

Poverty Issues in the Novels *Bidayah Wa Nihayah* and *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan*: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses the theme of poverty in two selected novels, namely the novel Bidayah wa Nihayah (BWN) written by Najīb Mahfūz, winner of the Nobel prize for literature in 1988 from Egypt, and the novel Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan (RSJ) by National Literary Author Shahnnon Ahmad. This study will touch on the theme of poverty by using thematic comparative theory. A qualitative research design was chosen to answer the research questions through the textual study method of thematic comparative analysis and literature review. The results of the research show that there are some similarities about the theme of poverty between the two novels, among which the most significant is the interweaving of the story plot that begins with death (BWN) and dysentery (RSJ) of the heads of both families. The closure of the plot also ends tragically with suicide (BWN) and incurable madness (RSJ).

Keywords: *Thematic comparison, novel Bidayah wa Nihayah, Novel Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan, theme of poverty*

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini membincangkan tema kemiskinan dalam dua buah novel pilihan iaitu novel Bidayah wa Nihayah (BWN) yang ditulis oleh Najīb Mahfūz pemenang hadiah nobel kesusasteraan pada tahun 1988 yang berasal dari Mesir dan Novel Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan (RSJ) hasil karya Sasterawan Negara Shahnnon Ahmad. Kajian ini akan menyentuh tentang tema kemiskinan dengan menggunakan teori perbandingan tematik. Reka bentuk penyelidikan kualitatif dipilih untuk menjawab soalan kajian melalui kaedah kajian teks analisis perbandingan tematik dan Kajian kepustakaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat beberapa persamaan tentang tema kemiskinan diantara kedua-dua novel, diantaranya yang paling ketara ialah jalinan plot cerita yang bermula dengan mehnah kematian (BWN) dan ditimpa penyakit busung (RSJ) kepada ketua kedua-dua keluarga. Penutup kepada plot juga berakhir dengan tragis iaitu membunuh diri (BWN) dan gila yang tidak sembuh (RSJ).

Kata kunci: *Perbandingan tematik, novel Bidayah wa Nihayah, Novel Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan, tema kemiskinan*

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Introduction

This paper examines the theme of poverty in two novels, "*Bidayah wa Nihayah*" by Najīb Mahfūz and "*Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan*" by Shahnnon Ahmad, and compares the two novels.

Najīb Mahfūz, whose real name is Abdelaziz Ibrahim Ahmed Al-Basha, was an Egyptian author who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1988. Born in Cairo in 1911, Najīb Mahfūz began writing at the age of seventeen. His first novel was published in 1939, and he wrote ten more before the Egyptian Revolution in July 1952, during which he stopped writing for several years. He resumed his writing career with a reissued novel in 1953. However, it was with the Cairo Trilogy, "*Bayn al Qasrayn*," "*Qasr al Shawq*," and "*Sukkariya*" (Palace Walk, Palace of Desire, Sugar Street), published in 1957, that he gained international recognition throughout the Arab world. With the publication of "*Awlad Haratina*" (Children of Gebelawi) in 1959, he began writing in a new style that often concealed his critical stance toward contemporary politics through the use of allegory and symbolism. This new style permeated many of his works, including novels like "*al-Liss wa al-Kilab*" (Thieves and Dogs, 1961), "*As-Suman wa al-Kharif*" (Autumn Quail, 1962), "*Thartharah Fauq al-Nili*" (Adrift on the Nile, 1966), and "*Miramar*" (1967), as well as numerous short story collections. Throughout his life, he served in various significant public positions. In the context of imaginative creative writing, he produced thirty-five novels and over two hundred short stories. "*Bidayah wa Nihayah*" was published by him in 1949.

Professor Emeritus Dato' Dr. Haji Shahnnon bin Ahmad, born in 1933 in Banggol Derdap, Sik, Kedah, is a writer who has been recognised as a National Laureate (*Sasterawan Negara*) in 1982 for his contributions to the field of literature. He also served as a Professor Emeritus at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang.

His writing career began in 1956, with his early work, a translated piece, appearing in the magazine *Mastika*. His first work that brought him recognition in novel writing was "*Rentong*," which explored societal themes set in the village life of Banggol Derdap. From there, he produced various forms of writing, including short stories, novels, essays, and critiques. In the context of imaginative creative writing, he often depicted the suffering of rural communities and urban life. Throughout his involvement in the world of creative writing, he produced eighteen novels and five short story anthologies, both independently and in collaboration. The novel "*Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan*," discussed in this paper, was first published by him in 1966.

The issue of poverty is a significant concern among writers from the third world, especially when these countries have just achieved independence. This phenomenon occurs because the society at that time was plagued by serious poverty-related issues. Poverty, closely intertwined with the lives of the people at the time, involved not only financial factors but also material aspects like housing and other basic necessities. The problem of poverty had

not just affected the underprivileged rural communities but also had an impact on the middle-class urban population (Ramli Isin. 1997).

The issue of poverty in *Bidayah Wa Nihayah*

According to Zaghlūl Salām (1973), poverty that plagued the lives of the underprivileged in Egypt began to be felt with the success of Muhammad Ali's control over the Egyptian government in the early 19th century, leading to the confiscation of peasants' lands. Peasants who had previously sustained their lives through farming were ultimately forced to depend on meagre wages from the landowners, who were the aristocrats of the time. As a result, a minority that controlled the wealth emerged, while the majority of the underprivileged population lived as though they had nothing.

The arrival of British colonialists did little to change this situation. In fact, conditions worsened as they suppressed the Egyptian populace to profit from their colony. Using various tricks and deceptions, they attempted to control the wealth and resources of their colony, even in the face of strong opposition from the local population.

After the end of World War I, Egypt experienced a severe economic crisis that had a detrimental impact on the underprivileged and middle-class populations in Egypt. The effects of this economic crisis persisted and continued to grip the underprivileged and middle-class people in Egypt until the early 1930s. The pressing poverty in the rural areas led some of them to migrate to Cairo in search of better prospects. However, at the same time that the common people struggled to make ends meet, the aristocrats and elites lived in luxury, benefiting from the difficulties of the underprivileged.

The consequence of the stark inequality in status and lifestyle between these two groups eventually sparked dissatisfaction among those who felt oppressed. The seeds of resistance began to sprout with street demonstrations by the common people. However, these actions were insufficient to change the prevailing circumstances. Thus, it is not surprising that, with the outbreak of the July 23, 1951 revolution led by the military, this group provided unwavering support in the hope that these leaders could change their fate.

For a novelist deeply concerned about the fate of the underprivileged like Najīb Mahfūz, the issue of poverty that afflicted Egyptian society at the time was synonymous with his works. His novels such as "*Al-Qāhirah al-Jadīdah*" (1946), "*Zuqāq al-Midaq*" (1947), and "*Bidāyah wa Nihāyah*" (1949) are among his works that directly address this issue. In his other novels, he never failed to touch upon the issue indirectly. For Najīb Mahfūz, poverty was like a disease that consumed the human body little by little, eventually causing individuals to lose rational thinking. For people dominated by their desires, it could easily become a cause of serious social conflicts.

Among Najīb Mahfūz's novels that address poverty as a central issue is "*Bidāyah wa Nihāyah*." "*Bidāyah wa Nihāyah*" is a novel that tells the story of a family's life after the father's death, who was the economic pillar of the family. Set in the 1930s in Egyptian society, the novel invites readers to experience the suffering of Ummu Hassanain (Samīrah) and her family. Following her husband's death, she has to manage her family alone. Kamīl cAlī, who held a low position in a ministry before his death, certainly did not leave behind significant inheritance to support the family after his passing.

As a widow, Samīrah, with four teenage children, is forced to continue life in a state of scarcity. This is the beginning of a tragic story, as a mother has to raise her children without a stable and sufficient source of income. Everything must be managed carefully. Expenses must be reduced. The pocket money for Hasanain and Hussain has to be stopped. Even food must be carefully rationed to ensure their daily needs (Najīb Mahfūz. 1949). They have to leave their comfortable rented house and move to a smaller one to save money (ibid). As the needs become more pressing, their savings dwindle further, and they have to sell household items one by one to cover daily expenses.

Several heart-wrenching and poignant events, from the beginning to the tragic end of the story, are masterfully woven by Najīb Mahfūz to deeply affect the readers. Additionally, he does not miss the opportunity to include dialogues that criticise and depict the dissatisfaction of the underprivileged with the existing social divide between them and the elite.

In the midst of poverty, Hassan, the eldest son in this family, who does not have a stable job, eventually gets involved in criminal activities. To make a living, he becomes the local gang leader in his village. Starting with extortion of villagers, he later works as a protector of a prostitution den. To earn more money, he gets involved with a drug distribution syndicate. However, he ends up on the run from the police.

Husain, the second son of Kamīl cAlī, is a dutiful son. Unlike Hassan and Hassanain, who constantly oppose their mother's views, he is the opposite. With the intention of helping and easing his mother's burden, he sacrifices his aspiration to continue his education to a higher level. After completing his secondary education, he does not pursue university studies but instead seeks employment to support the family's expenses and needs. He is willing to give up his own dreams to pave the way for his younger sibling to continue their education. With the help of an old acquaintance of his father, Ahmad Yusrī Bey, he successfully secures a job as a clerk in a secondary school located in the city of Tanta (ibid).

Meanwhile, Kamāl cAlī's only daughter has her own problems. Nafisah is described by Najīb Mahfūz as a less fortunate woman. She was destined to be a girl who lacked both in terms of education and looks. Because she did not have a high educational foundation, she did not have the opportunity to work in any government department. However, to help ease her family's financial burden, she worked for a wage as a tailor (a job that was despised by

her younger brother Hasanain). Like other teenage girls who are thirsty for love, Nafīṣah met Salmān Jabīr (the son of a grocer whom she often visits). But after being deceived by false love, she was finally willing to give up her dignity. After realising that she was only being played by Salman, she has mental stress. With her poor looks and her lost dignity, her future grew darker. A girl who is no longer pure like her, can no longer be accepted by society. The urgent situation finally forced Nafīṣah to sell her dignity as a prostitute without her family's knowledge. But in the end, the secret was also revealed after she was arrested by the authorities in a raid. At the height of the mental crisis she experienced, she chose to commit suicide by throwing himself into the Nile as a solution to the suffering.

Poverty, as depicted by Najīb Mahfūz in "*Bidāyah wa Nihāyah*," also leads to the formation of a significant social gap within a society. The poverty that permeates the life of the late Kamāl cAlī's family is the primary reason for Ahmad Yusrī Bey rejecting Hasanain's proposal to marry his daughter. In his view, accepting Hasanain (who is the brother of Hassan, a criminal) as his son-in-law would only tarnish his reputation. Additionally, Ahmad Yusrī Bey rejects the proposal on the grounds that their social status is not the same. He believes that the family of the late Kamāl cAlī has a lower social status than his own. Therefore, Hassanain is not qualified to be his son-in-law.

The character Hasanain in this novel is depicted by Najīb Mahfūz as an individualistic person who only cares about himself. If we look at his life story, this attitude is actually a result of the inner suffering he experienced in facing the fate of being a poor orphan. His internal monologue can illustrate his attitude:

... اننا نأكل بعضنا بعضا ينبغي أن نسر بتهريج حسن وعبثه ما دام يجيئنا كل شهر بفخذ خروف وينبغي أن نسر بأختنا الخياطة ما دامت تعد لنا لقمتنا الجافة وهذا الشاب المتذمر (حسنين) ينبغي أن يسر بانقطاعي عن التعليم ما دام سيتم تعليمه. يأكل بعضنا بعضا أي وحشية! أي حياة! لعلي لا أجد إلا عزاء واحدا وهو قوة أكبر منا جميعا تطحننا طحنا وتلتهمنا التهاما وأننا نصمد ونقاتل ...

He feels that the fate of poverty upon him makes his life miserable and considers it a phenomenon that cannot be eliminated. Furthermore, he cannot accept the reality of poverty and his suffering, often blaming his father who bequeathed it to them. At the same time, he constantly dreams of a life filled with comfort, luxury, and grandeur.

... حسنين يخاطب نفسه في فيلا احمد بك يسرى ... " ما أجمل أن املك هذه الفيلا وأنام فوق هذه الفتاة "

... كان كل عضو من جسدها الساخن يهتف بي قائلا : " سيدي هذه هي الحياة اذا ركبتها ركبت طبقة بأسرها

Through *Bidāyah wa Nihāyah*, Najīb Mahfūz also attempts to criticise the social institutions of that time that were perceived as unjust. One of his dissatisfactions is the clear existence of

a class gap in the standard of living that differentiates Egyptian society. His feelings are reflected in the conversation between Hassanain and his brother Husain (ibid):

يجب أن نكون جميعا أغنياء ..
 وإذا لم يكن هذا !؟
 إذن يجب أن نكون جميعا فقراء ..
 وإذا لم يكن هذا !؟
 فقال بحق :
 إذن نثور ونقتل ونسرق ..
 فابتسم حسين قائلا :
 هذا ما نفعله منذ آلاف السنين ..

Overall, *Bidāyah wa Nihāyah* is not just a story that depicts the struggle of a poor family on the outskirts of Cairo to sustain their lives, but more than that, it is a novel that successfully records and highlights the issues and suffering of the lower-class society in Egypt. Furthermore, Najīb Mahfūz attempts to make the audience reflect on the fact that poverty can lead to even worse problems. Hassan gets trapped in gangsterism and drugs, Nafisah turns to prostitution, and Hassanain faces serious mental issues. All of these events in *Bidāyah wa Nihāyah* stem from the poverty that suffocates their lives.

The issue of poverty in *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan*

For Malaysian novelist Shahnnon Ahmad, the issue of poverty in the lives of the lower-class community is a central theme in his writing, starting with his first novel, *Rentong*. Since the publication of that novel, his subsequent works have consistently addressed this issue. According to the scholar David J. Banks, Shahnnon genuinely wanted to express his feelings about the poverty of rural communities who lacked land and were in a state of economic decline through his novels (Ramli Isin. 1997). This view is shared by other scholars, such as Sohaimi Abdul Aziz (1992), who believes that in the 1960s and 70s, Shahnnon was truly obsessed with the poverty of his fellow villagers. Shahnnon's best work, *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan*, followed by other novels like *Seluang Menodak Baung*, is a prime example of this focus. These works, produced in the 1960s and 70s, are an accurate reflection of the poverty faced by rural Malay communities during that era.

According to a socio-economic study conducted in 1967 and 1968, over 65.7% of Malays worked in agriculture with an average per capita income of only three hundred and ninety-five Malaysian ringgit. This income was the lowest compared to other ethnic groups in Malaysia. In the 1960 census, two-thirds of farmers had no land, and only twenty percent of farmers owned their own paddy fields. Those who did own land had relatively small plots. According to the Second Malaysia Plan report (1971-1975), almost all paddy fields were owned by Malays, but most of them could be considered as tenants (A. Wahab Ali. 1989).

In conclusion, it can be said that the majority of rural Malays in the 1960s and 1970s were primarily farmers who were poor, had low incomes, and were economically backward. The lack of opportunities for children in these villages to receive a proper education made their situation even worse. Without proper education, efforts to raise awareness and help them break free from these problems became increasingly difficult.

Understanding this reality, *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan*, the third novel by Shahnnon Ahmad, was born. As he stated, "I took three months to complete *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan*. In the process, one issue could not be removed from my mind. That issue is poverty" (1991). While *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan* is set in the small and remote village of Banggul Derdap, in reality, it depicts the conditions of all villages in Malaysia, especially those where paddy fields were the main source of income. As a writer from a rural background, Shahnnon was able to capture the essence of this issue. In fact, Banggul Derdap is his birthplace and where he grew up. It is no surprise that, according to M. Yusof Hassan (1995, XXVII), *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan* is considered a successful work that addresses the issue of poverty in the narrative with the author's precision in questioning poverty (aided by his excellent writing techniques). This is because it portrays the actual life experiences of his early youth.

The story in *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan* revolves around the hardships faced by a farming family in a village named Banggul Derdap. Lahuma, the head of a family consisting of seven children and his wife, Jeha, relies on a fourteen-acre rice field to sustain their lives. Engaging in traditional paddy farming, coupled with limited inherited land, their life can only be described as barely sufficient to make ends meet (Shahnnon. 1966).

After Lahuma's death due to a *nibung* thorn prick, this already poor family faced additional problems. Lahuma, who had inherited poverty from his father, also passed it on to his family. His death meant the loss of the main labour force responsible for cultivating their rice fields. The task of heading the family then fell to Jeha. However, Jeha, experiencing emotional trauma following her husband's death, was unable to hold it together for long. Before the harvest season arrived, she ultimately went mad.

With Lahuma and Jeha absent, the responsibility for leading the family was taken up by Sanah, their eldest child. Sanah, still young, had to shoulder this heavy burden with the assistance of his siblings. They had to contend with all sorts of natural disasters threatening their rice fields. It began with crabs attacking the rice plants, pinching the stalks and felling them (1966). Later, they had to deal with heavy and dirty floodwaters, often carrying debris and logs that could land on the rice plants, crushing and destroying them (1966). As the rice neared maturity, they also had to face flocks of sparrows eager to share in the harvest (1966). After enduring all these natural disasters, the rice yield was undoubtedly meagre. Furthermore, the labour force was inexperienced and physically immature.

What Shahnnon depicts here is the real-life struggle of farmers, particularly in facing natural threats. Several notable aspects in this portrayal include the passive nature of traditional farmers who often resign themselves to fate and divine will. This can be seen through the recurring phrase, "Life and death, hardship and ease, are in the hands of God.

Held by Allah *azzawajalla*." This phrase suggests that human beings need not make efforts as their sustenance is already determined by Allah.

While accepting the decree of Allah is a quality encouraged in Islam, rigidly adhering to such a belief without sincere efforts to improve oneself can lead to undesirable consequences. In fact, Islam encourages its followers to be progressive and successful in life.

Another aspect is the tendency of these farmers to neglect the education of their children. In the case of a farmer like Lahuma, the rationale may be that his children's labour is more urgently needed to help with farm work. For a traditional, impoverished farmer like Lahuma, it appears that he prioritises his rice field over educating his child. This decision is driven by the pressure of his family's poverty. He believes that increasing the labour force in the field will alleviate his workload and enhance productivity. The conclusion here is that poverty is the root cause of their failure to educate their children. Meanwhile, education should be a catalyst for improving their social status.

Comparison between *Bidāyah Wa An-Nihāyah* And *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan*

One interesting point to discuss regarding both of these novelists is the similarities that exist between *Bidāyah wa an-Nihāyah* and *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan*. Although both novels are produced in two different countries and time periods, they share several similarities. These novels are seen not only to present the same theme but also have almost similar plot developments.

The tragedy of death is the cause of the beginning of problems in both stories, and tragedy also marks their endings. The death of Ahmad Kamal as the head of the family opens a new chapter in the lives of Ummu Hasanain and her children. Everything changes after this death. The same applies to the death of Lahuma in *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan*. The turning point in the lives of Jeha, who becomes a widow, and her children begins after this death. The suffering and hardships of life as members of society facing poverty are felt by these single mothers as a result of the departure of their husbands.

Tragedy also colours the ending of the stories of both families. Death is the answer to the culmination of the problems faced by Hasanain and Nafisah in *Bidāyah wa Nihāyah*. Meanwhile, the incurable madness is the answer to Jeha's problems in *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan*. The deaths and madness that conclude both novels seem to convey the message that the struggle against poverty is not an easy one.

The issue of social class differences in society is also raised by both authors. In *Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, Najib creates the character of Ahmad Yousri Bey, a wealthy and high-status individual. Meanwhile, in *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan*, there is Tok Penghulu, a wealthy individual with a higher social status than the other villagers in Kampung Banggul Derdap. Both of these characters are seen not to contribute much to solving the problems

faced by both families. Instead, their rank and wealth are symbols that need to be flaunted. For example, Ahmad Yousri Bey, despite providing some assistance to Ummu Hasanain's family, he only does so due to the repeated pleas and requests from Hasanain. The help offered, such as finding a job for Husain, is only given as long as it does not inconvenience him. He is reluctant to allow his daughter to marry Hasanain because he believes Hasanain comes from a poor family that is not at the same level as his (Najīb Mahfūz 1949). His stance exposes his true nature.

Tok Penghulu, who should be an example and protector for the village residents, is seen as unable to fulfil the responsibilities that he should bear. If the rent charged for using his tractor is too high, the peasant community in Banggul Derdap could have enjoyed this convenience, which would have improved their paddy fields. Moreover, the incident leading to Lahuma's death, in which he was pierced by a *nibung* thorn, might not have happened.

The help provided by ploughing Jeha's field after Lahuma's death was not done out of goodwill but rather to show off in front of his subordinates. His effort to call the authorities to handle Jeha's madness is also seen as something he only did after he felt that Jeha was causing trouble and embarrassment. However, if he had called the authorities when Lahuma was suffering from his illness, there would have been a high chance of his recovery.

In summary, the comparison between *Bidāyah Wa An-Nihāyah* and *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan* reveals several similarities and differences, highlighting how both novels address the theme of poverty in distinct cultural and societal contexts.

Although they share some similarities as discussed earlier, it cannot be denied that there are certain differences between these two novels. Through reading and research, the researcher finds that the differences between them are influenced by specific factors. The primary factor influencing these differences is the different backgrounds or settings in which the two stories take place. The Kamal Ali family (in *Bidāyah wa Nihāyah*) lives near Shubra Road (on the outskirts of Cairo) and later moves to Misr Jadidah, which can still be considered part of the city of Cairo. Therefore, even though they are poor, their way of thinking and motivation to improve themselves is undoubtedly different from Lahuma's family, which lives in a rural and less developed village. Moreover, the limited facilities available to villagers are certainly not the same as what those living in the city enjoy. In terms of education, for example, Hussain and Hassanain have received adequate education due to their awareness of its importance. The availability of educational facilities is evident with the existence of a school not far from their home. On the other hand, Nafisah faces obstacles to education due to the mistaken perceptions of her parents and the general public. For them, girls do not need higher education (just knowing how to read and write is enough) because their role after marriage is to be a homemaker. For Lahuma, education is not essential due to his lack of awareness of its importance. Furthermore, with the school being quite far away, Lahuma is more inclined to stop his children's education. He believes that not going to school will help lighten his burden in the fields. In addition to education, from a social mobility perspective,

the Kamāl Ali family has a greater awareness of self-improvement. This may be influenced by their surroundings, which constantly push them to compete for opportunities enjoyed by the more affluent people around them. For Lahuma and his family, they are not inclined in that direction because the people around them all share the same fate, that is, rich in poverty. One interesting aspect to discuss when reading the stories of suffering and struggle of the poor in the writings of both authors is the background and plots in their novels. Shahnnon Ahmad, through his novels, predominantly uses the village as the setting of his stories related to poverty. This differs from Najīb Mahfūz, whose stories take place in the cities of Cairo and Alexandria, which can be considered urban locales. Although the novel *Bidāyah wa Nihāyah* is about poverty, the story unfolds around the city of Cairo.

The conclusion that can be drawn here is the role of the environment because the place where the writer lives actually plays an important role in influencing their writings. It is the environment in which they live that truly helps shape their work. Therefore, for Najīb Mahfūz, who was born, raised, and later lived in the city, the focus of his storytelling is naturally on urban society. Conversely, Shahnnon Ahmad, who was born and raised in a village, often writes stories related to rural life. However, after living in the city for some time, Shahnnon began writing about urban life as well (without neglecting stories about rural communities). Based on the discussion above, we can state that the social issues reflected in the novels of Najīb Mahfūz and Shahnnon Ahmad are clearly evident in both of the works chosen for this study. These issues are seen to have many similarities between them. Poverty is the main issue for the people of both countries who came from the third world before and after their independence.

Poverty, synonymous with third world society, became the most dominant issue in their writings. Moreover, other problems that arise can be said to stem from the factor of poverty that haunts the people of both countries who have just achieved independence from colonialism. The analysis by the researcher of the selected works found that both authors have successfully brought forth and highlighted these phenomena in their works. Poverty in the novel produced by Najīb Mahfūz is seen to more closely reflect the problems of the lower-class urban population. This is not surprising given his background, as he was born and lived in the city of Cairo. Meanwhile, for Shahnnon Ahmad, who was born and raised in a village, poverty in his novels is always associated with rural life. However, with his move to the city, Shahnnon found that people living there also cannot escape from facing the same problems, especially for those living in squatter settlements. This is evident in his other novel, "*Seluang Menodak Baung*." For a writer living in a particular environment, they are naturally more inclined to incorporate their experiences into their work.

From the analysis conducted, it is found that the issue of poverty can also lead to the emergence of other problems. The problem of moral decay, including issues like prostitution, is seen as a result of the hardships experienced by urban society. Examples of such cases can be observed in Nafisah from the novel *Bidāyah wa Nihāyah*. On the other hand, being deprived of educational opportunities is an effect of the poverty experienced by rural communities. This can be seen in Lahuma's children in *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan*, who do not attend school because they are called upon to help ease the burden of work in the fields.

Apart from moral decay and educational problems, poverty also brings side effects to social life. The existence of a class gap between communities is one of the side problems (effect of poverty) that both writers try to highlight. From the research done, the works of Najīb Mahfūz are seen to be more significant in talking about the class gap found in society. This may be due to external influences that affect his writing. The city life that he has lived since he was a child is seen as the main factor in the matter. Compared to Shahnnon who comes from a backward village, the wealth gap in urban society is certainly wider. That can be followed in the novel *Bidāyah wa Nihāyah* with the characters of Hasanain and Ahmad Yusrī Bey, a high government official. Hasanain, whose father died, lives in poverty. What's more, his father Kamāl cAlī during his lifetime was just an ordinary worker in a government department with a meagre salary who could not leave anything to inherit. Hasanain's wish to marry Yusrī Bey's daughter was simply rejected by him on the grounds of unequal status between the two parties. As a result, Hassanain was willing to let his sister commit suicide. Hassanain himself eventually committed suicide after feeling that his dignity and position as a high-ranking military officer had been damaged.

Research Findings

From the analysis conducted on the two selected novels, the researcher identified several noticeable similarities between them:

Both novels address poverty as the main theme. The storyline in both novels shares certain commonalities. Starting with the deaths of Kamāl Afandi cAlī and Lahuma, the lives of both families become entangled in challenges and obstacles. Although the lifestyle of Kamāl Afandi cAlī's family, living in Cairo, may differ from Lahuma's family in the village, when viewed from the perspective of poverty and suffering, they essentially share the same issues. In their efforts to sustain their lives, all family members are forced to join forces and contribute their efforts to secure their daily sustenance. The suffering caused by poverty also leads to other social problems.

Nafisah (daughter of Kamal Afandi cAlī) was trapped in the valley of prostitution caused by poverty. Jeha (Lahuma's wife) who became insane as a result of the suffering she experienced, was also a burden and a problem for the villagers.

Najīb Mahfūz and Shahnnon Ahmad conclude their novels without providing a clear resolution to the conflicts faced by both families. The closing technique employed by both authors symbolically portrays the severity of the issue of poverty, which evidently has no easy solution.

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