

Critique of Conventional Masculinity in Tawfiq Al- Hakim's

The Song of Death

This thesis is a critique of conventional masculinity in Tawfiq Al-Hakim's The Song of Death being based on gender studies. The research presents Hakim's challenge to the masculinity especially in Arabian Islamic culture that is guided by revengeful motive of mother. Tawfiq was born in 1898 in a wealthy Egyptian family of Alexandria. He studied law in Cairo, graduated in 1925 and before died in 1987 translated and written so many articles, plays and books. Ahl al-Kahf, One Thousand and One Nights and ISIS are his exemplary plays. Being woman, Asakir is guided by the patriarchal motif of revenge i.e. eye for an eye. It is Asakir, a widow who ironically thinks that version of masculinity has to be preserved by her in order to do so she makes her son Ilwan take revenge of her father's murderer but in vain. Ilwan is reflected as one of the modernists guided by social norms, decorum's and laws. In order to critique the conventional masculinity the research makes use of theoretical insights of Judith Butler, Judith Halberstam and some more ideas of Glover and Cora Kaplan. Finally the research concludes that Hakim is critical of conventional masculinity. The mother is presented as a strong advocator of masculinity but her failure at the end of the play ironically displays the implacability of gender based roles in modern society like that of Cairo.

Key Words: Gender, Masculinity, Tradition, Islamic culture, conflict, gender role.

This project dealing with the social issue like status-quo, focuses on Tawfiq al Hakim's *The Song of Death* which challenges the conventional masculinity.

Asakir and Mabruka are the resemblance of older generation whereas Ilwan mirrors the younger generation. They have different mindsets which causes the contradiction

in their respective beliefs. Older generation people like Asakir and Mabruka want to stick with the Egyptian norms and values but younger generation like Ilwan tends to shift from tradition. This research explores the failure of conventional masculinity through the study of Asakir and her motive of taking revenge of her husband's murder. This project shows the ongoing conflict between two ideologies. One is of older generation of people who want to remain and preserve old Egyptian tradition and other is new generation of people who believe that the Egyptian rural society can do better in dealing with different problems of people of rural Egypt with help of modern way of thinking. The present study seeks to analyze the characters tending them to bring into the frame of critical analysis that represents the tendency to the then Egyptian rural Society.

Although influenced by European playwrights like Ibsen and Shaw, Tawfiq al Hakim incorporated his Egyptian perspective in plays: "psychological issues such as personal identity, relations and attitudes towards the West, the conflict between the spiritual East and the material west" (23). In the book, *An Introduction to Arabic Literature*, the author Roger Allen wrote: "The performances were not a success; for one thing, audiences seemed unimpressed by a performance in which the action on stage was so limited in comparison with the more popular types of drama" (24). It was problematic in the realm of both production and reception that led Tawfiq al Hakim to use some of his play-prefaces in order to develop the notion of his plays as 'theater des idées', works for reading rather than performance.

Gender role is a social role encompassing a range of behaviors and attitudes that are generally considered acceptable, appropriate or desirable for people based on their actual sex. Gender roles are usually centered on conceptions of femininity and masculinity. The *Song of Death* is set on a domestic context. The

play is a story of revenge and a generational conflict between a mother and her son in the Egyptian family. Asakir, the main female character of the play wants her son Ilwan to revenge his father's murderer. But her son strongly refuses her. The disappointment leads the mother up to the stage of killing of her own son. Asakir orders her nephew, Simeida to kill her son, Ilwan. The Tahawi had killed Asakir's husband for killing his father. It means that the revenge is set as a culture from the generation to generation between the two families, Azizes and Tahawi. The term of revenge comes to Ilwan but he wants to stop this revenge culture and wants peace, prosperity and harmony between the people. The generational conflict seems apparent here in understanding level of mother and son. There is not any sufficient proof that the Tahawi had killed Ilwan's father. The mother just blames Tahawi as her husband was suspected the murderer of his father. The mother believes that he chopped his body up and put it in the saddlebag his head on one side and the rest of his chopped body on the other side. The Tahawi placed the saddlebag on the back of its owner's donkey. The donkey carried his master's mutilated body back to his house. Afraid that the killer would kill her son, too, the mother sent her son, Ilwan to Cairo. In Cairo, he was joined to apprentice in a butcher shop, so that he could become skilled at using the knife but Ilwan left the shop to become a student in Al-Azhar University. Seventeen years later, Ilwan returns to the village and to his mother who has been waiting for his return to revenge from his father's killer. Ilwan comes back to his birthplace with a different agenda. He seeks to make better the living conditions of his fellow villagers. In conversation with his mother he says, "It's most important for me to meet the villagers. Haven't I just told you that I have come to do something truly great" (286). The line of his speech also proves that Ilwan wants modern life in his village as like he spent his seventeen years in the

city, Cairo. But at the same time his mother is taking something great in different way, for her something great is to take revenge of her husband's murderer. He finds his mother in a discourse she could not care less to understand. Her dream of her son avenging his father's killing seems to fleet away when her son rejects her proposal. Al-Hakim draws the universal value of generational conflict and the conflict between the generations through recycling the Egyptian narratives.

The protagonist of the play, Ilwan represents the modern and educated man on the other his mother, Cousin and his Aunt represent the traditional and uneducated people. They give the important value to the revenge and familial dignity but Ilwan gives value to the modern way of life, humanity and peace, is the main contradiction between them. Every society has the feature of contradiction between two generations in different levels.

In the play *The Song of Death*, the playwright beautifully presents the critique of masculinity through the picture of Asakir who eventually fails in taking revenge of her husband's murder. The mother is firm to take revenge of her husband's murderer as she manipulates her son Ilwan frequently but who rejects his own traditional cultures, stands for modern progress, for enlightenment and a social order. He has modern view towards the society and disagrees with the blood feud in which the responsibility for justice is transferred from the family to the civic community. But on other hand Asakir and Simeida brought up in the vendetta tradition who simply cannot envisage any other way of life. For them, family honor is the supreme value, the value of shame culture loss of respect in the village and family is the ultimate misfortune. This is a 'Mediterranean' *Old Testament* and middle-eastern concept of 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth' is deeply rooted in them. Asakir has waited for years for the one murderous action that will restore

honor and avenge of her husband's death. She had planned for Ilwan to become a butcher in Cairo and so learn better how to kill effectively, but Ilwan, brought up and educated in Cairo has turned to religion and law. Ilwan, as the son escaped the village, believes in brotherhood, not vengeance. This tells us a lot: that the intellectual life of Egypt, Cairo was being affected by political movements, such as feminism and socialism, also taking place in Europe. The play is built upon a set of opposition contained in the attempted evolution from tribal to civic life. Asakir, blind to anything but her unyielding passion for vengeance, destroys her own family, (Ilwan and Simeida), more effectively than her supposed enemy, Suweilam Tahawi ever could have done. She has wiped out the new generation of menfolk so the family line has come to an end. She is 'tragic' rather than hateful because she is true to the logic of the tradition that created her. Her seventeen years of constancy to her one project vengeance is heroic over many years suffering humiliation from her enemies in order secretly to raise her avenger, Tahawi, safely in exile. Because of Asakir's one sided notion of taking avenge against suspected murderer of her husband, Simeida's future is entirely ruined. He is certain to be punished, perhaps executed, for the murder. So that, he is an example of a lost generation denied the chance of the enlightenment of the new ideology of the state and the city.

Ilwan, the central character of the drama is pioneer of shift or transformation and it is he, who brings unprecedented conflict. Ilwan becomes so much frustrated with the traditional values of his village and prepares himself to go his village even he finds people hanging in the past and he dislikes them too. Plot of the play tells us that he becomes irritated with his mother. He seems irritated with his mother but in depth his irritation is not with her rather it is with the traditional values of rural Egyptian the then society, which he thinks is the barrier to Egyptian advancement.

Ilwan hopes a lot for changes and transformation of Egyptian rural society and to establish new societal order based on social justice and transformation. His mother has not seen him for many years and is now very much eager to see him in her village. She wants to show the society that her son is still alive and he is ready to avenge his father's murderer which she thinks reestablish her family's honor. Ilwan seems to be in irritation; therefore he seems in dark and melancholic mood. Ilwan was forced to leave his home and forced to return to the Cairo after rejecting the proposal of his mother. Ilwan always hopes for the change and newness within his mother and society around him, but it is not easy to discard the traditional values, people have followed from unknown time. This project claims that the clash between mother and son is because of the setting they grown up. The mother lives in a rural village and her son lives in city. Because of the rural setting mother adopts the traditional beliefs, on the other son, Ilwan brings modern concept of enlightenment and a social order, justice and a wholly new way of life from the modern Cairo. So, this play is not the clash of Good vs. Evil, or even right vs. wrong, but of the new World vs. the old. Ilwan does not like traditional rules, values and ideas therefore; he wants to change the status quo of the society. He regards all the ideas represented by adult generations are local. Younger generation being university graduates, have been influenced with the consciousness of the time and globalization in every sector. Ilwan longs for change as per the pace of time, but he finds out that older generations are on static position by dead values and attitudes.

The wish and desire of newness in social structure and way of life of Ilwan is rampant in the play. Ilwan arrives at his village with his vision of upgraded mentality but he finds himself alone because of his family's pressure to avenge his father's murderer. He is the representative of matured mind but his mother is the

representative of older norms and values, she wants him to follow her project and involve in honor killing that masculinity believes. In its depth, we can assume that their dual is not physical one rather it is the dual between the old and the new attitudes, norms, values, social structures and mechanism.

In the same vein, the desire of change mingles Ilwan with different bizarre experiences. Ilwan is of the opinion that people and society should run as per the change of time. In the process of implementing his new vision of social order and justice he himself gets victimized by traditional thought of vendetta culture. Every society has the clash between two generations. There is the vast difference in the way of thinking, the use of language, fashion, beliefs and even in Arts and Literature between old generation and new generation. So, we can say that the issue of generational conflict is universal. The same issue and the theme has been shown in the play, *The Song of Death*. The play writer gives modern role to Ilwan and gives traditional role to Asakir, and Mabruka in the play. What the strong beliefs that make the main character who rejects his mother's wish and in the same way what makes the mother that she declares her own son as a coward and enemy of his own family and orders to kill him? The primary objective of the study is to show the generational conflict of the contemporary society of Egypt through the play, especially through the main characters of the play *The Song of Death*. How and why they have the generational conflict is the main purpose of the study. But it also focuses on the ideological beliefs of the characters they live in. Although this study makes significant use of concepts developed in modernist scholarship, it does not offer a comprehensive analysis of modernist literary theory. *The Song of Death* is considered as one of the prominent works of Tawfiq al-Hakim. It has received various criticisms from different angles since its publication. Regarding this play,

Jill Leahy on his essay, "The High Cost of Family Honor" comments; "The Play highlights the universal themes: family conflict and revenge versus forgiveness. The work explores the idea of revenge killing as a way to restore a family's honor-a mother expects to avenge his father's murderer. While honor killings must often occur in paternalistic societies, against women who have 'shame' their family by breaking a prescribed code of sexual behavior, or religion. (127) In this way, Jill Leahy takes this play as a family conflict on the issue of revenge. He also gives the concern on the issue of honor killing to restore the family's honor. He thinks that the honor killings are not unique in paternalistic societies. He warns the modern audiences that not to take the honor killing is a Muslim, Arab or even Eastern culture.

Another critic, Leke Ogunfeyimi focusing on the protagonist of the play, Ilwan, asserts: "There is discord between two families in Upper Egypt which claims lives of the most successful figures in both families by assassination. It tells of the challenges a young scholar, Ilwan, who is not happy with him. She has kept the same knife with which his father is killed for him" (65). Ilwan, who realizes the implication of these succeeding assassinations, decides to take the road not taken in both families to make his people live together as a people.

Ilwan being the protagonist of the play wants to end the discomfort created between the families. Leke Ogunfeyimi gives his concern to the play, *The Song of Death* for its family's discord and the challenges for the protagonist of the play who wants to end this discord. By taking the character of Ilwan, the critic tries to justify his concern the conflict of a mother and son on the name of family's discord. Further, it is better to cite another critic Brian Johnston who puts remarkable line of the main character, Asakir with Simeida from the play, "Simeida, are you a

man?"(417) on his consideration reviews on the character of Asakir; "This is Asakir's trump card. Her definition of a man is tribal and it is in conflict with the universal brotherhood of Ilwan. Christianity and early Judaism is a conversion religion which welcomes all races and so embraces all humanity. Therefore, it cannot be limited to the tribe or the village, race or nation"(3). Brian Johnston compares the clash between Asakir and Ilwan view of 'man' with the Pan- Arabism vs. nationalism. They have the clash between tribalism and civic law.

Masculinity is the set of social practices and cultural representations associated with being a man. The feminist critique of masculinity as that against which women are defined as the other has long history but writing on masculinities grew enormously from the 1980s onwards. In the words of one contributor, "it seems as if every man and his dog is writing a book on masculinities". In the literature on masculinities evaluations of masculinity and explanations of the links between masculinity and those people defined as men vary according to theoretical perspective. For example, in accounts drawing on the natural science, masculinity is the result of physiological factors, such as hormones or chromosomes, Goldberg for example identifies the neuro-endocrine system of the nervous system with the hormone system as the biological basis of masculinity. Such essentialism is also characteristic of populist celebratory writing about masculinity, in which men are urged to reinvigorate their natural masculinity.

Robert Bly for example sees masculinity as being damaged by the conditions of modern society, and prescribes a remedy in the form of men only retreats and bonding rituals. In contrast, from the more critical, academic perspective of the social sciences, masculinities are understood as a form of power relation, both among men themselves and between men and women. Masculinities are argued too arise from the

social contexts in which men live for example from their positions in the various institutions and social organizations of their society and or in the context of the socially available discourses about gender.

This research has tried to unravel the backlashes of conventional masculinity Tawfiq al Hakim's *The Song of Death*. Ilwan the main character of the play shows different ideas and struggles through the course of the play for changes. Ilwan challenges the convention of rural Egypt but has to sacrifice his life for his resistance to the tradition. Thus, Hakim has presented Ilwan as an agent who advocates the ideology of the playwright himself. He questions everything of Egyptian traditions including social norms and values. He does not believe his mother rather he begs proof of his father's murderer so that he can go to the court against case. The first part of this research makes introduction of the play, issues, problems, hypothesis, literature review and the introduction of the theory. The second chapter of this research deals with the event of *The Song of Death* from the perspective of the gender studies as a theoretical tool. The third chapter of the research concludes the major issues that have been raised during the reading of the text from the perspective of gender studies.

This research is the critique of feminine masculinity. Through the analytical tool of masculinity and gender role the present research unearths how the two different and successive generation are in continuous turmoil while transforming from agrarian life to the urban life in the mid twentieth century Egypt. It is conflict between old values, norms, culture and new ones. However, in the play in period of this transition Ilwan, the representative of young generation tries to change and accept new values of modern Egypt but becomes the victim of his own new opinion towards the modern society. The old generation cannot accept his concept of society

in the modern age. Outside of the village, the masculinity affects the thinking of the people but in the rural village people have deep rooted beliefs on tradition. So that, the protagonist of the play, Ilwan has to sacrifice his life on the name of tradition and culture of revenge. Egyptian society in the mid-twentieth century was in a big flow of cultural conflict. There was conflict and mental tension within oneself whether should remain with Egyptian old beliefs, values and norms or should change thinking of gender. People had a big dilemma whether to remain with their religious limitation or go with modern social justice and technology invented by western society. On the one hand, there was old generation of people who always wanted to remain with their own religious, cultural, social, political and familial values and on the other, there was new generation of people who always sought newness and attracted towards the invention of modern way of thinking as well as the new beliefs of westernization and modernization. Therefore, it is obvious that we can see big conflict between these two generations on beliefs.

The adaptation of newer development has changed the urban Egyptian society especially Cairo. The standard of life as well as social structure along with thinking pattern of people has been drastically changed. The improvement in educational sector and socio-cultural spectrum have the people towards new concepts of social development; that is the real product of the modernization and westernization. Agriculture had to be done in changed way. Traditional way of farming had to be displaced by new technologies and land reform programs had to be introduced.

Gender roles play an important role in society whether it is for good or for bad. These roles have been placed in society since the beginning of time. The term gender

is socially created and it therefore categorizes men from women. How is gender defined, and what makes it different from the term sex?

Sex refers to the biological characteristics that distinguish women and men: sex chromosomes, reproductive organs, sex-specific hormones, and physical characteristics... Gender... refers to the social and cultural characteristics that distinguish women from men. It is completely social construct where biological difference has no any concern. (82).

Gender role is grounded in the supposition that individuals socially identified as males and females tend to occupy different ascribed roles within social structures and tend to be judged against divergent expectations for how they ought to behave.

The terms sex and gender are sometimes used interchangeably, although there is a clear distinction between the two. Gender is known to be socially constructed and is learned through social interactions and through the influences of the people around us. Gender roles are therefore sets of behaviors that are considered appropriate or acceptable for a man and for a woman, exclusively. These roles are socially created as well. For example, men play football and women play volleyball. Gender neutrality on the other hand is a term that is trying to push out these socially constructed roles. “Gender neutral language and gender inclusive language aims to eliminate (or neutralize) reference to gender in terms that describe people” (2015)

In most of the cases Urban people are shown themselves as modernist whereas rural people as traditionalist. Even within the people themselves there we can find a kind of quarrel whether they should call themselves as modernist or traditionalist because those new urban people sometimes identify themselves as urban people and some other time they get nearer to rural values. The discrepancies

with new values and old values were seen in Egyptian Societies in the mid twentieth century.

Hakim shows a kind of quarrel or disagreement explicitly in his play *The Song of Death*. In the play, Askir wants to continue the tradition of revenge which she thinks is a very honorable for her family. So, she says to his son, "Of course you have not come here for food or drink. You have come to eat of his flesh and drink of his blood" (57). Here in her speech we can easily know that she wants to continue the tradition of revenge which is very easy and safe because of the culture of revenge they had been practicing for a long time. It is the reason that she directly tries to convince her son to revenge his father's murderer. But the son asks for the proofs of his father's murderer, says to his mother,

I know you have told me that. You have told that name to me over and over again, whenever you came to visit me in Cairo. I was too young to think then or to argue. But now my reason needs to be satisfied. What's the evidence? Have you ever tried to go beyond perusing me? I don't think this is the job of mine. Did the police ever look into the crime? (83).

In surface it seems that mother is the protagonist of the play who is guided by the male motifs. Asakir has adopted the male decorum fully in her life. The above mentioned words of Ilwan are very strong enough to show his clash with the older generation and their thought of revenge. He strongly believes in the social justice. Ilwan complains to his mother that from the times past he was compelled to listen and get ready for the revenge with the one who killed his father but Ilwan is firm that the action of poetic justice should be taken by police. In the play, the kind of conflict between old generation and new one is set between mother and son as the

representative of the two different generations but it is Ilwan, who seeks the total change and hopes to lead other people towards modernism. In this reference he says, "It's important for me to meet the villagers. Haven't I just told you that I have come to do something truly great?"(286) Mother, Asakir is always seen faithful to Egyptian Culture and her tradition, and she is unwilling to accept the reality, but younger generations specially her son, Ilwan is attracted towards newer way of life and he has shown disregard to the old Egyptian traditional values. The theme of the generation gap is patterned out impressively in the play, *The Song of Death*.

German writer Ernst Jünger recounts the story of how he escaped being captured, shooting enemy soldiers as he ran, even though his own body was riddled with bullets. Narrated with the surgical precision that was to become his trademark as a novelist continuous loss of blood gave me the lightness and airiness of intoxication he notes as he describes dodging and then returning enemy fire Jünger's recollections come to a halt in a military hospital where the tone of his writing abruptly and rather unpredictably changes (312). Declaring himself to be no misogynist, the author cannot help but confess that:

I was always irritated by the presence of women every time that the fate of battle threw me into the bed of a hospital ward. One sank, after the manly and purposeful activities of the war, into a vague atmosphere of warmth. Only the 'clear objectivity of the Catholic nursing sisterhoods 'offers an ambience that is at all 'congenial to soldiering', a blessed relief from the usual oppressively maternal regime (314).

To be sure, women do have their charms. Earlier in the narrative, when a 'friendly' seventeen-year-old, alone in her cottage, serves him a peasant supper Jünger is

immediately struck by the 'ease of manner that one finds so often in France among quite simple girls' (66). For a moment he almost seems to forget that he is a member of an army of occupation and that he is enjoying his enemy's hospitality. But in the rather less idyllic setting of the military hospital a line must be drawn in the sand that will keep femininity at bay, despite the fact that these nurses are enlisted Germans sent to provide him with the care he so desperately needs.

The two generations differ vastly in their expression of the things and ideas. Younger people like Ilwan expresses whatever they think and feel in a different way than older generation of people like Asakir and Mabruka do. New generations think and act different from old ones. They behave differently, express things differently and use to do things differently which is directly against to the behavior of older generations. As in the play *Ilwan*, the leading character is in direct contradiction to Asakir and Mabruka. Old people like Asakir thinks for culture and family background; and younger people like Ilwan use to think for modern norms and values and mental sharpness. Judith Butler in her "Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex" makes a claim,

The misapprehension about gender performativity is this: that gender is a choice, or that gender is a role, or that gender is a construction that one puts on, as one puts on clothes in the morning, that there is a 'one' who is prior to this gender, a one who goes to the wardrobe of gender and decides with deliberation which gender it will be today.

(23)

Butler is of the view that the society has misconception regarding the gender. The phrase 'gender is social construct' itself is biased. There shouldn't be one who makes other wear the gendered cloths cut in his own fits. No gender is prior or

inferior to other. As a result, “gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which “sexed nature” or “a natural sex” is produced and established as “prediscursive,” prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts” (24). Ilwan rejects his mother’s familial law of tradition in the following conversation with his mother:

ILWAN: [raises his head and takes courage] Mother, I will not kill.

ASAKIR: [tries to conceal her distress] What do I hear? ILWAN: I will not kill. ASAKIR: [in a rough voice] The blood of your father!

ILWAN: It’s you yourselves who left it split and wasted by hiding the crime from the government. It’s up to the authorities to punish.

(339)

The aforementioned conversation is the crucial illustration of how Asakir who is guided by male notions of revenge. Thinking in the pattern of male she is firm to make his son take revenge but that goes in vain as Ilwan does not only reject his mother’s plan rather he blames his own mother for concealing the case from government authorities. As a modern man he wants the punishment from legal court. So, he dislikes the culture of blood feud.

Carlyle’s fantasy of male-bonding is not without its problems, however. The powerful communal feelings passing between men can become charged with desire and, at St Edmundsbury, it is the task of the fatherly abbot to set an example, to hold their psychic energies in check, and to sublimate any last trace of homoeroticism into productive work. The nobility of the Carlylean male ideal is compromised by a deep interior division between the need for mastery or control that will create order out of chaos and a fear of the potentially untamable flows of energy within. One can see this as a splitting of gendered identity, in which the instability of what for the

early Victorians constituted ‘maleness’, the potent physical powers that were thought to be of the basic essence of man, begins to sabotage the ‘manliness’ or self-discipline with which an individual conducts himself. For Carlyle,

Maleness, potentially progressive, is also innately diseased. The very spring of male identity is also potentially the source of its destruction as dissolution. Repelled by the male body, by male sexuality, by what he sees as the miasmatic swamp of the male psyche, Carlyle imagines the interior of the male as polluted, unclean. Masculine energy may power the energy of industrial society but it may also disrupt it in a power surge, an overflow of the diseased fluid interior in a flood that would dissolve the ego boundaries of the male self and the patriarchal bounds of the social system. (24)

Herbert Sussman’s analysis of the phantasmatic construction of masculinity in texts like *Past and Present* brings out not only Carlyle’s immensely fertile strategy of yoking together materials drawn from different historical times, so that the warrior may be reborn (or re-branded) as the ‘Captain of Industry’; but it also reveals the extreme precariousness of his restless imaginings, a masculine ideal that is in constant danger of collapsing under the weight of its own contradictions. Unlike the rival images of the male self-held out for inspection in Boswell’s journals, this is not so much a conflict between competing masculinities as a strong bid to establish a dominant form of masculinity for the industrial era that pays the price of its own exclusions.

One possible interpretation is that the woman in masquerade wishes for masculinity in order to engage in public discourse with men and as a man as part of a male homoerotic exchange. And precisely because that male homoerotic exchange

would signify castration, she fears the same retribution that motivates the “defenses” of the homosexual man. Indeed, perhaps femininity as masquerade is meant to deflect from male homosexuality—that being the erotic presupposition of hegemonic discourse, the “homo-sexuality” that Irizarry suggests. In any case, Riviere would have us consider that such women sustain masculine identifications not to occupy a position in a sexual exchange, but, rather, to pursue a rivalry that has no sexual object or, at least, that has none that she will name.

Riviere’s text offers a way to reconsider the question: What is masked by masquerade? In a key passage that marks a departure from the restricted analysis demarcated by Jones’s classificatory system, she suggests that “masquerade” is more than the characteristic of an “intermediate type,” that it is central to all womanliness:

Furthermore Asakir is very distressed about her son as she does not convince him in her project of revenge. At the same time she is able to convince her Nephew, Simeida to kill her own son who finally becomes their enemy. In this context it is very applicable to bring a short conversation between Asakir and Simeida:

ASAKIR: Our hope is now in you, Simeida. SIMEIDA: A nephew can stand in for a son. ASAKIR: But in this case the son’s alive. It’s his duty before anybody else to avenge the shedding of his father’s blood. He’s alive... SIMEIDA: Just try to tell yourself that he’s dead. ASAKIR: I wish he had really died, drowned in the sluice of the waterwheel when he was a child... I wish he had truly died. We would have been able to live honorably then, and not be wearing our garments of shame. But he is alive, and it has been broadcast in the

market places and in the whole neighborhood that he is alive. Oh, the shame. The ignominy. Disgrace! (404)

As traditional people always try to convince young generation of people in traditional values and beliefs Asakir also tried her son to bring him in her way of thinking but she is failed in her mission. So, she laments about her son's birth and curses to his birth. At that time her nephew comes to support her and said he can also stand as her son in her favour. In this way Simeida seems as a lost young generation who becomes the victim of traditional belief and ruins his brother's and his own life in a vain.

In the play too we can easily notice the cultural transition as Ilwan wants to adopt the urban culture which he has been internalizing for a long period of time in Cairo. We also see the dilemma in Simeida too; he is in the confused situation whether to support Ilwan or to support his Aunt's view of familial dignity. But unfortunately takes the side his Aunt and kills Ilwan who is the powerful advocator of social order and law. Here Ilwan who never surrenders against the asocial values and belief but he sacrifices his life. It seems in the play that the tradition is winning over the modern beliefs but in fact Ilwan rejects the culture of revenge and stops the dead tradition of his society that's why it is a victory even though he loses his life.

The refusal to postulate a femininity that is prior to mimicry and the mask is taken up by Stephen Heath in "Joan Riviere and the Masquerade" as evidence for the notion that "authentic womanliness is such a mimicry, *is* the masquerade." Relying on the postulated characterization of libido as masculine, Heath concludes that femininity is the denial of that libido, the dissimulation of a fundamental masculinity. The very notion is very much applicable to mother, Asakir. Her motive of taking revenge using her own son is very much approval of conventional

masculinity. She wants to take revenge even at the cost of life. Conventional masculinity believes that male and female are social construct. They have to act accordance with the social values offered upon them. But here in the play, Asakir is mirrored as the real daughter of a traditional father and his ideals.

It is very important to bring the lines here from the play to prove, how the old generation of people are static and blind in their traditional beliefs affirming gender role, Asakir proves this in the following conversation:

ASAKIR: You are talking the language of books. You can keep that for later. For when you have your evening talk with Sheikh Muhammad Isnawi. He can understand it- I can't. As for the present, there's something more important that we have to do, Ilwan.

ILWAN: [Shocked] What is it that's more important? ASAKIR: No. Don't go to the mosque to pray tonight. I will fetch water from the water pot for you to prepare for your prayers. Put on the cloak and help me sharpen the knife. (318)

This shows the concretize thought pattern of Asakir filled with masculine dumps. The yoking of words like 'prayer' and 'sharpen the knife' in a single sentence is very thundering. How one can think of meditation amidst of war scene? Such thoughts of mother are all loopholes that are fasten to strengthen the conventional masculinity but that ultimately goes in vein. In the conversation Asakir, the mother of Ilwan stands for traditional religion, Islam but her son she thinks is against her religion. So, she says that her son talks about his book but in reality it doesn't work. She tells him to follow her traditional religion in which ritual washing before prayer is obligatory. She is static in the level that she does not believe on her son's study and believes that her son is only speaking the language of the books. Her son Ilwan,

changes his traditional religion and becomes Sheikh which the mother never takes positively.

There is conflict between older generation and new generation because old people are attached to their culture, tradition and their roots. This orthodoxy has its own system that cannot be changed overnight. Culture is a way of life and it changes as people change with time. It takes a long span of time to change these believes. Generation gap, educational quality, modern inventions are some of the factors which bring the dispute within the people clinging to tradition. In the play, Ilwan challenges the conventional social concepts of rural Egyptian society by not following the tradition of taking revenge though he is victimized because of rejecting the tradition. To sum up, though there is conflict between traditional and modern way of thinking. Among different people change occurs at the passage of time. There is the complete end of tradition of revenge between the two families, the Azizes and the Tahawis. In addition, young people of the society also to some extent assimilate themselves with old and useless tradition but get their life ruined at the end. In the play when Simeida being the people of young generation following the order of traditional people like Asakir kills his brother, Ilwan and ruins his life as a murderer. Here again changes occur with the passage of time due to assimilation of tradition. Obviously, the process of modernization tend to break down the remaining vestiges of social functions. Deep-rooted attitude of Egyptian people regarding their Egyptian tradition gets completely changed at the end.

The play, *The Song of Death* by Tawfiq al-Hakim presents the critique of conventional masculinity via clash between mother and her son. The two generations have conflict, confusion and disparities that are created by time and space. It also depicts their hardships and struggles. The new generation having

modern way of thinking is highly affected by the traditional and conservative society. Attitudes of new generations are highly suppressed by the traditional Egyptian culture. All the new generations have the stories of sufferings, obstacles, hardships and tragic moments due to the traditionally biased society of rural Egypt so it is clear that gender biased convention cannot give justice to the empowerment, betterment and development in the traditional rural Egyptian society. And the generations are being victimized by the traditional norms and values. The people of new generation wish to implement the western way of freedom but the traditional Egyptian society looks them derogatorily and the people from the society treat them odd. Humankind is changeable and it changes according to time and space. Older generation of people are even in conflict with their mother at their young age and so to new generation of people are in conflict with them. There is certainly conflict between two different generations that represent different time span, and it is there in *The Song of Death*, which seems natural.

In the play, protagonist, Ilwan who hopes to lead other people of his generation ideologically to better way of life is in conflict with the people of his preceding generation like Asakir and Mabruka. He is dealing with a new kind of philosophy of life. He advocates it even for other people. He hopes to interrogate all the rural Egyptian Traditional Institutions, though it is of education, social, moral, ethical or of conceptual. Ilwan through the adaptation of convention masculinity in rural Egyptian society faces the challenge from culturally restricted tradition. In various aspects, Ilwan reflects the oppositions between convention and his rural Egyptian society. He thinks that his duty is to disintegrate Old Egyptian social values. So that he questions it repeatedly and thinks to dismantle it. Throughout the course of the play, he is in disparity with his mother and he puts new ideas in front

of his preceding generation. Ilwan, who wants to be a pioneer of new philosophy of life that is realistic aspect which questions everything that exists in the society? Older generation of people is attached with their tradition and they hang on it. But they see changes in their sons and lament over the loss of traditional values in them. They think that their Egyptian roots are in the verge of collapse. Moreover, Younger people like Ilwan follows and advocates newness in traditional Egyptian society. But being the part of rural traditional society, Asakir, blind to anything and her unyielding passion for vengeance, destroys her own family more effectively than her supposed enemy, Suweilam Tahawi, ever could have done. She has wiped out the new generation of menfolk so the family line has come to the end. She forces her cousin, Simeida to kill her own Son, Ilwan after being irritated by the refusal of her son to take revenge of her husband's murder. She has waited for years for the murderous action that will restore honor to the family and avenge her husband's death. She wishes Ilwan to be an avenger of family honour. But Ilwan, brought up and educated in Cairo, has turned to religion and law, in other words, from parochial to universal values, believes in brotherhood, not vengeance. He utterly fails to fathom his mother's traditional values. He misunderstands his own traditional culture, stands for modern progress, for enlightenment and a social order that rejects the blood feud and in which the responsibility for justice is transferred from the family to the civic community.

Feminine or masculinity are socially constructed terms which vastly differ from biological difference. Masculization refers to the development of male specific morphology whereas feminization refers to the development of female specific morphology. The coined term feminine masculinity literally refers to the blended qualities of male and female that the society assign to. Asakir has totally adopted the

male culture of revenge and fights. The play presents her lacking feminine qualities as her motto is to take revenge of her husband's murderer. Her motive of revenge using her own son is very devastating.

At last in the play, the protagonist, Ilwan is murdered by his brother, Simeida when his mother forces him to kill her own son. The wailing face of mother after killing own son is in a sense failure of notions of conventional masculinity. The tradition here becomes the curse people and especially for the new generation like Ilwan in traditionally biased society of rural Egypt. Simeida is the son who stayed behind and he also is a tragic figure. His future is entirely destroyed by Asakir. He is certain to be punished, perhaps executed, for the murder of his Ilwan. So that, he is an example of a lost generation denied the chance of the enlightenment of the new ideology of the state and of the city. In Simeida, we see the relentless pendulum logic of the tribal vendetta law. Here also we can see the clear effect of tradition in the case of Simeida. In the play he is compelled to kill her brother because of the force of her aunt in the name of masculinity. Being of young generation he was compelled to kill other young generation because of the traditionally conservative unyielding passion for vengeance.

In *Female Masculinity* Judith Halberstam takes aim at the protected status of male masculinity and shows that female masculinity has offered a distinct alternative to it for well over two hundred years. Providing the first full-length study on this subject, Halberstam catalogs the diversity of gender expressions among masculine women from nineteenth-century pre-lesbian practices to contemporary drag king performances.

Through detailed textual readings as well as empirical research, the present research uncovers a hidden history of female masculinities while arguing for a more

nuanced understanding of gender categories that would incorporate rather than pathologize them.

Killing of Ilwan by Simeida is the proof Hakim presents very tactfully to critique the conventional masculinity that is based on revenge. Asakir is represented as one of the failures to uphold the male convention in fact; it is the failure of conventional masculinity. She is unable to make her son walk in her dream of revenge means the complete disaster upon all the notions based on biased conventional masculinity. Among many issues, challenge to masculinity is the major issue the research has delved into. The play ends in abhorrent surprises for both Akasir and the readers. Ilwan surprises his mother who was waiting for seventeen years for avenging her husband's murder, refusing to kill. His own mother surprises him by ordering his cousin to kill him. The act of order to kill his own son is very much meaningful in the play. The research finally concludes the actions of both mother and son jointly prove the failure of conventional masculinity.

Works Cited

- Butler, Judith. *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge. 1990.
- Glover David and Kaplan Cora. *Genders*. Routledge. New fether land, London, 2000.
- Halberstam J. Jack. *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal*. Boston: the Becon Press, 2012
- Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.
- Johnston, Brian. Course in Dramatic Literature from Ancient to American Drama.
[http://www.coursesindrama.com/index.php/arab-drama/tewfiq-al-hakim-song death](http://www.coursesindrama.com/index.php/arab-drama/tewfiq-al-hakim-song-death).
- Leahy, Jill. "The High Cost of Family Honor." Study Guide to Opera.
Pittsburgh Opera, 2425 Liberty, Aveneuwe, Pittsburgh/PA 15200.
- Ogunfeyimi, Leke. "Teabags and Oranges as Metaphors of Sacrificial Positive Leadership in Africa: A comparative study of selected TV commercials and plays." *International Journal of Arts and Humanities*: 3(3): (March 2015): 63-69.
- Rubin, Gayle. 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', in Rayna R. Reiter, ed., *Toward Anthropology of Women*. New York: Monthly Review Press. 1975
- Russo, Mary. *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* London: Routledge. 1995
- Santner, Eric. 'Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and the Writing of Abjection' in Stanley Corngold, trans. and ed., *The Metamorphosis*. New York: W.W. Norton. 1996

Scott, Joan Wallach. *Gender and the Politics of History*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1988

Sussman, Herbert. *Victorian Masculinities*. Cambridge University Press; Reissue edition. 2008.