

Free Will and Fate: An Existential Marxist Analysis of Naguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley*

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Abstract

The article explores the relationship between free will and fate in Naguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley* through Jean-Paul Sartre's Existential Marxism. Wartime Cairo during World War II is the setting, and the alley's lower-middle-class residents with their hopes and fears are the locus. Sartre's concepts of praxis, scarcity, practico-inert, seriality, freedom and responsibility are used to closely analyze the text through qualitative research methodology. The analysis shows that the characters practice personal agency, but material and social conditions are constantly affecting the choices that Hamida, Abbas and Hussain Kirsha make. The research adds to the existing knowledge as it provides existential marxist interpretation of *Midaq Alley* suggesting that free will and fate are not presented as conflicting realities, rather as interrelated; it further suggests an inclusion of gender, class consciousness, colonial influence, and social mobility to existential Marxism for a comprehensive understanding of human agency and social determinism in the text.

Keywords: Existential Marxism, Jean- Paul Sartre, Free will, Social Determinism

Introduction

Midaq Alley (1947) is one of the primarily important works of modern Arabic literature written by Egyptian Nobel prize-winner Naguib Mahfouz. The novel is set during World War II in a small, narrow, dead-end street in Khan el-Khalil district of Cairo. The alley symbolically represents the whole Egyptian society, showing the conflict between traditional and cultural values, and modernity during the sufferings of war. The alley itself stays physically separated from the turmoil of war; however its inhabitants are greatly influenced by outside factors such as existence of British army and socioeconomic transformations. Mahfouz depicts the struggles of common people enduring poverty and their struggles to make their lives better by presenting a variety of characters. Mahfouz focuses on themes like class division, homosexuality, individual desires, prostitution, gender roles and poverty. The story of the novel centers on *Midaq Alley's* diverse inhabitants lives including the main figure Hamida, a beautiful and ambitious young lady who desires to evade poverty and get an additional charming and elegant lifestyle. She is betrothed to Abbas who is a meek barber and loves her intensely. He is not a rich man so in order to enter into a marital union with her; Abbas takes part as a worker in British military during World War II to earn enough money. At the same time, Hamida gets enchanted by Salim Alwan who is an aged rich businessman, later by a British soldier named Chris Crick and finally is manipulated by Ibrahim Faraj who forces her into prostitution and to leave the alley. As Abbas comes back for the holidays, he becomes heartbroken by finding the fate of Hamida. In order to save Hamida, he assails her exploiter but is put to death in a brutal fight. Moreover, Hussain Kirsha is a character who is inspired by the British Army and desires to leave the alley to raise his status. Other minor plots contain Kirsha's Café, the place where Kirsha's inclinations toward homosexuality are hidden. Hussain Kirsha's wife deception, and a matchmaker named Umm Hamida. *Midaq Alley's* plot exposes human selfishness, ambitions and hopelessness. By profound portrayal, Mahfouz evaluates life of lower-middle-class and social conditioning in Egypt during World War II.

Naguib Mahfouz (1911- 2006), born in Cairo, was the foremost Arabic and Egyptian writer who became a Nobel laureate in 1988. He grew up in a middle class family. Prior to starting his professional career as a writer at 17, he completed his graduation degree in philosophy in 1934 from Cairo University. Mahfouz's literary writings primarily contain the larger context of the city that was near Gamaliya, where he spent his whole life. In 1939, he published his first novel *Abath al-Aqdas*. At the time when he was writing, Mahfouz also served as Egyptian government official by 1972 where he worked as Cultural Affairs advisor and Director of

Censorship as well. During his professional writing career that span over 70 years, he published more than 350 short stories, seven plays, 35 novels, a number of articles, and 26 screenplays. Though in his initial writings, Mahfouz emphasized on history of old Egypt, however, he became popular with the publication of *The Cairo Trilogy* where he portrays an Egyptian middle class family across three consecutive generations and proved himself as the outstanding novelist of Arab. His further famous writings are *Midaq Alley* (1947), *Children of Gebelawi* (1959), and *The Thief and the Dogs* (1961). He was honored by the Nobel committee for producing such an artistic narration of the novels that refers to whole humanity and that are profound in nuance, blurring boundary between the elements of ambiguity and reality. In his writings, Mahfouz presents lower-middle-class life of Cairo and the major themes in his writings are power, destiny, the conflict between tradition and modernity and Egyptian identity. He left a rich heritage of the modern Arabic fiction.

Existential Marxism basically developed in France after the war as a philosophical movement during the 1940s-1960s. This movement seeks to combine focus of existentialism on personal experience, individual autonomy and personal liberty with emphasis of Marxism on conflict between social classes, economic interpretation of history and social liberation. Primarily, Poster defined the term “Existential Marxism” in his most famous work *Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser*. The main idea of this movement that was presented by Sartre is that individuals take birth first and after that they find meaning and purpose in their lives according to their own free will and personal choices even in marginalized structures of society. The important oppositional ideas of this movement are: facticity, group-infusion, praxis, bad faith, practico-inert and serial praxis. Sartre’s “progressive-regressive method” reveals how society conditions humans and their choices and in spite of limitations of social system/history how individuals can act freely in a meaningful way. Sartre says that a human can act freely in complicated circumstances. As De Beauvoir and Sartre beliefs that unlike other literary, social and philosophical movements existential marxism can never be comprehend only as an academic philosophy rather as a philosophy grounded in real-life experience.

There are other numerous theorists who worked on existential marxism. In this paper, Sartre, one of the pioneers of existential marxist theory, is chosen and his existential marxist concepts including praxis, scarcity, practico-inert, seriality and freedom and responsibility are used to analyze Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley*.

This paper analyzes free will and fate in Naguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley* from an existential marxist point of view, asserting that free will and fate are not shown as opposite forces rather as interconnected forces. In the novel, though the characters attempt to practice personal freedom but their choices are constantly influenced and restrained by social determinism (i.e., social expectations, poverty and patriarchy) that ultimately shape their destinies. Moreover, qualitative research method is used in this paper for critical analysis.

Literature Review

Scholarly researches on Naguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley* conducted from different theoretical perspective by different scholars are as follows:

Deeb's research of *Midaq Alley* is based on cultural and social perspective. His findings reveal the tension between conventional society of *Midaq Alley* and modern society outside the alley. His study also gives a broad analysis of strata depicted in the novel and this stratum symbolically represents the whole Egyptian society. The names of characters as Deeb claims are consciously opted by Mahfouz and they represent class level and personal traits of the characters .i.e., Zita is linked with dirt and Alwan is associated with prominence and high status. He says that names reflect personality of individuals and this can be seen in the novel. Deeb's another key research is the exact historical setting of the novel i.e., around 1944-1945. He claims this period by internal proofs in the text which includes power failure due to the war that lasted for five years, mention of parliamentary elections linked with Ahmed Pasha during 1944 and 1945. In this way, he links his analysis to the real social and political history of Egypt during World War II. Moreover, Deeb has expeditiously analyzed moral decay of both conventional and modern Cairo (Deeb, 1983, pp. 121-130).

Al-Subari employed Saidian, Gandhi and Tyson's concept in his research to analyze the novel from postcolonial perspective in which he discusses that two issues were produced by British domination in English society i.e., loss of identity and breakdown of social relations. The alley represents Egyptian society, where individuals are struck between modernity and convention, foreign impact and native values. People in the alley get fragmented and lose their identity due to colonial power and financial difficulty. He argues that the arrival of English people brought financial imbalance and class division in the alley. Hamida faces poverty in the alley so in order to uplift her social status, she worked for English soldiers as a prostitute and left the alley which becomes the cause of her alienation from her native society and her name is also replaced by Titi which shows her loss of identity. Kirsha's family also faces social fragmentation. After the

arrival of British army, Hussain and Abbas joins English military as a worker which becomes the cause of loss of their identity as they also left the alley. His study reveals that characters left their original place to raise their status but became victims of colonial system (Al-Subari, 2021, pp. 508-524).

Khadim's study of *Midaq Alley* is based on a postcolonial perspective. His study shows that he has interpreted the novel not only from the social perspective but from the political and historical point of view as well. His study reveals how British rule and World War II molded Egyptian's identity, individual morality and normal life. Khadim's findings also exhibits that West has always marginalized and politically humiliated the East and through the character of Hussain Krisha, he has tried to reveal the impact of British army on him that in order to gain status and wealth, Hussain worked under English people started to live like them and began to hate alley. Abbas joins British army by leaving the alley in order to raise her social status to marry Hamida and Hamida becomes the victim of her internal desire and becomes a prostitute in order to live a life of high status. Through the discussions of these characters, Khadim's study reveals the relations between characters as manifestation of personal desires and dual consciousness and how these are shaped by colonial rule. He also gave the stance of radio and oral storytelling to show that how modernity caused by colonizers' arrival becomes a threat to conventional world of alley. His findings also reveal the link between moral decay and colonial power through Ibrahim Faraj's character as he participates in political bribery during elections and hires female for English army. He has also discussed the arrival of British people in East in the past and other major events like Revolution of 1919 which shows that he has analyzed the novel from historical point of view as well. His study's culmination point comes by Abbas' death which also exhibits colonized people's repression under colonial rule. Finally, Khadim's findings conclude that *Midaq Aalley* novel is a historical postcolonial rewriting (Khadim, 2023, pp. 1-20).

Shafique et al. conducted a research on *Midaq Alley* which is based on how war affects the social and economic condition and morality of people in the novel. Their findings reveal that World War II affected not only directly but also indirectly on people's lives. It acts as a concealed power by shaping morality, personal preferences, financial status and individual relationships. They argue that war not only harms physically but also morally to the characters in *Midaq Alley*. Their study shows that they have connected conditions of war in the novel to the real-time war events by providing Benjamin's factual data related to presence of English army, recruitment and inflation during World War II. Through the portrayal of different characters, their evaluation of the novel shows that war has affected different people

differently. Hussain joins British army to raise his status but as war ends he returns back to alley which reveals that the rise in his status was temporary. So, their analysis shows that how dreams of class mobility were falsely produced by war. Due to war, Hamida's identity changes as war brings opportunity for her to present herself as a prostitute for British soldiers in order to fulfill her ambitions. Their findings exhibit that they have tried to symbolically analyze *Midaq Alley*. Their study also focused on economic effects of war in the novel that war benefited some people greatly (Shafique et al., 2024, 459-467).

Nevertheless, a number of literary researches have been conducted on *Midaq Alley* from cultural, social, postcolonial, historical and war-related perspectives, but no work has been done on the novel from Jean-Paul Sartre's existential marxist point of view. Particularly, the interconnected relationship between free will and fate, as influenced by interpersonal and material-social factors is not explored. Thus, this paper analyzes *Midaq Alley* from an existential marxist perspective, discussing free will and fate as interconnected forces.

Research Methodology

Qualitative research method has been adopted in this paper for critical analysis and interpretation of original text of the novel and secondary literature. Qualitative research consists of data that is gathered and interpreted from different sources in words' form to comprehend concepts, beliefs and opinions of the participants. It contains data that is non-numerical in nature. All the concepts, thoughts, ideas, available information and perceptions have been used in the paper to achieve the basic goals of the research.

Both primary and secondary sources have been used in this paper to collect data. From the primary source, data has been collected by making interpretations and close reading of the primary text, whereas from the secondary sources, data has been collected from internet sources like journals, by reading different books, articles, notes and existential marxism's scholarly discussions, etc.

Theoretical Framework

The main theory used for the analysis of Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley* in this paper is Jean Paul Sartre's Existential Marxism. In *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), Sartre combined the existentialist focus on individual freedom with the Marxist focus on material and social conditions, thus developing Existential Marxism. He believes that humans are not totally free,

and also not totally determined by outside influences. Instead, humans act freely by remaining within the restrictions forced by their historical, economic and social conditions.

One of the key concepts of Sartre's theory is **praxis**, which is the process of conscious human action whereby individuals construct themselves and their social world. Sartre opposes the deterministic Marxist analyses and argues that individuals engage in the creation of history by their choices and actions. But all of these decisions are shaped through material realities like poverty, class relations, patriarchal norms, and social structures.

Scarcity is another important idea, one that Sartre recognizes as a fundamental state of existence of human. Scarcity creates competition, conflict, and alienation among people which impacts their choices and interactions. Sartre also presents the concept of the **practico-inert**, which represents that the social institutions, traditions, and material structures were originally human constructs but later they become constraining forces that restrict human autonomy.

He also describes the notion of **seriality**, where humans live within society without actively relating to one another and becoming constrained in recurrent social patterns. It is a concept that helps to understand how people embrace oppressive conditions as natural rather than trying to resist them by collective action.

Finally, Sartre pays attention to the connection between **freedom and responsibility**. Humans are not determined completely by the historical and material circumstances but also by their own choices. As freedom remains there in every circumstance, but still humans remain accountable for their decisions. As a result, humans fails to ascribe their decisions completely to social or economic factors or destiny. The dialectic of freedom and limitation is at the center of Sartre's Existential Marxism.

This paper explores the interconnected relation between free will and fate in *Midaq Alley* by applying Sartre's Existential Marxism. The framework allows for the exploration of how Mahfouz's characters cope with their own desires and social expectations, poverty, and class constraints. By using this theoretical framework, the novel depicts the interdependence of free will and fate. While the characters make choices, these choices are continually shaped and limited by poverty, patriarchy and social expectations, making fate an outcome of the way material conditions and individual action interact.

Discussion and Analysis

The paper analyzes the interconnected relation between free will and fate in Naguib Mahfouz' *Midaq Alley* in the light of Jean-Paul Sartre's theory of Existential Marxism. Sartre critiques

the conditioned Marxist belief as he claims that while humans are determined by history and material conditions but they are not devoid of freedom completely. Human beings are continually shaping their life with conscious decisions, but these decisions are made in social and economic constraints. This framework is especially related to *Midaq Alley* where Mahfouz shows characters trying to redefine their lives as they face poverty, tradition, class oppression, etc. The novel shows that destiny is not entirely predetermined nor self-made, but a product of the interplay between individual will and structural restrictions.

In *Midaq Alley*, Mahfouz portrays a world in which humans are constantly making compromises between their own desires and the constraints of their surrounding. Many residents of the alley consciously embrace the restrictions enforced by tradition and economic deprivation but other individuals like Hamida, Abbas Hilu and Hussain Kirsha, make a conscious effort to transform their lives by making their personal choices. Their struggle to evade out of the dullness of the alley offers an appropriate background for using Sartre's concept of **praxis** of existential marxism, meaning that humans, by their conscious action, aimed at changing both one's selves and one's external world. Sartre opposes the idea that humans are the products of history; instead, he believes they play an active role in creating their own lives (Sartre, 1991, pp. 79-94). *Midaq Alley* presents some of its characters whose choices embody this existential struggle to define themselves, especially those of Hamida, Abbas and Hussain.

Hamida's character embodies a constant resistance to the social identity that is enforced by Midaq Alley on her. She is constantly aspiring to transcend the narrow confines of poverty and obscurity in contrast to other women who seem happy with a traditional domestic lifestyle. Her aspirations suggest an active awareness that do not simply accept the given social conditions. While writing about Hamida's thoughts when Salim Alwan proposes to her, Mahfouz notes that she imagines "This at last was the man who could give her all the luxury and freedom from drudgery she prayed for" (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 98). This representation is important as it shows that her aspiration was not just to get more wealth but also to change her whole life.

The desire of Hamida represents praxis from a Sartrean point of view as she strives to adopt a life in future that would be different from her current world. She never consider her situation as a certain fate in the alley, but she believes it as a state that she can change through her choice. Sartre claims that an individual shapes himself by the ambitions he choose freely, and Hamida's ongoing dissatisfaction thus represents this existential concept farther than defined self.

This analysis is further supported by her rejection of Abbas. Umm Hamida recalls her about her engagement, but Hamida rejects him and says, "That barber! . . . He must go" (Mahfouz,

1966, p. 99). She does not embrace the future that is decided by society and family for her rather she prefers other path which reflects her conscious denial of traditional societal roles. In making this decision, Hamida strives to forge a new identity that is free of the traditional norms that govern the alley.

However, the notion of complete personal liberty is questioned in the novel by showing that the personal agency is rigidly constrained. The outcomes of Hamida's decisions, as she deliberately practices free will, shows that it is not possible to gain freedom by self-determination only. Her struggle to overcome poverty eventually puts her in another system of exploitation (i.e., prostitution), indicating that self-determination is influenced by systems that can shift or erode individual agency. In *Midaq Alley*, Mahfouz does not deny freedom and also not glorify it either, rather he shows that decisions and their outcomes are shaped through the larger historical realities.

This is the same existential principle that can be observe in the character of Abbas however his motives have a very different nature from Hamida's. At first, Abbas seems satisfied with his work and simple life but his passion for Hamida changes his outlook about himself and his life ahead. He explains that this emotional experience has transformed him into a different person saying, "Love has made a new person of me" (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 60). The above assertion depicts Sartre's view that identity is not fixed but is always reconstructed by deliberate decisions and personal experiences.

Praxis concept is further seen in Abbas's next act of leaving the alley to work for the British Army. Motivated by Hussain Kirsha, he leaves the comfortable life of the alley in search of a better life in order to become economically a rich man and fulfill his personal desires. Hussain suggests him to "Say goodbye from now on to this wretched alley life. Now start to enjoy a real life" (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 76) highlighting that change is possible through firm action only. This challenge is accepted willingly by Abbas – it shows Sartre's belief that individuals not only adapt to circumstances but they also actively intervene in them.

Although, the analysis also indicates that merely deliberate action cannot guarantee the intended results because personal autonomy is always influenced by material and social conditions. Abbas's choice is a voluntary one, but he remains unable to achieve his desires as his choice is defined by historical and social circumstances. His tragedy does not abolish his freedom, but it makes us aware of the indeterminacy of being free to choose. Sartre maintains that freedom always entails some risk because humans can exercise autonomy yet cannot ascertain what the consequences of their actions will be. This existential tension is depicted in Abbas's experience.

Another example of praxis is seen in Hussain Kirsha, who is unhappy with the drab existence of Midaq Alley and thus joins the British Army to improve his social and economic condition. Hussain is not like many residents of the alley who embrace poverty as natural, but he's a man who deliberately strives to elevate his status by moving and working at other place. His refusal to passivity represents Sartre's belief that humans can make decisions even under limiting circumstances. Yet, the later challenges (i.e., as the war ends, he returns to the alley and started to live the life of poverty again) faced by Hussain also shows that personal initiative can be undermined by forces outside of human control, further substantiating the main claim of this research, which is that free will and fate are not opposite forces but are interdependent realities. *Midaq Alley* does not offer an absolute autonomy of praxis analytically. Rather, Mahfouz presents conscious action as an essential, but not an adequate circumstance, for self-transformation. Hamida, Abbas, and Hussain though practice autonomy by conscious actions, but each finds that he is unable to master social reality completely. They are not only influenced by their own intentions, but also by historical circumstances that constantly intervene into human life that shape their desires.

Thus, using the principle of praxis in *Midaq Alley* is an affirmation and revision of Sartre's existential marxism. Mahfouz's novel resists destiny through portraying characters' strive to change their fate but at the same time, it doubts whether it is possible to break down the social structures with the power of individual freedom. Praxis thus becomes a negotiation between will and circumstance, but not an unlimited personal autonomy's representation.

Most important of all, Mahfouz does not portray free will and fate as opposing forces, rather as interactive realities which continuously influence each other in the novel. By autonomous choices, Hamida, Abbas and Hussain certainly practice free will, but their choices are still affected by poverty, social norms and the fixed roles of Midaq Alley. In this context, their fates are not entirely self-made and not entirely predestined, instead their fates arise by the connection between structural constraints and personal autonomy. Sartre's notion of praxis thus reinforces the main point of this paper by proving that individuals exercise liberation, but that liberation is constantly exercised in a material and historical context which has a significant impact on its results.

Mahfouz presents a society in *Midaq Alley* subjected to financial insecurity and in which characters' lives and desires are influenced by poverty. The residents of the alley face limited opportunities, unstable jobs and social insecurity while fostering a surrounding that leads to financial survival being the overwhelming concern. In this context, Sartre's notion of **scarcity** provides a significant philosophical approach for comprehending the impact of material

conditions on human choices without obviating the freedom of the individual entirely.

Sartre believes that scarcity does not involve the wealth's deprivation only but also a historical circumstance by which individual relations are shaped and humans are influenced to exercise agency under limited circumstances. Scarcity does not negate freedom rather it defines the conditions under which liberty is practiced (Sartre, 1991, pp. 122-152). Mahfouz's depiction of *Midaq Alley* represents this notion through portraying that how individual aspirations are shaped by poverty though it still creates space for deliberate decision.

Scarcity is more apparent in Hamida's continuous urge to get out of the alley. Her dissatisfaction is not just self-regard's depiction, rather a reaction to economic deprivation that surrounds her. While reflecting on the prospect of forming a marital union with Salim Alwan, Mahfouz writes, "She wanted the other things it would bring: dignity, beautiful clothing, jewelry, pride, and a whole new world of secure and happy people" (Mahfouz, 1966, pp. 98–99). The notion of Sartre fosters a deeper analysis instead of interpreting this aspiration as materialistic superficiality. Through Hamida's lived experience of scarcity in which wealth is an expression of dignity, autonomy and freedom from social humiliation, her desire arises.

But this analysis is further intensified by showing that materialistic aspiration is not enough to achieve true freedom. By Hamida's urge for economic progress, she alienates herself from the emotional connections and becomes a victim of exploitation under the hands of Ibrahim Faraj. Therefore, the novel implies that scarcity has its effect on individual consciousness, but humans are responsible for how they act regarding it. While poverty may account for Hamida's dreams, it doesn't necessarily explain what she does to achieve those dreams.

Scarcity influences Abbas' decisions as well. Abbas cannot offer Hamida a better future that she dreams of thus he chooses to work outside the alley by becoming a member of the British Army camp. He chooses to make this decision because he hopes that he will be able to improve his personal and social condition through financial improvement. He says, "There's plenty of work and plenty of money" (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 159). It depicts his view that he can fulfill personal desires and obtain a brighter future with Hamida through financial progress only.

In an existential marxist view, Abbas's emigration is an example of the interplay between free will and the material circumstances . He abandons alley's life from his own will, but this decision is still made under conditions to which scarcity primarily shapes. Mahfouz does not present full economic determination, as well as not complete autonomy in characters' lives in the novel. Rather, poverty is depicted as a social force by him through which opportunity becomes limited but still it gives space to make deliberate decision .

Thus, *Midaq Alley*'s analysis made in this paper shows that poverty doesn't exclude individual agency but it certainly shapes the manner by which free will is practiced. The characters remain autonomous decision makers, but their actions are always affected by social inequalities and poverty. Hence, in the novel scarcity emerges as one of the major arguments that interconnects free will and destiny- emphasizing the idea that destiny is created by the interplay of individual action and economic constraints, not through either factor solely.

In addition to economic poverty, *Midaq Alley* is depicted as a social space where tradition and cultural norms have greater influence. Customs and social norms shape the residents' actions well before they make their own decisions. Such established systems seem permanent and irrefutable and make it hard for an individual to practice personal freedom. This is a portrayal directly related to the notion of the **practico-inert** by Sartre. According to Sartre, the practico-inert are such institutions and economic conditions that emerged through human agency basically and become structural forces subsequently that limit future generations. These forces steadily become more authoritative over humans and make historically created truths seem natural or inevitable (Sartre, 1991, pp. 153-255). The alley serves as a practico-inert realm by itself in *Midaq Alley* as it enforces predefined social roles associated with profession, social class and gender.

The alley's male-dominated society expects that without defiance females should embrace traditional gender roles. However, Hamida's rejection of marrying Abbas depicts her action to resist this established social structure. As she was recalled by Umm Hamida of her engagement with Abbas, Hamida says, "A girl is free until the marriage engagement is signed. Nothing has passed between us but words and a dish of sweet! (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 101). Her assertion symbolizes the denial of the conventional expectations that are enforced on her aspiration to decide her destiny.

Yet, Mahfouz shows that although an individual can find a way out of one restrictive structure but he usually becomes a victim of another structure in consequence. Hamida's exit from the street is not a true liberation rather she falls under the sway of Ibrahim Faraj (who tricks her into prostitution) by becoming a victim of another power structure. As a result of this transformation, Mahfouz proposes to challenge the notion of freedom as physical liberation, as social structures continuously influence the experiences of individual in various ways.

The idea of practico-inert is also reflected in the social positioning of Abbas that his profession defines. Regardless of his sincerity and loyalty, Hamida continually undermines his individuality to "That barber!" (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 99), showing that how human relationships are affected by established class differences. His personal qualities are not enough to prevail

the social connotations associated with his occupation, and thus it shows that social structures have remained powerful.

Midaq Alley illustrates the idea of practico-inert: the choices available to the individuals are very much affected by the social expectations, patriarchal norms and class structures. The fate is shaped by these forces as they restrict human choices, but they don't exclude autonomy entirely. Thus, free will and fate function together, as the novel's characters make choices while being restricted by the social conditions created historically.

Midaq Alley's some inhabitants attempt to change their conditions, but many characters passively embrace their lives as they are. Traditional views, recurrent lifestyles and restricted expectations have influenced their lives, thus developing a perception of social passivity that undermines significant change. Sartre theorizes this concept as **seriality**, which refers to humans who live in society together, but still keep themselves alienated and detached from either collective action to change their circumstances. He states that serial individuals are passive reproducers of established social structures, instead of active challengers of them. They reinforces oppressive structures by accepting the routine and by starting to apprehend prevailing circumstances as inescapable and inevitable (Sartre, 1991, pp. 256-317). Midaq Alley is portrayed by Mahfouz as a society in which this passivity has come to be seen as widely accepted.

The concept of seriality is illustrated by the character of Uncle Kamil in the novel. His recurrence of everyday activities and limited aspirations represent a sense of entire acquiescence with the prevailing conditions. Instead of attempting to change his circumstances through deliberate agency, Uncle Kamil embraces his societal restrictions passively. Such actions are interpreted by Sartre as representation of serial existence, in which humans give up their historical agency and unconsciously reproduce the structures which shape their lives.

At first, in fact Abbas takes part in this state of passivity as he lives contentedly with his occupation and his everyday life. Later, he chooses to work in the British Army and move away from the alley which symbolizes an effort to escape seriality by deliberate choice. His efforts to change his conditions remain ultimately unsuccessful as he dies tragically in the end, but his choice however shows an individual's ability to rebel against passive acceptance and strive for self-transformation.

However, Hussain Kirsha challenges this passive mindset by openly showing his dismay and says, "I have tied my clothes into a bundle and there's nothing left but to say goodbye. It's a filthy house, the alley stinks, and the people here are all cattle" (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 78). This statement by Hussain not only reflects his discontent with prevailing social conditions but also

represents refusal to the intellectual passivity which stops the alley's residents to envision a new future. Thus, the collective stagnation which Sartre relates with seriality is revealed by Hussain as he rejects it.

Employing seriality notion to *Midaq Alley* reinforces the main argument of this research as it shows that fate is not always predetermined, instead it is usually reinforced by passive acquiescence. By not questioning the prevailing circumstances, the alley's dwellers perpetuate those very structures that limit them, which shows that social determinism and free will are not opposing forces, but interrelated.

Sartre's Existential Marxism principle of interconnected relation between **freedom and responsibility** is the last concept which is applied in this paper. Sartre believes that though humans don't adopt the existing structural realities in which they find themselves, but are nonetheless accountable for exercising agency within prevailing circumstances. Autonomy exists in fact within repressive conditions as individuals analyze and react to their circumstances persistently by agency. Thus, it is not possible to shift responsibility completely on material conditions, society, or history (Sartre, 1991, pp. 318-342).

This theoretical approach offers an efficient framework for interpreting the issues of free will and fate in *Midaq Alley* portrayed by Mahfouz. Throughout the novel, the influence of social structures on human behaviour is shown without it completely controlling or determining human behaviour. Characters experience great economic and cultural constraints, but still make choices that shape their fates.

This concept is best illustrated in the character of Hamida. Her discontent of poverty is though comprehensible, but her refusal to accept Abbas and the traditional life that alley offers her, and her desire to improve her social status is a choice she has made consciously. Through portraying her journey Mahfouz discusses "It seemed that, lying there, she saw no serious difficulty in choosing the path she would follow. There was simply her dull past and an exciting future. The truth was that without realizing she had chosen her path. She had chosen this man when she was in his arms in his flat" (Mahfouz, 1966 p. 137). It reveals that Hamida is an individual whose fate is not being determined by circumstances only, rather she is an autonomous subject of her own fate. It is not only the outside factors that become the cause of her subsequent suffering, rather it is linked to the choices as well that she makes of her own free will.

Likewise, individual freedom is practiced by Abbas also as he makes choices about migrating and working at other place in order to change his circumstances. Instead of embracing the alley's constraints passively, his choices depict a deliberate action to change his conditions.

Hussain Kirsha encourages Abbas to pursue a different future for him by saying “shake off this miserable life, close up your shop, leave this filthy alley behind” (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 26). Motivated by the prospect of financial and social progress, Abbas seizes this opportunity and hopes to get his desires. His aspirations tragically end eventually, but their tragic outcome reveals that he remains responsible for the choices he has made.

Thus, Mahfouz does not allow his characters to be helpless victims of destiny. Rather, it is the interconnection of the individual autonomy and social structures that creates fate. It is obvious that poverty, class structure, colonialism and male-dominated culture affect what opportunities are available to individuals, but they in no way exclude the responsibility entirely associated with individual agency.

In the end, it is analyzed in this paper that free will and fate are not portrayed as conflicting forces, rather as interdependent aspects of human life in *Midaq Alley*. Through deliberate actions, the individual freedom is practiced by the characters but those actions are always shaped and constrained by social conditions, social expectations, male domination and poverty that influence the characters' futures. This paper uses Sartre's notion of freedom and responsibility to show that, even in the face of limiting social environment, humans are responsible for the decisions they make. The analysis of the novel thus confirms the main assertion of this paper which shows that destiny emerges neither by the individual autonomy nor through the structural determinism alone but by the constant relationship between these two forces.

Conclusion

The correlation between free will and fate in Naguib Mahfouz's novel *Midaq Alley* has been discussed in this paper by using the theory of Existential Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre while earlier researchers have examined the novel from a cultural, social, historical, postcolonial and war-related point of view. The qualitative analysis of Mahfouz's novel has shown that the characters in the novel face human life as a combination of conscious decision and structural constraint. The novel does not depict individuals as victim of destiny or full-fledged agents of their own choices but shows that freedom is always exercised in historically and socially determined situations.

The analysis shows that the characters of *Midaq Alley* engage in an ongoing process of negotiation and balancing between one's aspirations and external constraints by applying Sartre's concepts of praxis, scarcity, practico-inert, seriality and freedom and responsibility.

Hamida, Abbas Hilu and Hussain Kirsha try to change their world through conscious choice, mirroring an existential power to define one's own world. But poverty, class divisions, patriarchy, colonialism, and the confined atmosphere of the alley all define their decisions. Thus, the findings of this research reveals that human decisions are not fully determined by their personal choices but also influenced by material and social conditions. Apart from the extreme restrictions, the characters still possess some agency and remain accountable for their own decisions.

In the end, *Midaq Alley* reveals that free will and determinism are not contrary factors, but are deeply interwoven aspects of human life. In the novel, Mahfouz shows that destiny is a product of personal choice and social conditioning. The novel, then, through an existential marxist perspective, portrays human existence as an ongoing struggle between freedom, responsibility, and the past experiences that influence everyday life, thus providing a deep understanding of intricacies of human destiny.

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