



প্রতিধ্বনি **the Echo**

Pratidhwani the Echo

A Peer-Reviewed Indexed International Journal of Humanities & Social Science

Published by: Dept. of Bengali

Karimganj College, Karimganj, Assam, India

Website: <https://www.thecho.in>

ISSN: 2278-5264 (Online) 2321-9319 (Print)

KHAN AL –KHALILI: A Masterpiece of Naguib Mahfouz

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Abstract

The main key contribution to the maturation of the Arabic Novel in modern Arabic literature is Naguib Mahfouz; he is widely recognized as the founding father of Arabic Novel. He is the most illustrious and prolific writer of fiction in the Arab World today. In his Novel Khan al-Khalili Mahfouz addressed many social and political issues. Mahfouz in this Novel succeeds in breaking the norms of the realistic Novel to create a new literary style heralding modernism in the Arabic Novel. The Novel, Written in a clear easy flowing style, paints a vivid picture of social political and religious issues and their impact on Egyptian society. This Novel constitutes a major step forward in the development of Arabic Novel. Khan al –Khalili is a great introduction to the work of Mahfouz and the rich and complicated life of modern Egypt and Egyptian. Its completion marked a turning point in Naguib Mahfouz career and it reflects instead a deep concern with the lives and problems of contemporary Egyptian. The techniques of Mahfouz writings reach the Arabic Novel with a new look and standard status in the fictional world.

Novel in Arabic literature is one of the literary forms which were borrowed from the west and it played very important role in modern Arabic literature. In the short history of Arabic novel Naguib Mahfouz occupied a unique position. The technique of the presentation and the style of writings of Naguib Mahfouz reach the Arabic Novel with a new look and standard status in fictional world. He presents fantastic style in his socio-realistic novel Khan al-Khalili. He writes this novel in a classical and lucid Arabic style, interspersed with colloquial Egyptian and proverbs throughout the Arab world. The novel written in a clear easy flowing style, paints a vivid picture of social political and religious issues and their impact on Egyptian society. In Khan al-Khalili Mahfouz also paints the debilitating confusion of the intellectuals in Egypt during the II world war. The major theme of Khan al-Khalili is that of the impact of rapid change in the social values and radical alteration of the perspective of reality on the common people. His overriding purpose is clear: to give a true picture of the human condition as he sees it. He is the Mahfouz of Egypt, his realistic styles, his interest in social issues, indeed his whole ethos are genuinely Egyptian shows in this novel. This novel constitutes major steps forward in the development of the Arabic novel.

Khan al-Khalili is one of the novels written by Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006) published in Arabic in 1946 was made into black and white Arabic film in 1966 directed by Atef Salim, then an English translation was released in 2008 by the prolific translator Roger Allen who has translated a galaxy of Arabic novels by Arab authors. Khan al – Khalili is renowned traditional sock in the heart of Cairo. The author Mahfouz has taken this bustling place as a

setting for his novel that carries the some name of the street and the time was the II world war was when it was at its prime and the rage of the war was pummeling the northern coast of Egypt as far as Al-Alamein. Mahfouz grew up in the city of Cairo during the mid 1900s and the sudden wave of modernization that was beginning to sweep across Egypt. During this time of a social change much of his critique of the city dealt with the imbalance of past Egyptian traditions and was brought about by industrialization and resulting social changes of his novel Khan Al – Khalili address these issues.

The story is set in 1942, and the African campaign during World War II has started to directly affect the inhabitants of Egypt, as the Germans bomb the city. This time is at its height and the Africa campaign is raging along the northern coast of Egypt. The competition of Khan al – Khalili in 1945 marked a turning point in Naguib Mahfouz's career. Departing from the traditional themes drawn from Egyptian antiquity that characterize the author's works Khan al – Khalili reflects instead a deep concern with the lives and problems of contemporary Egyptians. The events of Khan al – Khalili cover twelve months during world war II, from September 1941 to August 1942. During this period the German forces commanded by Filed Marshal Rommel reached al – Alamayan and were almost at the greatest of Alexandria. With British forces occupying Egypt, the people found their country the arena of a conflict not of their making. In this novel Mahfouz shows its effects on the social and economic conditions in Egypt and on the attitudes of the common people.

In the novel Khan al – Khalili, Mahfouz utilizes not only the characters and there contradictory ideals to demonstrate the opposition between the past and present, but also the two cities and particularly themselves. The novel is set in the early 1940's a mid the terrors of the II world war as well as the air-raids that plagued Cairo at the time , because the people of Cairo were is so much danger, many fled to more rural regions which were believed to be safer.

In this novel Mahfouz recount the tale of the Akif's family who moved from El-Sakakini to Khan al – Khalili. The family is comprised of the true elderly parents and their two sons. Ahmed, who was in his forties and was unmarried who lives with his parents and works at the post office in a dead – end job, uproots the family to the ancient – quarter of Khan al – Khalili hopeful the Germans will spare the historic neighborhood famous for its bazaar and the Al – Husayan Mosque named in honor of Mohammed's grandson and his younger brother Rushdi Who was still studying. During the air- raids all the inhabitants escape to the shelters.

Their protagonists are depicted interacting and their attributes are unraveled to the reader, new relationship and acquaintances developed. A pretty young girl, the Akif's neighbor, Nawal caught Ahmed interest and he felt attracted to her. Yet when his younger brother visited the family he also appeared to have feelings for her and her for him. They start seeing each other and started to build through their dreams their future life. Ahmed becomes more involved with his new neighborhood's affairs suppressing his passion for Nawal. Rushdi feels pain in his chest and was diagnosed with TB and he had to be admitted for treatment at a distant place. The poignant and tells of the demise of Rushdi the moving of the family to a new neighborhood.

The Akif's we quickly discern are not heroic people the father was forced to retire from the govt. 20 years earlier because of insolent behavior. Consequently, support of the family fell to Ahmed, who never finished his studies and won't be free of his obligation to the family until his younger brother Rushdi earns his degree; Ahmed's loves his family and yet harbors the delusion that his genius will never be recognized. He falls in love in his 16 years old neighbor; a girl with honey- colored eyes is young enough to be his daughter. His room faces hers in the apartment complex and each evening at sunset. She honors him with respectful glances, which soon become smiles the kind his heart has craved for 20 long years.

Khan al – Khalili takes place in one year and includes the point of view of only, Ahmed Rushdi and Nawal. That's more than enough as Mahfouz explores the wants and needs of three people in love. In the end at least one of them will be heart broken but will all be lost. Through the eyes Ahmed the eldest Akif son, Mahfouz presents a richly textured vision of the Khan al – Khalili and of a crisis that pits history against modernity and faith against secularism. Addressing one of the fundamental questions of the modern era. Mahfouz asks whether like the German bombs that threaten Khan al – Khalili daily progress must necessarily be accompanied by destruction of the past.

Ahmed is not a sympathetic character he has pretensions of being and intellectual and secretly resents the fact that he was forced to go in to a job without many prospects straight after school due to his father's forced early retirement putting his younger brother Rushdi through College and supporting his family. In the first few days following on from the move, he gets to know the residents of the area who meet in the Zahra café to discuss politics and the unfairness of living in the nation of beggars. The main character is undoubtedly Ahmed Akif's who serves as a link between his family and other characters whom he meets frequently at the Zahra coffee house in Khan al- Khalili.

It is difficult to pass judgment on the courage taken by a novelist, after all Mahfouz is free to end his works in a way befitting his objectives. One may speculate that if Mahfouz had ended the novel Khan al – Khalili with the marriage of Rushdi to Nawal, the eccentric Ahmed would have become insane or committed suicide in a fit of jealousy – a tragic outcome in either case. That so many of his characters meet tragic endings reflects his frame of mind before the Egyptian revolution of 1958. He was sad and frustrated over the condition of the lower classes, which were manipulated by unprincipled politicians and the omnipresent British authorities. In such a morbid and melancholic ambience, say Mahfouz it was difficult to write cheerful stories. He claims his characters appreciated life.

On the surface, Mahfouz apparently seeks to portray through Ahmed Akif's the disadvantage status of Egyptian govt. employees whose livelihood was subject to the whims of corrupt, selfish, powerful men who occupied key positions in the govt. These minor officials had no laws to protect their jobs and no equitable merit system to ensure their advancement. Many Egyptians sought govt. employments only because of the lack of economic opportunities such as exist today. The lower middle class was squeezed in between the upper middle classes, which controlled wealth and land and the fellahin, who owned no land and simply worked for their landlords. Yet beyond simply portraying Ahmed Akif as a symbol of the lower middle class in Egypt.

The tragedy of the middle class is embodied in the character of Ahmed Akif in Khan al – Khalili, who can not realize his own aspirations and can not achieve them even his dreams. He dreamed of being educated, of getting a better job, and of falling in love. These are the murdered dreams of this class.

Khan al – Khalili is a great introduction to the work of Naguib Mahfouz and the rich and complicated life of modern Egypt and Egyptians. Its completion marked a turning point in Nagib Mahfouz's career and it reflects instead a deep concern with the lives and problems of contemporary Egyptians. In this regard it is right to regard Nagib Mahfouz as the pioneer of the Arabic novel. He was awarded the Nobel Prize simply because he was a great novelist with deep and extensive experience. As a progressive writer Mahfouz paved the way for the development of modern Egyptian novels by introducing new values and ideas in his writing. It has rightly been called the Khan al – Khalili reflects with the lives of contemporary Egyptian life based on a serious and social problems.

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