and war-torn world, both in Europe and Asia, out of which these novels were fashioned. (Yadav, Characterization, p. 335)

Yadav goes on to say that "The trilogy is also an intense politico-sociological document intended to project on congeries of conflicting forces which impinge on the consciousness of the hero as he gropes for identity"(Yadav, Characterization, p. 335). The private and the public come together in the trilogy. Singh rightly observes,

The Trilogy is not just the story of a peasant lad Lalu's spiritual journey in quest of identity. It is also a chronicle of Indian peasantry in the throes of exploitation during the British colonial rule in India, immediately before and after the outbreak of World War I.(Singh, p. 3)

Many historical events are presented, mentioned, or dealt with in Mahfouz's trilogy according to Allen,

The daily existences, the trials and tribulations, the generational squabbles of the individuals who make up this family, all become emblematic of an entire period of 20th century Egyptian life, spanning a period between about 1916 and 1944. The level of Mahfouz's interest in and research on this period is aptly reflected in the highly successful way in which he manages to capture historical moments, social trends, and intellectual movements within a broad canvas that his readers soon recognized as being totally authentic. (Allen, p. 10)

In his novels Mahfouz recreated events that occurred during his lifetime. Talking about the 1919 revolution, Mahfouz says, "I used to see the demonstrations of the 1919 revolution ... I often saw English soldiers firing at the demonstrators. My mother used to pull me back from the window, but I wanted to see everything" (Al-Ghitani G. , 1987, p. 16). In the first part of the trilogy, the Said family stands for the whole of Egypt and the political, social stances taken by its members reflect to some degree the attitudes of the Egyptian society. "Mahfouz" Samarrai points out (space) "weaves the political attitudes of its members in a way that functions as a correlate to their 'traditionalism'. Without exception they are introduced to us as supporters of the National Party and they identify with it precisely because they believe in the restoration of the Ottoman caliphate"(Samarrai, p. 25). The interrelationship between the private life of the family and the public life is best shown during the 1919 revolution. People took to the street to protest against the British-ordered exile of revolutionary leader SaadZaghlul, and numerous other members of the Wafd Party and to quell these nationalistic demonstrations, British garrisons are established in various parts of Cairo. One garrison is across the street from the Abd al-Jawad home. Kamal befriends the soldiers while his elder brother Fahmy grows to hate them. The nationalists gain their goals and a great, joyful celebration is allowed by the British. Idealistic Fahmy is one of those gunned down by British troops.

National liberation fascinates Fahmy, Kamal's elder brother who dreams of a new nation free of foreign control whether British or Turkish. Fahmy who is killed at the end of the first part of the Cairo trilogy is more like Lalu Singh in *The Sword and the Sickle* than Kamal is. Fahmy, like Lalu, took active part in the freedom struggle against the British despite the warnings of his father. His death shatters the family and has a lasting impact on the old patriarch and other members of the family. According to Samarrai,

from among the many dynamic characters of the Trilogy, it is Fahmy through whom Mahfouz observes and records the changes in the Egyptian nationalist sentiments before the 1919 revolution. He has seen that Fahmy moved from enthusiastic and emotional conformism to the family's Ottomanist orientation(Samarrai, p. 27).

International historical events have a place in both works but in a way that reflects each novelist and his protagonist's nature. For example, WWII is presented in Mahfouz's novels from the point of view of Kamal who never left Cairo. We hear news of the battles, raids, and other political developments through the conversations of the characters. But the life of the Abd al-Jawad family is directly influenced by the war when the German planes bombarded Cairo and people had to look for shelters. Lalu on the other hand joined the British army and fought for it against the Germans. The second part of Anand's trilogy *Across the Black Waters*, is devoted to Lalu's participation in the First World War. We are given a first hand view of war and its atrocities through the story of Lalu Singh who fought only to get his land free from

mortgages. Lai Singh returns landless to his village and plays a leading role in organizing the peasants against the local landlords and the English colonial power.

5. Anand and Mahfouz's views on social Change

Anand and Mahfouz did not use their novels only as historical chronicle, but also as a means for change. They believed in the social function of literature and that it can be used as a useful and effective instrument of change. They used their novels as platform to awaken social consciousness and raising political awareness among the people. Anand speaks for both of them when he says that the function of the writer is to become "an inspiring force behind all those men and women who face the task of reconstructing the future society of the shambles of a near pre-historic present"(Anand, *Apology for Heroism*, p. 134). According to Yadav, Anand in three parts of his trilogy "shows that superstition, belief in Karma, religious fundamentalism and fanaticism are enemies of healthy social life. They should be totally removed from the mind of the people by rational thinking"(Yadav, *Thematic Structure* 289). Talking about Mahfouz's trilogy, Allen says that the work is "not only the record of what had been achieved, but also the clearest possible example of the novel genre fulfilling its generic purpose as a reflector and advocate of change"(Allen, 2004, p. 10). Both novelists tried to expose the evils of the social system in India and Egypt at the time. They also criticize the people who put up with exploitation and oppression without trying to change their lives. They believed that to create real change, there is a need for a fundamental change in the attitudes of the people. The difference between Mahfouz and Anand regarding the concept of change is reflected in the character of Kamal and Lalu Singh while Anand favours swift change, Mahfouz supports gradual change.

6. Conclusion

The foregoing analysis of the two trilogies suggests that both, Anand and Mahfouz have strong commitment towards the society and they have wonderfully combined the private stories of their characters with the socio-political development of society. This exemplifies their strong social vision and their desire to record the transformations in their societies as they take place and highlight the conflict between Eastern traditions and values on the one hand and Western culture on the other. Both were contemporaries and the similarities in the development of Indian and Egyptian societies in the last centuries have made a comparative study of the two trilogies rewarding. Both writers used their imagination and creative skill to transform facts into fictions to present a realistic vision of life of their societies at a transitional period in the first half of the twentieth century. Anand uses the story of Lalu Singh to recreate the social and political transformations in India especially the Indian villages. Mahfouz adopts the Jawad family structure to mirror the political ramifications and urban culture of life in Egypt in the first half of the 20th century. What is remarkable is the way in which each protagonist in the trilogies is a reflection of the writer himself. Lalu is Anand with his determination and active participation in public events while Kamal's philosophical mindset is a Mahfouz in disguise. Both writers believed at a time in their lives that socialism was the only solution to the problems of their countries. Both developed their own philosophy of life that incorporates many western philosophical trends and eastern values.

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