

Al-Qahira Al- Jadida: A Novel of Najib Mahfouz

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Al- Qahira al- Jadida, a masterpiece of Najib Mahfouz is a saga of the rise and fall of university student of humble origins. Though composed in 1945, the novel is set at the backdrop of the overarching social problems that engulfed the Egyptian society in the early decades of the 20th century. Mahjub Abd al-Daim, the protagonist who is imbued with grey shades, hails from a humble family based in the town of al- Qanatir. His four mates- Mamun Ridwan ,an Islamic fundamentalist and avid reader of books; Ali Taha an atheist and a hardcore materialist; and Ahmad, a working journalist -- are about to graduate from King Fuad University and make their way into the class and status obsessed Egyptian society.

Mahjub, an embittered youth, is vociferous critic of the prevailing values, beliefs, and customs of the contemporary Egyptian society, and is consumed by resentment at his poverty and hard luck. He is envious of the rare good luck of the handsome, vivacious Ali Taha, who enjoys the company of a beautiful girl friend named Ihsan, while he is forced to derive gratification from his mingling with scavengers' girls of the squalid. Like Mahjub, Ihsan also comes from a poor family, and as a beautiful daughter of the impoverished couple she is considered as an asset who must be translated into wealth. Soon, she is forced to succumb to a rich suitor named Qasim Bey Fahmi.

On the other hand, Mahjub,s life takes a new turn when his clerk father gets bedridden, and this uninvited catastrophe takes to all on the family and the allocation for Mahjub's expenses reduces to one pound a month . However, his meeting with Salim al- Ikhshidi, an officer of the influential Qasim Bey Fahmi, is a fateful one, and this meeting later shapes the course of his life. Ikhshidi allures Mahjub with the officers of the covetous job of Bey's secretary and a luxurious life,



and makes him marry a certain girls who have lost their chastity in the hands of Qasim Bey and whom he wants to keep as mistress in future.

The story takes a twist when Mahjub discovers Ihsan as his bride at the marriage ceremony. However, his attitude towards Ihsan remains both realistic and full of hope. The couple attains some tenderness and physical gratification, but neither discovers the love he| she pines for, and both remain unsatisfied. Besides, Bey's frequent visit to Ihsan, causes anxiety in him. The plots shocking twist brings together Ihsan, Mahjub& Qasim Bey in an utterly unholy alliance, a microcosm of societal exploitation & political corruption that characterize the contemporary Egyptian society.

Soon Qasim becomes a minister and Mahjub is appointed manager. Al-Ikhshidi asks Mahjub to swap jobs with him but Mahjub refuses. This integrates Al-Ikhshidi and seeks revenge. Mahjub has not only embroiled himself in a shameful marriage but he has not told his parents he is married and has continued to claim to them that he is too poor to send them money.

At the end, Mahjub's father being informed by al- Ikhshidi, turns up at his flat and co-incidentally Bey has also arrived their on his regular visit. His father becomes enraged to find his luxurious flat and his affluence and saddened to find he has married without informing them. Situation worsens when al- Ikhshidi's enraged wife turns up and all is undone for Mahjub.

The novel is a scathing attack on the exploitation of the floor, class oppression, moral degradation that was in vogue in the contemporary Egyptian society. The author uninhibitedly presents the sexual & emotional life of his characters. This work gives an insight into the contemporary Egyptian society.



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