

## Love in the Rain: A Comparative Analysis of Naguib Mahfouz's *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar* and Syed Abdul Malik's *Aghari Atmar Kahini*

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### ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

This study explores the thematic and narrative intricacies of love as depicted in Naguib Mahfouz's *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar* (*Love Under the Rain*) and Syed Abdul Malik's *Aghari Atmar Kahini* (*The Tale of the Nomadic Soul*). Both works delve into the complexities of human emotions, relationships, and the sociopolitical contexts that shape them. While Mahfouz portrays the lives of individuals entangled in a web of romance, societal expectations, and existential struggles against the backdrop of post-war Egypt, Malik focuses on the strained marital and emotional lives of his characters within a peri-urban Assamese setting.

In Mahfouz's novel, love is presented as a multifaceted emotion influenced by personal ambition, societal constraints, and the turbulent environment of war. The characters navigate betrayal, passion, and idealism, reflecting the fractured yet hopeful spirit of a nation in transition. Conversely, Malik's work offers a metaphorical exploration of love and self-discovery, portraying characters trapped in a dysfunctional marriage and haunted by their pasts. The arrival of a charismatic outsider catalyzes a journey of introspection and emotional awakening for the protagonists, emphasizing themes of human connection and liberation.

This comparative analysis highlights how both authors use love as a lens to examine broader existential and social dilemmas. Through richly layered narratives and complex characterizations, Mahfouz and Malik craft stories that transcend cultural and geographical boundaries, offering a universal meditation on love, loss, and identity. This paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of how these literary masters depict the transformative power of love amid personal and societal upheavals.

**Keywords:** Love, Relationships, Socio-political contexts, Existential longing, Cultural boundaries, Human connection, etc.

### Introduction

Love is a timeless theme in literature, explored across cultures and genres as a central force that shapes human emotions, decisions, and interactions. From ancient epics to modern novels, the concept of love has been reimagined in countless ways, reflecting the complexities of individual experiences and societal contexts. In Naguib Mahfouz's *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar* (*Love Under the Rain*) and Syed Abdul Malik's *Aghari Atmar Kahini* (*The Tale of the Nomadic Soul*), love emerges not merely as a romantic or idealized emotion but as a transformative force, revealing the intricate dynamics of relationships and the socio-political environments in which they unfold.

Naguib Mahfouz, a Nobel laureate and a towering figure in Arabic literature, masterfully captures the essence of post-war Egypt in *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar*. Set against the backdrop of societal turbulence and existential uncertainty, the novel intertwines the lives of its characters with themes of passion, betrayal, and resilience. Mahfouz delves into the struggles of love within a fragmented society, where political instability and cultural norms influence personal relationships. The novel presents a vivid portrayal of individuals grappling with their desires and ideals, mirroring the challenges faced by a nation in transition.

Similarly, Syed Abdul Malik, an acclaimed Assamese writer, explores the emotional and relational complexities of love in *Aghari Atmar Kahini*. Unlike Mahfouz's broader societal lens, Malik focuses on the

intimate and nuanced relationships of three main characters entangled in a web of marital discord, emotional suppression, and rediscovery. Set in a peri-urban Assamese milieu, the narrative is steeped in poetic introspection and a sense of existential longing. Through the arrival of Sasanka Choudhury, a mysterious outsider, the novel unfolds a journey of self-reflection and emotional awakening for the protagonists, highlighting the universal nature of human connection and alienation.

While the two novels emerge from distinct cultural and historical contexts, they converge in their exploration of love as a multi-dimensional experience. Both authors use love as a narrative device to interrogate broader themes of identity, societal expectations, and personal fulfillment. Mahfouz's characters navigate the chaos of post-war society, reflecting the broader national anxieties of mid-20th-century Egypt, while Malik's characters grapple with their inner voids and unfulfilled desires, offering a poignant commentary on the human condition.

This comparative analysis aims to uncover the thematic and narrative parallels and contrasts in the portrayal of love in these two iconic works. By examining the characters, their relationships, and the socio-political contexts of the novels, this study seeks to highlight how Mahfouz and Malik use love not only as a personal experience but also as a mirror reflecting the socio-cultural and existential dilemmas of their respective settings. In doing so, it aspires to provide a deeper understanding of how literature transcends cultural boundaries to explore universal human emotions and the transformative power of love amidst the chaos of life.

### Biography of Naguib Mahfouz:

Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006) was an Egyptian writer and Nobel Prize laureate in Literature.<sup>1</sup> Born on December 11, 1911, in Cairo, Egypt, Mahfouz grew up in the Jamaliya district, which later became the backdrop for many of his works.<sup>2</sup> He attended the Egyptian University (now Cairo University), where he graduated with a degree in philosophy in 1934.<sup>3</sup>

Mahfouz is best known for his Cairo Trilogy—“Palace Walk” (*Bayn al-Qasrayn*), “Palace of Desire” (*Qasr al-Shauq*) and “Sugar Street” (*Sukkariya*)—which provides a vivid portrayal of Egyptian society from World War I until the 1952 revolution.<sup>4</sup> His works often explore themes of existentialism and social change.<sup>5</sup>

In 1988, Mahfouz became the first Arabic writer to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature.<sup>6</sup> Despite facing controversy and threats, particularly for his novel “Children of Gebelawi” (*Awlâd Hâratinâ*), Mahfouz continued to write until his death on August 30, 2006.<sup>7</sup>

### Biography of Syed Abdul Malik

Syed Abdul Malik, born on January 15, 1919, in Naharani village, Golaghat district, holds a unique position in modern Assamese literature. He was the son of Syed Rahmat Ali and Syeda Lutfu Nisa. Malik's early education began at Naharani Lower Basic School, progressing to Dergaon Medium School, and later Jorhat Government High School, where he passed the entrance examination in 1937. He graduated from Cotton College in 1941 with honors in English and completed a Master's degree in Assamese from Guwahati University in 1951.

Malik's career began in 1942 as a sub-inspector in the excise department, and he later worked in education, teaching at various schools and colleges, including Jorhat Jagannath Baruah College. He retired in 1976. Despite his official work, Malik was deeply involved in literature from a young age. His first poem was published in 1936, and his first poetry collection, *Bedouin*, was released in 1948. Malik wrote over 2,000 short stories, inspired by writers like Anton Chekhov and Guy de Maupassant. His notable short story collections include *Parashmoni* (1986), *Ronga Gora* (1943), and *Moroha Papori* (1954).

Malik is also renowned for his contributions to Assamese novels, having penned around 72 novels, including *Aghari Atmar Kahini* (1969), which won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1972. His other significant works include *Tirthajatri* (1950), *Kavitar Nam Lava* (1956), and *Jia Jurir Ghat* (1960). Malik's influence extended to Assamese drama, with about 21 plays to his name, including *Rajdruhi* (1957) and *Mokora Jal* (1964).

In addition to literary works, Malik wrote radio plays, children's books, travelogues, and biographies, such as *The Life Story of Hazrat Muhammad*. He was involved in Sufi and Sufism studies, and his notable research book, *Dhikr and Zârî*, reflects his deep thinking. Malik's involvement in politics and literature was marked by his role as a Rajya Sabha MP in 1983 and his leadership as the Editor-in-Chief of the Assam Sahitya Sabha in 1969.

Recognized for his immense contribution to Assamese literature, Malik was honoured with the Padma Shri (1984), Padma Bhushan (1992), and an honorary D.Litt. from Dibrugarh University (1988). He passed away on December 20, 2000, leaving behind a legacy that continues to inspire future generations.<sup>8</sup>

### About “*Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar*” (Love Under the Rain)

The novel *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar* (Love Under the Rain) is considered one of the most famous works of the renowned writer Naguib Mahfouz. It gained great popularity among intellectuals, readers, and critics and became well-known among the public as well.

Like all of Mahfouz's literary works, this novel achieved great fame. When it was first published, it topped the bestseller lists, and its popularity continues to this day.

This novel is part of Mahfouz's body of work that portrays the social situation of Egyptian streets. Despite his global recognition, he remained deeply engaged with the Egyptian street and consistently depicted its struggles.

Through this novel, Mahfouz attempted to provide a glimpse into life during times of war and poverty. He did so through skillfully crafted events and characters that reflected deep insight.<sup>9</sup>

***Love Under the Rain* (Al-Hubb Taht Al-Matar)** is a novel by the renowned international author Naguib Mahfouz. It is considered one of his most famous works and has garnered significant admiration from both readers and critics alike. In this novel, Naguib Mahfouz sheds light on the social conditions in Egypt and describes the struggles of individuals amidst war and poverty.

The novel is categorized as a work of drama, fiction, and romance. It comprises 168 pages and was published in 1973. Upon its release, the novel topped the bestseller lists, and it remains one of the most celebrated works to this day.

The novel contains a wide array of characters. Below is an overview of the key figures:

**Husnî Hijâzî:** He is the central character in the novel. He is a middle-aged bachelor who works as a cinematographer and owns an artistic apartment in central Cairo. Unfortunately, he uses this apartment for illicit purposes, luring young women into it.

Many women visit Husnî Hijâzî's apartment, where they spend enjoyable times and accept gifts and money to support their university studies. Despite his moral shortcomings, Husnî Hijâzî has numerous friends of both genders and is known for his loyalty to them. He offers advice, helps them resolve their problems, and provides support.

**Marzûq:** He is in a romantic relationship with 'Alîyât. They have completed their university education and are preparing for marriage. However, Marzûq must travel abroad for work, while 'Alîyât finds a job opportunity at the Ministry of Social Affairs in Cairo, creating an obstacle to their marriage.

At the train station, Marzûq meets film director Muḥammad Rashwân, who offers him the lead role in his new movie. Marzûq agrees and decides not to travel. Later, Marzûq meets actress Fatna Nâşir.

**Fatna** is the mistress of two men—the Shaykh and the director Muḥammad Rashwân. Despite this, Marzûq becomes enamoured with her and marries her, leaving his former fiancée, 'Alîyât, behind. As a result, Marzûq faces numerous attacks that tarnish his reputation and destroy his artistic career.

**Sâlim 'Alî:** He is a prominent legal figure. He enters a romantic relationship with Munâ Zahrân, a friend of 'Alîyât. However, Munâ has progressive ideas and desires independence, which Sâlim struggles to accept. Eventually, their relationship ends without marriage.

**Ibrâhîm:** He is 'Alîyât's brother and the lover of Saniyya, who is Marzûq's sister. Ibrâhîm is a soldier fighting on the front lines, where he sustains a severe injury. Despite this, he marries Saniyya, but their married life does not proceed as planned.<sup>10</sup>

### About "Aghari Atmar Kahini" (The Tale of the Homeless Soul)

The novel titled "Aghari Atmar Kahini" unfolds a story in Assam, delving into love, relationships, and societal issues, with Shashanka Choudhury at its centre. Shashanka, disillusioned by his father's moral failings—particularly the relationship with Swarnalata Barua—rebels against his family's dishonourable conduct. Leaving his home, he seeks refuge first with his maternal uncle in Tezpur and later in Calcutta, where he stays as a paying guest with the Joshi family.

In Calcutta, Shashanka falls in love with Chaya, the foster daughter of the Joshis. However, their love is thwarted by Chaya's foster father, Sadananda Joshi, who demands that Shashanka live in his house after marriage and eventually inherit his property. Shashanka, valuing his independence, refuses, leading to their separation. Chaya's poignant farewell to Shashanka reflects the despair of unfulfilled love.

Apara, a talented singer and dancer, is unhappily married to Niranjan. She reveals to Shashanka that her confession of a past relationship with Mriganka shattered Niranjan's trust, leading to a loveless and strained marriage. Despite her unhappiness, Apara is a cultural icon in the community, celebrated for her performances.

Shashanka visits Niranjan and Apara's household and becomes a witness to their deteriorating relationship. Through conversations, he learns about their emotional struggles and tries to mediate. Niranjan's despair and Apara's regretful honesty paint a poignant picture of a marriage plagued by past mistakes.

Through Shashanka's philosophical reflections, the novel critiques contemporary politics and the loss of genuine patriotism. Shashanka distinguishes between professional patriotism and sincere love for one's country, lamenting the decline of integrity in public life.

The narrative reveals Apara's earlier involvement with Mriganka, Shashanka's brother. Their relationship is marked by manipulation and desire, with Apara using her charm to displace Rachana, a rival for Mriganka's affection. This connection underscores the novel's exploration of human frailty and moral ambiguity.

Throughout the story, Shashanka reflects on his own life choices and relationships. His experiences with Chaya, Apara, and his family shape his understanding of love, freedom, and societal expectations. He ultimately embodies a quest for self-discovery and authenticity. The novel also portrays the aftermath of a devastating flood, highlighting corruption in relief efforts. Through Niranjan's observations, the story critiques the forgery and exploitation in aid distribution, reflecting broader societal decay.

Shashanka's visit to Niranjana and Aparajita's home brings unresolved tensions to light. While trying to save the family's tea garden from financial ruin, Shashanka uncovers deeper emotional truths about his own life and those around him. The novel bears a good number of characters; they are as follows

1. Shashanka Choudhury: The protagonist, a thoughtful and introspective man, the third son of Manmath Choudhury.
2. Aparajita Barua (Apara): A gifted artist, married to Niranjana Khaund but harboring past emotional scars.
3. Niranjana Khaund: Apara's husband, a melancholic and disillusioned man struggling with his conjugal life.
4. Chaya: A fostered girl raised by the Marathi family Sadananda Joshi and Maya Joshi. She shares a tender but tragic romantic relationship with Shashanka.
5. Mriganka Choudhury: Shashanka's elder brother, a flawed character with a complicated relationship with Apara.
6. Manmath Choudhury: Shashanka's father, a minister, whose questionable morality creates familial discord.
7. Swarnalata Barua: Apara's mother and a concubine of Manmath Choudhury, adding to the family's complications.
8. Hamidur Rahman: An advocate and Shashanka's close friend.
9. Kanak: A boy cook working in the household of Niranjana Khaund.
10. Urmi Choudhury: Shashanka's sister, admired for her work ethic but criticized by her brother.

Syed Abdul Malik weaves a rich tapestry of human emotions, societal critique, and philosophical musings in *Aghari Atmar Kahini*. The novel portrays the struggles of its characters with love, morality, and existential questions, offering a profound reflection on human nature and the complexities of life.<sup>11</sup>

### **Comparisons between *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar* and *Aghari Atmar Kahini*.**

*Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar* (*Love Under the Rain*) by Naguib Mahfouz is a prominent Arabic novel exploring human relationships, societal transformation, and personal struggles in post-revolution Egypt.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini* (*The Tale of the Nomadic Soul*) by Syed Abdul Malik is an Assamese novel delving into love, familial discord, and social critique in mid-20th century Assam.

Both novels focus on human relationships, existential dilemmas, and societal issues, but their contexts, narrative styles, and thematic emphases differ significantly.

*Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar*: Set in 1960s Egypt, the novel reflects the challenges of post-revolution society, examining the erosion of idealism, corruption, and the complexities of modernity.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Set in rural and urban Assam, it critiques familial and societal structures, highlighting issues such as moral decay, interpersonal conflicts, and the effects of modernization.

*Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar*: Deeply rooted in Egyptian culture and the socio-political upheaval following the 1952 revolution.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Reflects Assamese traditions, familial hierarchies, and cultural practices, juxtaposed with the changing dynamics of modern India.

### **Love and Relationships:**

*Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar*: Love is portrayed as fleeting and often tainted by societal pressures. The relationships reflect a search for emotional refuge amidst chaos.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Explores the complexities of love, including unrequited feelings, marital discord, and past relationships. Love serves as both a source of solace and conflict.

### **Societal Critique:**

*Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar*: Critiques the disillusionment with the post-revolutionary government and the moral compromises of its citizens.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Highlights corruption, particularly in disaster relief, as well as the moral failings of individuals in positions of power.

### **Search for Meaning:**

Both novels deal with characters grappling with existential questions and the search for purpose amidst societal and personal turmoil.

### **Characters: Protagonists:**

*Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar*: A collective ensemble of characters, such as Samara and Dr. Raouf, representing various facets of Egyptian society.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Shashanka Choudhury is a singular protagonist whose introspective journey forms the narrative's core.

### **Female Characters:**

*Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar*: Women like Samara embody resilience and emotional depth, often navigating societal constraints.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Apara and Chaya reflect both strength and vulnerability, embodying the emotional and societal struggles faced by women.



### Family Dynamics:

*Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭār*: Family relationships are strained under the pressures of societal transformation.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Family conflicts arise from moral failings, generational divides, and unresolved emotional scars.

### Narrative Style

*Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭār*: Mahfouz employs a modernist approach, using fragmented narratives to portray the lives of multiple characters.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Follows a linear narrative interspersed with flashbacks and introspective passages.

### Philosophical Undertones:

Both novels use the internal monologues of characters to explore philosophical themes, though Mahfouz leans more heavily on existentialism, while Malik emphasizes spiritual and cultural introspection.

### Language and Imagery:

*Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭār*: Rich in metaphorical language, it often reflects the desolation and hope of post-revolution Egypt.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Vibrant descriptions of Assamese landscapes and cultural motifs serve as a backdrop to the characters' emotional journeys.

### Depiction of Society: Moral Decay:

Both novels critique the erosion of ethical values in society but with differing focuses—Mahfouz critiques a failing revolutionary idealism, while Malik critiques individual moral failings in familial and societal contexts.

### Role of Politics:

*Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭār*: Politics plays a central role, with characters directly affected by governmental policies and social upheaval.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Politics is more peripheral, manifesting in corruption during disaster relief and the misuse of power within families.

While *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭār* and *Aghari Atmar Kahini* differ in cultural and historical contexts, they share a focus on love, morality, and societal critique. Mahfouz's work is rooted in the existential struggles of post-revolution Egypt, whereas Malik's novel delves into personal and familial conflicts within the changing dynamics of Assamese society. Both offer profound insights into the human condition, reflecting universal themes through regionally specific lenses.<sup>12</sup>

### Dissimilarities Between *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭār* and *Aghari Atmar Kahini*

While both *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭār* (*Love Under the Rain*) by Naguib Mahfouz and *Aghari Atmar Kahini* (*The Tale of the Nomadic Soul*) by Syed Abdul Malik explores themes of love, morality, and societal challenges, their dissimilarities stem from their cultural contexts, narrative techniques, and thematic focus.

**(1) Geographical and Cultural Background:** *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭār*: Set in 1960s Egypt, it reflects the aftermath of the 1952 Egyptian Revolution, focusing on urban life and the political disillusionment of that era.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Set in mid-20th-century Assam, India, it draws from Assamese rural and urban contexts, deeply rooted in local traditions and socio-cultural dynamics.

**(2) Historical Relevance:** *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭār*: The novel critiques the failure of revolutionary ideals and explores the impact of national politics on personal lives.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: It does not directly engage with political history but critiques social corruption, familial hierarchies, and modernization's effects on traditional values.

**(3) Focus of Social Critique:** *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭār*: Focuses on political corruption, the erosion of revolutionary ideals, and urban societal malaise.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Highlights personal and familial moral failures, particularly through the misuse of authority and strained human relationships.

**(4) Exploration of Love:** *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭār*: Love is portrayed as a fleeting and often compromised emotion, overshadowed by societal and political pressures.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Love serves as a deeper emotional and spiritual exploration, often tied to individual growth, regrets, and reconciliation.

**(5) Religious and Philosophical Undertones:** *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭār*: Employs existential themes, questioning the purpose of life and morality in a changing world.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Reflects spiritual introspection and draws upon cultural and moral philosophy rather than existentialism.

**(6) Narrative Technique:** *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭār*: Employs a fragmented, modernist structure, weaving multiple characters' perspectives to present a collective social reality.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Adopts a linear narrative style with flashbacks, focusing on a single protagonist's introspective journey.

**(7) Character Development:** *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭār*: Features an ensemble cast, with characters representing different societal facets, and their development is secondary to thematic exploration.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Focuses on the psychological and emotional evolution of the protagonist, Shashanka Choudhury, with other characters playing significant but supporting roles.

(8) **Language and Imagery**: *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar*: Leans on metaphorical and urban imagery, often bleak, reflecting societal decay.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Uses vivid descriptions of Assamese landscapes and cultural imagery, offering a contrast between human struggles and natural beauty.

(9) **Political Dimension**: *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar*: Politics is central, affecting characters' lives and driving the narrative's critique of society.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Politics is peripheral, primarily addressed through corruption in disaster relief efforts, with a greater focus on personal morality.

(10) **Societal Reflection**: *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar*: Primarily critiques urban middle-class society and its loss of idealism.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Examines both rural and urban societies, critiquing traditional familial structures and modern values.

(11) **Emotional Tone**: *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar*: Pessimistic and often resigned, reflecting characters' struggles against insurmountable societal forces.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Offers a blend of melancholy and hope, with an emphasis on rediscovery and reconciliation amidst human flaws.

(12) **Resolution**: *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar*: Ends on a note of ambiguity, reflecting the unresolved tensions of its characters and society.

*Aghari Atmar Kahini*: Provides closure through introspection and self-awareness, emphasizing personal transformation.

The dissimilarities between *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar* and *Aghari Atmar Kahini* lie in their cultural settings, thematic focus, and narrative approaches. While Mahfouz critiques societal and political disillusionment through a modernist lens, Malik emphasizes personal and familial introspection within a traditional Assamese context. These differences highlight the universality of human struggles while showcasing the unique perspectives of their respective cultural landscapes.<sup>13</sup>

### Criticism about “Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar” by Naguib Mahfouz

*Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar* (*Love Under the Rain*) by Naguib Mahfouz has been the subject of various scholarly analyses, each offering unique insights into its themes, narrative structure, and socio-political commentary.

#### 1. Socio-Political Critique and Disillusionment

Mahfouz's novel is often interpreted as a critique of the socio-political landscape of post-revolutionary Egypt. Scholars highlight how the narrative reflects the disillusionment with the promises of the 1952 revolution, portraying characters who grapple with the erosion of idealism and the prevalence of corruption. This perspective is discussed in the context of Arabic literature's engagement with political themes.

#### 2. Exploration of Existential Themes

The novel delves into existential questions, portraying characters in search of meaning amidst societal chaos. This existential dimension is analyzed in studies focusing on the philosophical underpinnings of Mahfouz's work, emphasizing the individual's struggle against an indifferent society.

#### 3. Narrative Structure and Characterization

Mahfouz's use of a fragmented narrative and an ensemble cast is noted for its effectiveness in depicting a multifaceted society. Scholars examine how this narrative technique allows for a comprehensive exploration of diverse social strata and the complexities of human relationships in a transforming Egypt.

#### 4. Symbolism and Imagery

The novel's rich use of symbolism and imagery, particularly related to urban life and the metaphor of rain, is analyzed for its role in enhancing thematic depth. Studies explore how Mahfouz employs these literary devices to reflect the emotional and psychological states of his characters.

#### 5. Reception and Impact

The reception of “Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar” is discussed in the context of Mahfouz's broader literary career and its impact on Arabic literature. Scholars assess the novel's contribution to modern Arabic narrative traditions and its reflection on societal issues pertinent to its time.<sup>12</sup>

Mahfouz frequently spoke about the publishing conditions during that period and always grouped *Love Under the Rain* (*Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar*) and *The Karnak Café* (*Al-Karnak*) together, as both were written and published around the same time and under similar political circumstances. Most importantly, neither escaped the censor's scissors.

In an interview with writer and critic Ghali Shukri, published in his book *From Al-Gamaliya to the Nobel Prize* (1988), Mahfouz said:

“You may recall the story of *Love Under the Rain* and how it has three origins. They completely removed the part about the frontlines. I was on the verge of withholding the novel from publication as a book, except the publisher insisted that I would have to cover the printing costs if I did so. The publisher found himself facing two options: either to comply with the censor's orders or to bear the cost of typesetting (the technical preparation of the novel for printing). Of course, he wouldn't bear the cost himself; it would fall on me

instead. So, I agreed to release the book under censorship, as I could not afford to pay compensation. The system involved reviewing the book after it was printed, meaning that whoever failed to comply with the censorship instructions attached to the manuscript would face legal and financial consequences.

The published novel became like a bird with a crippled wing, with only one functional wing. We did not get to know the life of the soldier, which would have justified his anger and resentment.”

In the same book, Ghali Shukri writes: “When *Love Under the Rain* (*Al-Hubb Taht Al-Matar*) was published in the early 1970s, Naguib Mahfouz confided in me an astonishing literary secret. He revealed that when he finished *Mirrors* (*Al-Mara'ya*), for one reason or another, three characters remained in his memory without being written. From these characters, he began to weave the story of *Love Under the Rain*. Had he completed *Mirrors*, this novel would not have existed.

I would add that at the time, Al-Ahram did not publish *Love Under the Rain*, so Naguib Mahfouz gave it to a magazine called *Al-Shabab* (*Youth*). Simultaneously, the novel was being printed by a publisher. Thus, the novel was serialized in *Al-Shabab* in a version different from that in the book, and both differ from the original text, which was not published in its entirety until 1983. In this way, a single novel that was written by chance ended up having three versions.”

Ghali Shukri recounted the same story in the introduction to the third edition of his book *The Affiliated: A Study in the Literature of Naguib Mahfouz* (*Al-Muntami: Dirasa fi Adab Naguib Mahfouz*, 1982), adding further details:

“The censor interfered with the publication of the novel, removing parts of the text as he pleased. This was the press censor. Simultaneously, the publisher was preparing the novel for release in book form. It so happened that I was in Naguib Mahfouz’s office when he was responding to a phone call. He was deleting, adding, and modifying the manuscript prepared for the book. The person speaking on the other end of the line was the publishing censor. Anyone wishing to document the history of freedom of expression at that time should compare the version of *Love Under the Rain* published in *Al-Shabab* magazine, the version published in book form, and the version Naguib Mahfouz himself possessed.”<sup>14</sup>

### Criticism about “Aghari Atmar Kahini” by Syed Abdul Malik

Syed Abdul Malik holds a significant place as a cornerstone of Assamese literature, recognized for his extensive and varied literary contributions. His stature as one of the best prose writers in the Assamese literary tradition underscores his versatility and depth as an author. The eminent title bestowed upon him by Sudhakanth Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, who referred to Malik as the “owner of Assamese literature,” emphasizes his unparalleled influence and the respect he commanded within the literary community. This honour reflects not just his prolific output but the profound impact his works have had on shaping the Assamese narrative and literary culture.

Malik’s identity as a storyteller, playwright, novelist, and poet further underlines his multifaceted talents. Each role he assumed contributed uniquely to the enrichment of Assamese literature, showcasing his ability to navigate different genres and forms with equal adeptness. His narratives often delved into social and cultural dimensions, bringing to life the complexities of human experience in Assam. This versatility set him apart as not just an author, but a vital voice chronicling and interpreting the essence of his times through literature.

Critically, Malik’s works are lauded for their emotional depth, cultural authenticity, and the seamless integration of local themes with universal human experiences. His legacy as a writer who could craft compelling stories while engaging in social commentary cements his position as an irreplaceable figure in Assamese literary history.<sup>15</sup>

Syed Abdul Malik’s narrative craft in his novel reveals a universe teeming with diverse and relatable characters whose lives are intricately connected through a web of interactions. This interconnectedness is both thematic and structural, with Malik employing a loosely constructed storyline to emphasize the fluidity of human relationships. The main characters of “Aghari Atmar Kahini” — Sasanka Choudhury and the Khaunds—navigate a complex matrix of connections, betrayals, and emotional adjustments, which are both deeply personal and universally resonant. The supporting cast enriches this network, adding layers of tension and depth that enhance the novel’s thematic exploration.

Satyendra Nath Sarma, a noted literary historian, aptly encapsulates Malik’s thematic essence, stating, “*The central subject of Malik’s novel is love—human love. But the love is largely born of romance. Love finds expression in his novels in a variety of forms and colour.*” This observation underscores the multifaceted nature of love in Malik’s works, where it is not confined to romantic idealism but extends to emotional and even physical dimensions. The novel’s undercurrents of love, intertwined with emotional and sexual desires, are a hallmark of Malik’s literary oeuvre. These motifs emerge powerfully, revealing the characters’ internal struggles and yearnings for fulfillment.

Malik’s literary genius lies in his portrayal of existential emptiness—a void that pervades the lives of his characters. This sense of emptiness is amplified by their mundane routines and habituated connections, which, while familiar, bind them in invisible chains. The narrative masterfully captures the unease and longing of the protagonists, who have stifled their inner desires and ambitions over time. Through uneasy conversations and strained silences, Malik reveals their suppressed identities and forgotten aspirations.

The temporary cohabitation of Sasanka Choudhury with the Khaunds serves as a microcosm of this emotional entanglement. Over the days, their interactions become a canvas for exploring the distances they inhabit—both physical and emotional—and the silent burdens of their existence. The characters' growing awareness of their constraints, alongside their fleeting attempts to reconnect with their buried desires and ambitions, lends the narrative an introspective and poignant quality.

In essence, Malik's novel transcends a mere portrayal of relational dynamics. It delves into the human psyche, presenting love, longing, and emptiness as universal experiences, while simultaneously reflecting on the socio-cultural realities of the Assamese milieu. This nuanced interplay of personal and collective struggles elevates the work, solidifying Malik's reputation as a master of literary introspection and human portrayal.<sup>16</sup>

### Findings:

- i. *Al-Hubb Taht Al-Maṭar* reflects the political and social turbulence of 1960s Egypt, addressing the disillusionment of revolutionary ideals.
- ii. *Aghari Atmar Kahini* is rooted in Assamese society, focusing on the tension between traditional values and modernity.
- iii. Both works reveal how cultural and historical contexts influence thematic priorities and character portrayals.
- iv. *Al-Hubb Taht Al-Maṭar* emphasizes political corruption and existential dilemmas, portraying love and morality as compromised by societal decay.
- v. *Aghari Atmar Kahini* explores familial dynamics, personal redemption, and spiritual introspection, prioritizing individual morality over political critique.
- vi. This divergence highlights distinct cultural concerns: urban political struggles versus personal and societal ethics in a transitioning traditional society.
- vii. Mahfouz employs a fragmented, modernist structure with an ensemble cast to reflect collective societal issues.
- viii. Malik adopts a linear, introspective narrative, focusing on the protagonist's psychological journey and emotional growth.
- ix. These stylistic choices align with the works' thematic focus: the collective societal crisis versus individual redemption.
- x. Politics plays a central role in *Al-Hubb Taht Al-Maṭar*, shaping the characters' lives and the narrative's critique.
- xi. In *Aghari Atmar Kahini*, politics is secondary, appearing only as a backdrop to critique corruption, with the primary focus on human relationships and moral failures.
- xii. This difference underscores the respective emphasis on public versus personal spheres in societal critique.
- xiii. *Al-Hubb Taht Al-Maṭar* adopts a pessimistic tone with unresolved tensions, reflecting the chaotic societal milieu of its time.
- xiv. *Aghari Atmar Kahini* balances melancholy with hope, offering closure through personal introspection and reconciliation.
- xv. This reflects contrasting outlooks: Mahfouz's critique of an unyielding society versus Malik's faith in personal transformation and moral growth.
- xvi. Mahfouz uses urban, often bleak imagery to highlight societal decay and alienation.
- xvii. Malik's vivid descriptions of Assamese landscapes symbolize the contrast between human flaws and nature's purity.
- xviii. This difference reveals how the environment is metaphorically tied to each story's cultural and emotional tone.

The comparison reveals the universality of human struggles while showcasing the diverse ways literature reflects cultural, political, and social realities. *Al-Hubb Taht Al-Maṭar* critiques societal failures through a political lens, while *Aghari Atmar Kahini* explores individual morality within a culturally specific framework. Both works serve as mirrors of their respective societies, offering unique insights into human resilience and flaws.

### Conclusion

In both *Al-Hubb Taht Al-Maṭar* and *Aghari Atmar Kahini*, Naguib Mahfouz and Syed Abdul Malik explore the multifaceted nature of human relationships, emotional turmoil, and societal constraints, yet they do so through distinct cultural, historical, and literary lenses. Mahfouz's work, rooted in the turbulent political landscape of 1960s Egypt, portrays love as a fragile, fleeting refuge amidst societal upheaval and personal disillusionment. By contrast, Malik's novel, set in the serene yet introspective Assamese milieu, delves into the internal voids and suppressed desires of its characters, revealing the complexities of love and human connection.



Both authors employ rich characterization and nuanced storytelling to underscore the universality of love while addressing the specific socio-cultural contexts that shape their narratives. Mahfouz's portrayal of characters grappling with the chaos of a fractured society finds its counterpart in Malik's depiction of individuals trapped within the confines of their mundane lives and emotional silences. Yet, where Mahfouz imbues his narrative with political undercurrents and existential disquiet, Malik emphasizes psychological depth and personal awakening.

Ultimately, *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt Al-Maṭar* and *Aghari Atmar Kahini* stand as testaments to the enduring power of literature to navigate the complexities of the human experience. Through their distinctive yet resonant explorations of love, both novels invite readers to reflect on the intricacies of emotion, the burdens of societal expectations, and the universal longing for connection and meaning. These comparative insights not only enrich our understanding of the works themselves but also highlight the profound interplay between the personal and the universal in the realm of literary artistry.

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