

# Nobel Laureate Egyptian Novelist: Najib Mahfuz

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**Abstract:** Najib Mahfuz was the first and only Nobel laureate in the history of Arabic literature, a renowned and world famous novelist. His name and fame rest on his literary excellence. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1988 for his outstanding contribution to Arabic literature. That's why he is well known all over the world, including Egypt, a noble laureate novelist.

**Keywords:** Nobel laureate, Egyptian novelist, Nobel prize, Mahfuz career.

## 1. Introduction

Egyptian novelist Najib Mahfuz was on the most influential author in Arabic literary world of 20th century. He is the first and only Nobel laureate among the Arabic authors. He is one of the first author in Arabic literature to write about existentialism. Beyond the Arab world, he is one of the best authors in world. So many movies have been made at home and abroad based on his novels.

The World famous modern novelist was born in Cairo, capital of Egypt. He was born on 11th December 1911, in the village of Jamalia in Cairo to a middle-class family. When he was 13 years old, his father moved from his birth place Jamalia to the village of Al-Abbasiya. They lived there for many years. After the death of his father, Najib Mahfuz lived there with his mother for a long time. He then moved back to the Al-Azhar area of Cairo.

## 2. Discussion

His father Abdul Aziz Ibrahim was a civil service officer by profession. If so, Najib Mahfuz childhood have been spent very beautifully and happily. The author was youngest child of family. His age difference with the elder brother was about 10th years. His four brothers and two sisters got married and lived elsewhere. As a result, he was very affectionate to his parents like an only child. He was brought up in the religious environment of the family and his mother used to take him to see museums, pyramids and other ancient Egyptian architectures. The author was very interested in movies from a young age and was very attracted to playing football.

Najib Mahfuz has been fond of philosophy since his student days. In 1934, he graduated from the present Cairo University or the then Fouad University. Besides, he was a deep reader of literature. During his student life, he studied many books written in English and French with great pleasure. While still a university student, he wrote three historical novels. He started

writing at the age of seventeen years and his first novel was published in 1939. However, he didn't get fame at the beginning of writing, he had to do deep pursuit. In an interview published in the 'Paris Review', he went on to tell the story of the beginning of his writing:

"In 1929, All my stories were rejected. Salama Musa – the editor of Majalla used to say to me: You have potential, but you're not there yet. September 1939 I remember well because in was the beginning of World War-II Hitler's attack on Poland. My story, 'Abath al-Aqdar' was published, a sort of surprise gift from the Majalla publishers. It was an immensely important even in my life"

About ten of his books were published before the Egyptian revolution of July 1952. His writings play a special role in this revolution. He then stopped writing for several years. His famous novel 'The Cairo Trilogy' was published in 1957, which made him known all over the world. The total number of novels written by him are 34 and number of short stories are 350. He also five dramas and screenplays for many films. Films have been made in Egypt and other countries with many stories written by him.

Najib Mahfuz has written dozens of short stories in the first 10th years of his literary career, most of them about the dark side of city life. As a result, he quickly took place the hearts of reader. The famous novels written by him are mentioned below:

- Ancient Egypt - 1932
- Whisper of Madness - 1938
- Mackery of the Fates - 1939
- Rhadopis of Nubia - 1943
- The struggle of Thebes - 1944
- Cairo Modern - 1945
- Khan al-khalili - 1945
- Midaq Alley - 1947
- The Mirage - 1948
- The Beginning and the End - 1949
- Place Walk - 1956
- Place of Desire - 1957
- Sugar Street - 1957
- Children of Gebelawi - 1959
- The Thief and the Dogs - 1961
- God's World - 1962
- The Search - 1964
- The Beggar - 1965
- Miramar - 1967

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- The Honeymoon - 1971
- Mirrors - 1972
- The Crime - 1973
- Karnak Café - 1974
- Respected Sir - 1975
- Heart of the Night - 1975
- The Harafish - 1977
- Love above the pyramid Plateau - 1979
- The Devil Preaches - 1979
- Arabian Nights and Days - 1979
- Love and the Veil - 1980
- In the Time of Love - 1980
- The Journey of Ibn Fattouma -1983
- Akhenaten Dweller in Truth - 1985
- The Day the Leader was Killed - 1985
- The Hunger - 1986
- Morning and Evening Talk -1987
- The False Dawn -1988
- Echoes of an Autobiography -1994
- Echoes of Forget-ness -1999

His famous novel, 'Khan al-Khalili', is based on a market next to the Al-Azhar mosque in Cairo, with its numerous alleys and their anecdotes. 'Midaq Alley' is based on the story of how World War-II changed the city of Cairo. 'Midaq Alley' is one of the most famous Mahfuz's early novels. A film from Mexico called 'Midaq Alley' has also been made based on the story of this novel.

Mahfuz's famous novel 'The Cairo Trilogy' brought him great fame in Egypt and internationally. This great novel consists of three separate sections, Place Walk, Place of Desire and Sugar Street, originally named after the three streets of Najib Mahfuz's old village of Al-Jamalia. Some have called the novel 'War and Peace' in the Arab world. Najib Mahfuz won Egypt's highest state literary award in 1957 for "The Cairo Trilogy".

### 3. Nobel Prize

In 1962, Abbas Mahmud Al-Aqqad nominated Najib Mahfuz for the Nobel. He was finally awarded the Nobel Prize in 1988 for his outstanding contribution to Arabic literature. Among the Arabic authors, this good fortune has so far only been due to him. He was joined by three other people in the competition for Nobel Prize in literature that year- the Italian novelist Alberto Moravia, the British novelist and storyteller Graham Greene and the Lebanese literary Mikhail Naima. However, in the end, the famous Egyptian novelist Najib Mahfuz awarded the Nobel Prize of Arabic literature. Shortly after winning the prize, Mahfuz was quoted as saying:

"The Nobel Prize has given me, for the first time in my life, the feeling that my literature could be appreciated on an international level. The Arab world also won the Nobel with me. I believe that international doors have opened, and that from now on, literate people will consider Arab literature also. We deserve that recognition."

Also the Swedish letter to Mahfuz praised this 'rich and

complex work': "invites us to reconsider the fundamental things in life. Themes like the nature of time and love, society and norms, knowledge and faith recur in a variety of situations and are presented in thought-provoking, evocative, and clearly daring ways. And the poetic quality of your prose can be felt across the language barrier. In the prize citation you are credited with the forming of an Arabian narrative art that applies to all mankind."

As Mahfuz found difficult to traveling to Sweden at his age, he was unable to attend the award ceremony, so his daughter went to receive the Nobel Prize on behalf of her father.

### 4. Career

After graduating in 1934 Najib Mahfuz began his career by joining the Department of Administration at Cairo University. He worked here from 1936 to 1939. He then joined the Waqf Ministry and service there for 15 years. He was later appointed director of the censor board and the cinema department under the Ministry of Cultural, as he was closely associated with Egyptian cinema. He was eventually appointed as a consultant to the Ministry of Cultural. He retired from the civil service in 1971 at the age of sixty and joined the literary section of famous Al-Ahram newspaper.

### 5. Personal Life

Mahfuz was unmarried until he was 43 years old. He feared that if he got married and became busy with his family, he would lose his writing. But finally in 1954, he married a women named Atiyyaatallah Ibrahim of Alexandria. In time, the author's two daughters Umme Kulsum and Fatima, were born in his wife's womb. But he was always very introverted with his own personal life and loved to be alone. So, he would not go to any dinner party or reception and would not even go to his friends house.

### 6. Conclusion

From this article it's clear that Najib Mahfuz continued to write for the rest of his life. After retiring from the service in 1971, he regularly wrote for various influential journals. However, he used to write most in Al-Ahram newspaper. The magazine published a book in 2001 focusing on these writings. The great writer and Nobel laureate, who has been active in writing for nearly 70 years, died on 30th August, 2006 in Cairo capital of Egypt. He was 94 years old at time of his death. In long life, he brought Arabic literature to the forefront of world humanity.

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