CHAPTER – I

TAWFIQ AL-HAKIM: LIFE AND WORKS

1.1. Life of Tawfiq al-Hakim

Tawfiq al-Hakim is one of the major figures in the realm of modern Arabic literature and especially in the context of Modern Arabic drama; his efforts are highly considered as an important legacy of Arabic literature right from the ground level of its literary genre that evolved in his expressive techniques and mode of language he used as well. In fact, he fulfilled an overarching role having been the sole founder of an entire literary tradition particularly in the domain of Arabic theaters and plays. His overall contributions are related to the contemporary Egyptian political and social life.¹

In the development of Arabic drama and other literary genres produced by the sincere endeavors of some distinguished litterateurs, we find little evidence of any direct link between the advances made especially by Muhammad Taymur and others in the period around the First World War and al-Hakim’s own early theatrical productions, which were produced out of the confluence between the Egyptian popular theatre and European theatrical influences.²

His Birth

The popular Egyptian playwright Tawfiq al-Hakim is witnessed with the credit of being the founder and the pioneer of Arabic drama in the world. He was born in a landowning family in Alexandria, Egypt on October 9, 1898. His father was in the capacity of judge.

¹ Roger Allen, An Introduction Arabic Literature, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 204
Racially his mother belonged to a Turk family. At his childhood age, his mother generally used to tell him great tales from the Romance of Antara and *Alf Layla wa Layla* in his childhood. As a result, he grew in later periods of his life as the most imaginative writer of the Arab world.³

Since his family back-ground was of elite class, he happened to remain aloof from the peasant people and their poor children who lived near their country estate. Perhaps this lack of companionship led him to enter an inner world of thought at an early age, since the doors to the outer world were closed to him. Perhaps it made him more independent in thought and interest of his life.⁴

**His Schooling**

Tawfiq al-Hakim took his early education from his native place, Alexandria and joined the Law College in Cairo. But Cairo’s artistic milieu fascinated the young student and he leant towards arts and literature leaving his main subject Law. When the famous lawyer ‘Abd al-Rahman Rushdi quit law to start acting and Muhammad Taymur moved out of his father’s aristocratic circle to live among actors and artists, Tawfiq al-Hakim formed his own troupe and staged amateur plays. Later on, under the spur of his passion he improvised a theatre. During the 1919 revolution he joined student demonstrations and composed national hymns and anthems to inspire the Egyptian nation. He depicted this stage of his life in his great novel “*Audat al-Ruh*” (The Return of the Spirit) in 1933.⁵

In fact, al-Hakim appears to have developed a passion for the theatre from his early age, which was reinforced when he moved to Cairo

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⁴ M.M. Badawi, Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt, Cambridge University Press,1987 p. 8
⁵ Denis Hoppe, The Novels of Tawfiq al-Hakim, Dissertation for the Bachelor of Arts Degree, submitted to Princeton University, Princeton,1969, p. 2
in 1917 to obtain excellent preparation for the school Intermediate Certificate. Attending performances by Jurji Abyad and other troupes whenever he could, he began improvising plays with friends and soon started writing plays himself. It was seen that every Thursday afternoon a sketch would be performed in the guest-room of one of the group. It has been observed that during that time the status of Egyptian theatre was low standard. In fact, Tawfiq al-Hakim was forced to write under the name ‘Husayn Tawfiq’ to escape the attention of his family members.⁶

It is a matter of fact that his mother introduced him to art, giving him books to read and letting him participate in the back-stage activities of a local troop of dancers and musicians. He went to secondary school in Damanhour, a market town near the family estate in the Delta, and then was sent to the Mohammed Ali School in Cairo for his secondary education. In Cairo he lived with his father's cousins, who were poor, but whom he liked because of their natural gaiety and openness.

In 1919, he and his cousins participated in the revolution in favor of Sa‘d Zaghlul against the British Government. At his about twenty-one years of age, he was put in prison for a time because of his distribution of revolutionary tracts and poems. In 1921 he began studying law at the Sultaniya Law School, which, in fact, was the principal training ground for Egypt’s intellectual leaders of the new generation, while the Azhar University was such a ground for the earlier generation. Mustafa Kamil and Ahmed Lutfi Sayyid were also graduates thereof. Tawfiq al-Hakim graduated in 1924 in a class with Yahya Haqqi, who later became an ambassador and a novelist.⁷

While in law school he associated with the directors and actors of the active Cairo theaters. He was totally enchanted by the theater, as one can see by reading some of his autobiographical short stories written about his student days. He wrote some plays during this period, but they are mediocre. Though as yet unpublished, they are still performed.  

**His Higher Education**

At the behest of his father Tawfiq al-Hakim went to Paris in order to pursue higher judiciary studies in 1924 where he got a chance to live freely. As a result, he immersed himself totally in acquiring the knowledge of classical and modern European literature in general and that of the French stage in particular. In fact, there a situation took place for him that he became negligent towards his main subject law. He used to go to the theatre, operas, and museums which led him to on his sixth play *Ali Baba* in 1925. Though Tawfiq al-Hakim stayed for years in France, he could not complete his doctorate degree in law due to his deep involvement in theatrical activities; finally he came back to Egypt by his father’s strict order saying goodbye his lovely France in 1928.  

**Responsibility and Achievements**

After coming back to Egypt in 1928 Tawfiq al-Hakim held a succession of posts in the legal service in different parts of the country. In 1929 he became Deputy Prosecutor and subsequently worked in Ṭanṭa, Damanhur, Dasuq, Far Sukur, Itay Barud and Kom Ḥamadah. In 1934 he was appointed director of the Inquiries Department of the Ministry of Education and in 1939 director of the Information Service of the Ministry

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9 Ismat Mahdi, 1983, p. 124
of Social Affairs. In 1943 he started working for some time for the weekly magazine ‘Akhbar al-Yawm’. In 1951 he became Director of the national Library Dassr al-kutub al-misriyah. In 1945 he was appointed a member of the Academy of the Arabic language and in 1956 he became a member of the Superior Arts Council. Moreover, he worked some time as the Egyptian representative with UNESCO in Paris\textsuperscript{10} in 1959. To run a conjugal life he got married in 1946. He was awarded the first State Prize in literature in 1961. A Theatre entitled \textit{Masraḥ al-Hakim} was also formed in Cairo in 1963 and the same was named after him which opened with the performance of his own play ‘Pygmalion’; it is considered as one of the greatest achievements and honours in his artistic life.\textsuperscript{11}

1.2. Tawfiq al-Hakim and his attitude towards women

It has been observed that al-Hakim’s attitude towards women is a bit of critical right from his childhood. Sometimes his attention was drawn by some specific women, but they were failure to exert influence on his life, although reciprocal seriousness was there. He was shocked by an allergy as and when his mother tried to dominate his sentiment, created a revolutionary attitude against his mother that led him to become a misogynist. In this respect we may cite that his encounters in Cairo with a girl Saniya, who attracted him and the guichest girl at Odeon in Paris with whom he fell in love, were short-lived. In the passage of times his attitude started increasingly growing hostile towards women; as a result, he considered them dispensable inconveniences to an artist’s creativity. This formed the pivotal theme of many plays like \textit{al-Mar’a al-Jadidah}

\textsuperscript{10} Maqsood Ahmed, The Beginnings and Development of Drama in Arabic, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 130–31
\textsuperscript{11} J. Brugman, An Introduction to the History of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt, Leiden E. J. Brill, 1984, pp. 279 – 80
(the Modern Women), *al-Khuruj min al-Jannah* (Expulsion from the Paradise), Pygmalion etc. In fine, he was known as *'Aduww al-Mar’a* (The Enemy of Women). But his attitude towards women mellowed down following his marriage in the year of 1946.\(^\text{12}\)

Here mention may be made that William Maynard Hutchins has written a book entitled Tawfiq al-Hakim: A Reader’s Guide, of which final two chapters are devoted to Al-Hakim's view of women and the religious dimension in his works. In this connection, most critics are of the opinion that Al-Hakim was a self-confessed misogynist. Hutchins, who initially regarded him as “a liberal male chauvinist”, now sees him as an “Islamic feminist”.\(^\text{13}\)

Here mention may be made that Tawfiq al-Hakim frequently appeared in the society columns of the newspaper *al-Ahram* whenever some feminist wanted to voice her opinions against conservatism and the man’s world. All the pretty feminine journalists took his interview and tried thereby to change his opinion, but all found in vain. In this connection, he seems to feel that his prime duty as an Egyptian is to put a check on the Egyptian woman’s emancipation. His novel, *al-Ribat al-Mugaddas*, written in 1945 is of the nature of anti-feminine. In fact, it has given him a national reputation. His ideas against women have mellowed since then. He usually does not hate women and this motto comes in his expression. He just thinks they are dangerous, especially when they are pretty. The roots of Hakim’s anti-feminism lie in this personal life, but they are also inherent in the prevailing male orientation of Arab society.\(^\text{14}\)

It is aware of the fact that Tawfiq al-Hakim remaining in Egypt was bound to give eye to the environment of woman-folk. In fact, his

innovations in writing style, colloquial dialogues, and art in general are less commonly known than his stance against women. Nevertheless it is hard to understand why this thoughtful man, who would never write without reason, should write a book like *al-Ribat al-Muqaddas*, which only reinforces old bigoted beliefs. Either there is something more important he is trying to say or he is trying to warn his people, through exaggeration, that Egyptian women are evolving too quickly; becoming Western in their dress and lipstick, but not really overcoming their basic instincts. Perhaps such is his purpose, for his woman in *Al-Ribat al-Muqaddas* has touches of brilliance in spite of her evils. She is delightfully alive and open to the world, but her openness interferes with her duties as a wife.

Tawfiq al-Hakim constructed *Al-Ribat al-Muqaddas* as a confrontation between a thinking man and a passionate woman. The contrast brings out the author’s views on subjects other than anti-feminism. Like all of Hakim’s novels, it goes beyond its avowed subject (anti-feminism, or country life in *Yaumiyat*, or patriotism in ‘*Audet al-Ruh* (عودة الروح)). These deeper concerns are the subject of the next and final essay.

1.3. **His Literary Works**

It has been observed that Tawfiq al-Hakim had a strong mental temperament towards arts and literature from his childhood and he could always think independently. His interest in drama was aroused by a play he enjoyed at a very tender age. Although his parents planned his daily routine carefully, he could not maintain an atmosphere to follow the discipline. Instead of occupying himself with the Mu‘allaqas, he would like to spend his time with story books, novels and other fiction writings.

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He liked to enjoy dance and music. He hardly missed that kind of performances.

He was an activist of 1919 revolution and started writing national and emotional hymns and anthems whom he published by the daily newspapers in Cairo which made him popular throughout the country. Later he depicted his life in his famous novel *Audat al-ruh* (The Return of the Spirit). His four years in Paris is the turning point of his literary life where he spent his valuable time by reading European literatures and he used to go frequently to theatres, operas and art museums. This life of Tawfiq al-Hakim can be gleaned from his two autobiographical accounts: Zahrat al-‘Umar (The Flower of Life – 1943) and ‘Usfūr min al-Sharq (Sparrow from the East). After coming back to Egypt he dedicated himself for the awareness of his countryside and started writing on social issues specially the human sufferings caused by injustice and poverty and finally he published his book *Yaumiyat Na’ib fi al-Aryaf* (Diary of a Prosecutor in the Countryside) which is famous for its biting humor and sparking dialogue. Thus he began a lifetime devote to creative writings, particularly the drama in which he specialized. As he writes on this account – “My attempt at writing plays is like a journey in different directions …… Like a traveler seeking something, a man searching for his soul or an artist working on his art …. Or all of this and more.”16

**His Short Story**

It is aware of the fact that Tawfiq al-Hakim wrote a good number of short stories, which also gave a fillip to the development of modern Arabic literature. In this connection, an attempt has been made to bring them to the notice of people; they are as follows:

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<td>1.</td>
<td>Ahl Al-Fann</td>
<td>People of Art</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>'Ahd Al-Shaytan</td>
<td>The Era of the Devil</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Sultan Al-Zalam</td>
<td>Sultan of Darkness</td>
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<td>'Adalah wa Fann</td>
<td>Justice and Art</td>
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<td>Arini Allah</td>
<td>Show me god</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Madrasit Al-Mughafalin</td>
<td>School of Idiots</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Laiyat Al-Zifaf</td>
<td>Wedding Night</td>
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It appears from the theme of his short stories that Tawfiq al-Hakim made effort to make his short stories flavoured with the eastern literary trends, because he was inspired by old Pharaonic Egypt as “Cleopatra wa Macarthur” (Cleopatra and MacArthur)\(^\text{17}\) and “Marakib al-Shams” (The solar boats).\(^\text{18}\) “Cleopatra and MacArthur” is a silly story of Cleopatra coming to life again and spurring MacArthur on to great victories as she had done for Mark Anthony before. It is a short, whimsical version of *Al Qasr al-Mashour* which also depicts a famous eastern woman returning to the present.

Moreover, it has been observed that “Marakib al Shams” is a pretty story which takes place in ancient Egypt of the Pharaohs and deals with some of the same themes Hakim dealt with in this plays- - the conflict of the soul with Time and Place. The story has an endearing lightness and simplicity, so that the “philosophy” is unapparent. The remainder of Hakim’s short stories is taken from his country experiences. Some of his stories too are semi-religious or moralistic stories.

\(^\text{17}\) Hakim, Laylat al-Zifaf (Cairo: M. al-Adab, 1966 new ed.) pp. 136 – 154
His Novels

Here it may be noted that Tawfiq al-Hakim wrote a good number of novels and in this connection, we need to mention them as follows:

1. Awdat Al-Ruh (Return of the Spirit), 1933
2. Yamiyat Na'ib fil-Aryaf (Diary of a Country Prosecutor), 1937
3. 'Usfour min Al-Sharq (Bird from the East), 1938
4. Ash'ab Malik Al-Tufaylayin (Ash'ab King of the Parasites) 1938
5. Raqisat Al-Ma'bad (Temple Dancer), 1939
6. Al-Ribat Al-Muqaddas (Sacred Bond), 1944
7. Al-Qasr Al-Mashour (The Enchanted Castle), 1957 -- Taha Hussein co-author

He tried his hand at recreating history in one of his novels, too, although only on a humorous level, not a philosophical one. The novel is Ash‘ab.\(^{19}\) In the preface to his novel, Tawfiq al-Hakim says his purpose in writing it was to bring to life the world of the ancient Islam described in the works of al-Jahiz, Khatib al-Baghdadi, Ibn Abd Rabbu, and Sadi al-Zaman. He wanted to describe the colorful life of the common people and make the past seem more alive to contemporary Arabs, he claims that he was trying to mix the fleeting, snapshot beauty of the Arabs with the more complete beauty of the west in order to get the best of both.\(^{20}\)

It has been noticed that the chief character in the novel is Ash‘ab, the stock character of Arab humor throughout the middle ages in the Middle East. He is well described in Frank Rosenthal’s Ash‘ab article in Encyclopedia of Islam (new edition). Ash‘ab was a real and legendary

\(^{19}\) Hakim, Ash‘ab or Tarikh hayat Ma‘ida (Cairo: 1938). Various called “History of a Stomach” and “King of the Vagabonds. 

\(^{20}\) Introduction to the new edition of Ash‘ab (Cairo: M. al-Adab, 1962).
person who flourished as a professional entertainer in the Omayyad period and was famous for his jokes about politics, religion and middle class life. One of the most famous stories about Ash’ab, “the greedy,” tells about how he tries to get rid of some children who are annoying him by telling them that free gifts are being distributed in a different part of the city. They all run off and leave him standing alone until his own subtle intelligence outwits him and he runs after them to get some gifts himself. Tawfiq Al-Hakim’s Ash’ab is much the same. He is constantly on the move tricking people into giving him dinner and sometimes he is tricked by others. He meets a friend who is as crafty as he and the two of them decide to go to Medina and make their fortunes on the pilgrim trade. They set up a bar to entertain the pilgrim’s right outside the holy city and are quite successful until the authorities expel them and they must go back to their meager existence. The humor of the novel is corny, lacking subtlety.

It appears that in line with Tawfiq al-Hakim’s sensitive awareness of his ancient heritage, his most recent novel, Banq al-Qalaq (Bank of Worry, 1966) can be viewed as a further development of the Abbassid-Omayyad Ash’ab story. Here the rambling, crazy feeling of his Ash’ab is transposed into a creative, fantastical humor in a story which takes place in the modern age. In Banq al-Qalaq, two men without enough money to buy food, like Ash’ab and his companion, are in search of new ways to make money. Adham, the more imaginative of the two, devises the supra-modern idea of founding a “Bank of worry” where they would lend and borrow worries at interest and make a slight profit from the banking operations. They barely stay alive for the next few days waiting for the customers who never come. With difficulty they convince their landlord not to bother them for the rent until their bank is running.

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few days later, a rich landed man hears about them and is so enamored of their idea that he sets them up in a big office in the center of Cairo. All expenses paid. People from all walks of life come to the bank to tell them their troubles. In a crazy sort of way, all seems well for Adham and his friend Sha’ban but suddenly, like Ash’ab in the medieval anecdote, they discover that they had been too smart for their own good. The whole bank idea collapses in near catastrophe for them when they discover that they were unknowingly involved in a conspiracy to tap political malcontents through the tapes of “the grumblers” dialogues recorded in the bank. In a neat and terrifying way, reminiscent of the modern ironic pessimists like Gide, Ionesco and Camus, Tawfiq al-Hakim has modernized the Ash’ab figures. He changes them from bumbling wits into a happy-go-lucky Adham and Sha’ban, who suddenly discover that their cute little idea goes far deeper than they thought. Although they never realized it, their bank of worry had only been dabbling at the surface of worry and terror: the inner tragedy of Fatima, revealed to the reader only, is so harsh and real that it casts a shadow of ludicrous meaning to the rest of the story, making all the bantering dialogues that had proceeded seem hollow.22

There are no references to Ash’ab or any ancient traditions in Bank al Qalaq, just as there are no references to Sheherazade in Yomiyat Na’ib fil Aryaf, but a certain ordering and the method of characterization remind the reader of the older story. In Bank al-Qalaq, Hakim dealt with characters he knew—he himself had attended Law College like Adham and Sha’ban. They are typical of any poor, but happy Egyptian dreamers, modern descendants of Ash’ab. There are many comparisons between Adham and the medieval Ash’ab. Both Ash’ab and Adham began their operations in a bar (the first scene of Bank al-Qalaq is in a cabaret), although Adham is not a professional entertainer as Ash’ab was. Both

Ash’ab and Adham are vagabonds who wander in search of amusement and profit, using their creative imagination for their livelihood. Both are too smart for themselves—Adham failed his law examination because he felt the exam was an imaginary hoax and totally irrelevant: he only saw a picture of a donkey on the examination paper. With Hakim, the old, typically Arab character leaps into the modern world of banking socialism, capitalism and general tension—which is Qalaq in Arabic. Bank al Qalaq is somewhat like his new play recently translated into English, The Tree Climber where he has taken old songs, a bit of country life along the railroad, and some Sufi veneration for the abstract and woven them all into a dialogue of modern confusion.

His Play

As a best playwright in Arabic literature Tawfiq al-Hakim made seriously endeavour to write maximum numbers of his works, they are noted as follows:

1. Ahl Al-Kahf (People of the Cave), 1933
2. Sheherezade, 1934
3. Braksa aw Mushkilat Al-Hukm (Praksa or Problems of Governance), 1939; Pygmalion, 1942
4. Sulayman Al-Hakim (Solomon the Wise), 1943
5. Al-Malik Udib (King Oedipus), 1949
7. Al-Aydi Al-Na'ima (Tender Hands), 1959
8. Isis, 1955;
9. Al-Safqa (The Deal), 1956

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23 Samir Wahby has made an interesting comparison between Bank al-Qalaq and John Steinbeck’s Of Mice and Men (1937). Both are novels about two happy people who get into tragic situations.
10. Al-Masrah Al-Munawa': 21 Masrahiya (A Variety of Theatre: 21 Plays), 1956
11. La‘bit Al-Mawt (The Game of Death), 1957
12. Ashwak Al-Salam (Thorns of Peace), 1957
13. Rihla ilâ-l-Ghad (A Journey to Tomorrow), 1957
14. Al-Sultan Al-Ha’ir (The Perplexed Sultan), 1960
15. Ya Tali’ Al-Shajarah (The Tree Climber), 1962
16. Al-Ta’am li-kull Fam (Food for Every Mouth), 1963
17. Shams Al-Nahar (Daytime Sun), 1965
18. Masir Sirsar (The Fate of a Cockroach), 1966
19. Al-Warta (The Fix), 1966
20. Bank Al-Qalaq (Anxiety Bank), 1967
21. Majlis Al-’Adl (Seat of Justice), 1972
22. Rahib bayn Nisa’ (A Monk among Women), 1972
23. Al-Dunya Riwaya Hazliya (Life is a Farce), 1974
24. Al-Hamir (The Donkeys), 1975

The most refined evocation of the East was in his plays, which were dramatizations of famous Arab stories and dealt with the peculiar ways the Arab (Egyptian in particular) faced his universe. Hakim had definite views on the particular qualities of the Egyptian (and Arab) experience. He felt that, whereas Greek tragedy was concerned with Fate versus Justice, Egyptian tragedy was Time versus Place. According to Hakim, Egyptian literature “is the victory of the spirit over Time and Place: that victory is the resurrection (ba’th) not to another world without time and place, but to this same world with its time and place.”25 He does not see this philosophy as a consolation because of its emphasis on afterlife, but instead he views it from its tragic angle: is it worth being

reborn to a new time and place which is the same as this? And secondly, can man be worthy of being reborn? These are the questions he treats in his earlier plays. *Ahl al-Kahf* (The Men of the Cave, 1933) represents Man’s struggle with Time, as the sleepers of the cave come back to life and find all they had lived for in the past does not apply to the present. They seek in vain for a bridge between their souls and their fleeting surroundings. *Shahrazad* (1934) is the struggle between man and Place: King Shahrayar struggles to project his thoughts above sensuous reality in order to reach a truth which lets him live at peace with the world. Shahrazad herself is at once his ideal teacher, his teasing temptress, and a woman of carnal desires. *Ahl al-Kahf* and *Shahrazade* are the two most famous of his revivals of the past in his plays, but he wrote several others.

In fact, Tawfiq al-Hakim became preoccupied with the reincarnation of Shahrazad in his literature. Not only did he write the play, but also he collaborated with Taha Hussein to write *Al Qasr al Mashour* (The enchanted castle, 1936). This is an imaginary tale of Sheherazade’s return to earth and her meeting with the two authors at a hotel in the French Alps. She befriends Taha Hussein at first and does not want to meet Hakim because she claims that he does not understand her. She had been insulted by his play about her, Shahrazade. Tawfiq al-Hakim had portrayed her as being so vulgar as to “do it” with the black slave. But she and Hakim make amends, since Hakim sees her more ethereal nature as well. According to an Italian reviewer, the combination of Tawfiq al-Hakim and Taha Hussein was a fortunate one for the book. The imaginative symbolism and humor of Tawfiq al-Hakim combine with the thought, sentiment and style of Taha Hussein to create a delightful discussion of time, art and women.²⁶

It has been indicated earlier that in 1943 Tawfiq al-Hakim resigned from the government service and started working in Akhbar al-Yaum and in 1951 he was appointed to the post of the Director General of Dār al-Kutub which gave him a golden chance to offer service to the development of Arabic language and literature especially in the field of Modern Arabic drama literature. It is a matter of fact that during the revolution period, Cairo was the first trial ground for his creative talent and inspiring by its theatrical activity, he wrote his first play al-Daif al-THaqil (The Unwelcome Guest) a satire on the burning topic of British occupation in Egypt. After his first success he concentrated to write on the contemporary social as well as political issues, and the success of honour follows him one after another and he established himself as the most successful dramatist in modern Arab World.

It appears from the literary works of Tawfiq al-Hakim that during the period of the world wars he wrote two types of drama, they are highlighted as follows:

1. He wrote Social plays that deal with situations in society or the lives of individuals relating to either criticisms of life or efforts to reform it. Under this category Tawfiq al-Hakim wrote forty five plays, from the starting point of his literary career (1910 – 1923) till later, when he was a journalist (1943 – 1951). These plays are collected in two volumes: Masrah al- Mujtama’ah (The Theatre of Society – 1950) and al-Masrah al-Munaww (Varied Theatre – 1956). The majority of them are short plays in one, two or three acts. The famous full-length plays include: Sir al-Muntahirah (The Suicide Girl’s Secret) and Rasasah fil Qalb (A Bullet in the Heart).

2. His abstract plays are said to have been dealing with the themes of universal rather than local interests, based on suppositions posed by mythology or religion or by al-Hakîm
himself. Ahl al-Kahf (People or the Cave), 1933; Shaharzad, 1934; Pygmalion, 1942; and Sulaiman al-Hakim, 1943. In fact, all these are prominent works of the category of his abstract plays.27

His Inspiration

Tawfiq al-Hakim was an imaginary dramatist. It has been observed that he followed many persons for their literary works that linked to his interest. He brought all the trends of European culture into his mind that began from ancient to modern times. The plays of Sophocles and their modern versions presented by Andre Gide, Pirandello, Bernard Shaw, and Ibsen, inspired al-Hakim to introduce abstract plays which became his first major contribution to the Arab Theatre. The other persons by whom he was greatly influenced they are Wilde, Moliere, Chekov, Schiller, Goethe, and de Musset. As a matter of fact, their one act plays gave him the idea to depict social themes but in his own individualistic style. It is not easy to recognize the influence of European literature over Tawfiq al-Hakim’s dramatic works, because he has an amazing power to represent things in a way where his own personality stands over all and becomes dominant.28

Having been inspired by the western litterateurs, he was later to become the Arab world’s greatest playwright to date.29 It is a matter of fact that when Tawfiq al-Hakim was pursuing law study in Paris during 1925 – 28 radically changed his view of the possibilities for the development of Egyptian drama. Exposure to the intellectual and savant-grade authors and dramatists such as Shaw, Maeterlink and Pirandello

28 Ibid, p. 126
fired him with the idea of composing a number of ‘philosophical’ plays, which remain his most distinctive contribution to modern Arabic drama.\textsuperscript{30}

1.4. Tawfiq al-Hakim as a Dramatist

It has been admitted that Tawfiq al-Hakim is one of the outstanding dramatists who occupied the same eminent place in the development of the Arabic drama as Muhammad Taymur in case of the short story and Najib Mahfuz in novel.

Alexandria, the birthplace of Tawfiq al-Hakim, was the cradle of knowledge, art and learning in the beginning of twentieth century which focused over the world language and literature. In fact, Tawfiq al-Hakim could earn experience about theatre at his tender age under the initiative of his father that brought to him a keen interest in writing plays. As a schoolboy in Cairo he would go to the Opera House wherever he could afford the price of ticket, to see his favorite actor Jurj Abyad who performed the leading role in Arabic translations of Oedipus Rex, Othello, and Louis XI. During his college life he mixed up with the people belonged to the theatre world and wrote his first play \textit{al-Daif al-Thaqil} (The Unwelcome Guest) moreover with the collaboration of his friends he composed four plays for the troupe of ‘Ukasha Brothers’, the very troupe which had performed Taymur’s The Precipice. These plays were: Aminusa (1922), al-Mar’a al-Jadidah (1923), al-‘Aris (1924) and Khatim Sulaiman (1924) and in 1925 he completed his sixth play ‘Ali Baba in France.\textsuperscript{31}

Although Tawfiq al-Hakim went to Paris for higher studies in law but he failed to obtain his doctorate in law as he was attracted there by the western plays and made up his mind towards drama leaving his

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, p.179
main objective. His return to Egypt was traumatic. Not only did he miss the brilliant and stimulating cultural milieu of Paris but he discovered to his chagrin that the Egyptian theatre, which had been bubbling with activity when he left Cairo, was now virtually dead. Several troupes, including ‘Ukasha’s, had gone bankrupt and had been disbanded. His close friend Mustafa Mumtaz, with whom he collaborated in the writing of Suleiman’s Ring, had deserted play writing and despair moved to alchemy! He gave two reasons for the death of the theatre: first one is the squabbles and struggle for power between the various political parties, which made politics and political journalism occupy the forefront of people’s attention to the exclusion of the arts, and the second one is the growing world economy crisis, with its impact on the Egyptian economy. The only theatre that managed to survive was those that created for either the melodramas of Yusuf Wahbi or the farces of Najib al-Rihani and ‘Ali al-Kassar. When Tawfiq al-Hakim resumed writing plays on his return from France, he did so in the full knowledge that no one would be able to put them on the stage, unless it was some amateur company. To his credit, he was not averse to writing for such companies. He composed the play ‘Rassasa fil-Qalb’ especially for the society in lieu of the promotion of acting but unfortunately that society did not survive long enough to put it on the stage.32

Tawfiq al-Hakim developed the documented passion for music in his very early life; there was nothing surprising in his desire to contribute to the thriving musical theatre of the time. The plays he wrote in this genre, known as ‘operate’, did not seem to differ materially from those that had dominated the Egyptian stage for a long time. Like them,

they were adaptations of European works rather than original creations, with a strong pronounced melodramatic or farcical element. In this situation Tawfiq al-Hakim decided to resume writing plays after back to Egypt. He wrote five plays one after another. These included *Khuruj min al-Jannah* (Expulsion from the Paradise), 1928; Ba’d al-Mawt (After the death); Sirr al-Muntahirah (The Suicide Girl’s Secret), 1929; Hayat Tahattamat (A Bullet in the Heart), 1931; and al-Zammar (The Piper, 1932. The first two were in classical or literary Arabic and the other three were written in the colloquial form of Egyptian language. A Bullet in the Heart was actually written for an amateur society known as the society for the promotion of acting. So, al-Ḥakim had to content himself with writing plays often short one act plays for publication in the local newspapers and this lamentable fact strengthened the fallacy, no doubt partly encouraged by Tawfiq al-Ḥakim himself, that his plays constituted the so called ‘theatre of the mind’ and were, therefore, not suitable for stage production. After these he concentrated on *Ahl al-kahf* (The Sleepers in the Cave) published in 1933; then he continued writing dramas and he wrote *Shaharzad*, published in 1934; Muhammad in 1936; Pygmalion in 1942; *al-Malik Oudib* in 1949; Izis in 1955; *Sulṭan al-Ḥa’ir* in 1959 etc. and so many dramas he composed, for which he earned a great success that led to the development of Modern Arabic Literature. Evaluating on Tawfiq al-Hakim’s dramatic skill M.M. Badawi writes as follows:

“In many respects Tawfiq al-Hakim seemed to follow in the footsteps of his distinguished predecessor, Muhammad Taymur (1891 – 1921). Like Taymur, he fell under the spell of the theatre while still a student in Egypt. They each went later to France to pursue higher studies, but instead of law they devoted most of their energy to the study of the French stage. In France their interest in drama was further developed,
their taste refined, their ideas sharpened their views of what Egyptian
drama should be like formed. Of course, al-Hakim was much more
intelligent and much more widely read man. Nevertheless, in their
different ways, after their return to Egypt they were both intent on writing
serious specifically Egyptian drama which rose above the level of the
popular theatre.”³³

It cannot be gainsaid that Tawfiq al-Hakim has brought
perfection to the domain of Arabic drama and his dramatic skill has been
admitted by Ismat Mahdi as she writes as follows:
“Respect for al-Hakim transcends the Arab world. His works have been
translated into a number of languages, western and eastern, more than the
works of any other Arab writer. He is no longer just a literary giant or the
greatest Arab dramatist after whom a leading theatre has been named in
Cairo; he has become an institution whose literary efforts have become a
legend in his lifetime.”³⁴

It has been observed that during his later life, al-Hakim
stopped writing major dramas for the theatre. As his experience
increased, he continued writing some controversial articles which often
shocked the orthodox elements of Arab society and even incurred their
angers.

Besides all these works, Tawfiq al-Hakim wrote more other
works pertaining to essay, monographs and interviews, they are
mentioned below:

1. *Taht Shams Al-Fikr* (Under the Sun of Thought), 1938
2. Himari Qalla Li (My Donkey Said to Me), 1938
3. Himar Al-Hakim (Al-Hakim's Donkey), 1940
4. Min Al-Burj Al-'Aji (From the Ivory Tower), 1941

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³³ Ibid, p. 9
5. Taht Al-Misbah Al-Akhdar (Under the Green Lantern), 1942
6. Shajarat Al-Hukm (The Tree of Governance), 1945
7. Fann Al-Adab (The Art of Literature), 1952
8. Min Dhikrayat Al-Fann wal-Qadda' (Memories of Art and Jurisprudence), 1953
10. Ta'ammut fil-Siyasa (Meditations on Politics), 1954
11. Al-Ta'aduliya (Proportionalism), 1955
12. Qalabuna Al-Masrahi (Our Theatrical Mold); 1967
13. Hadith Ma'al-Kawkab (A Talk with the Planet), 1974
14. Thawrat Al-Shabab (Revolution of Youth), 1975
15. Safahat min Al-Tarikh Al-Adabi (Pages from Literary History), 1975
16. Bayn Al-Fikr wal-Fann (Thought and Art), 1976
17. Adab Al-Hayah (Literature of Life), 1976
18. Tahadiyat Sanat Alfain (Challenges of the Year 2000), 1980
19. Malamih Dakhiliya (Inner Features), 1982
20. Al-Ta'aduliyyah: ma' Al-Islam wal-Ta'aduliyyah (Islam and Proportionalism), 1983
21. Al-Ahadith Al-Arba‘a (Four Interviews), 1983

In addition of his credits being a writer he dared to have composition of poetry treasured under the caption as Rihlat Al-Rabi‘ wal-Kharif (Journey of Spring and Fall), 1964.35

His Death

It is a matter of that Tawfiq al-Hakim proved himself as one of the prolific Arab writers, who left more than eighty plays for us and

35 Al-Ahram Weekly On-line 8 - 14 October 1998; Issue No.398 Copyright Al-Ahram Weekly. All rights reserved
earned climax position in the domain of Arabic drama. As and when Tawfiq al-Hakim died in July, 1987, the Arab world lost a greatest dramatist as a loss of a wing, a hand and an intelligent mind that helped it find a niche in Arabic literature; because he was utmost successful to establish Arabic drama as a full-fledged genre in the scenario of world literature.36

Finally mention may be made that Tawfiq al-Hakim is identified as one of the major pioneer figures in modern Arabic literature. Especially his contribution to modern Arabic drama has given a fillip to the development of Arabic theatre and play; most of his plays have been brought to stage in Egypt that achieved a good name and fame in the world of drama culture. At the present juncture, every individual of art loving fellows remind the credit of Tawfiq al-Hakim that he did a lot for Arabic drama.

A Brief Introduction to the Drama

In fact, the Drama *al-sultan al-ḥaʾir* consists of three acts play. The central point of this drama is that a Mamluk slave soldier ascended to the rank of sultan; he came to know that he was not manumitted by the former Sultan, his master who died without manumitting him, since the matter was left out in his carelessness. In fact, the earlier Sultan had no real heir of his own. Twenty five years back he purchased one boy slave finding him very much intelligent. It made him thinking to let the slave rule over the state in future after his death. As such, the slave was nourished as his own child and brought up with full care and education. After the demise of the Sultan, the minister of the

state and the chief justice made the slave seated on the throne of Sultan. But it was tittle-tattle among the subjects that the present Sultan did not have manumission. So he has no right to rule over the free people of the concerned state; and it was their demand – the present Sultan should be manumitted for the benefit of the state exchequer. Under such circumstances, the sultan was fallen in dilemma how to subdue the people of his state exercising his power as it was insisted by his minister. In this connection, the chief justice suggested that the Sultan should display a public auction sale before general people, so that someone may purchase the slave Sultan and manumit him accordingly. At the primary level of discussion the present Sultan hesitated to the matter of his manumission, but after a long argument with the minister and the chief justice, he was bound to accept the course of manumission. Subsequently he was manumitted with due process of the state law in vogue.

**Description of the Drama**

As the Sultan accepted the proposal of his manumission, he was bound to comply with the state law and accordingly declared that he chose the law *(al-qanun)* instead of the use of sword *(al-ṣaif)*. The minister and the chief justice came to know the desire of the Sultan through conversation they had. As a result of which, an Auction Sale was held publicly, where he was purchased by a lady who had also bad reputation in the city, in fact, she was the highest bidder with thirty thousand Dinars. Accordingly the lady agreed to purchase the slave Sultan and to manumit him at the time, when the muezzin would give call to the dawn prayer, so she invited the Sultan at her residence, between them dialogue continued, by which their personality came to light; the slave Sultan disclosed that the lady is free from the charge of whore, she is the woman of culture and art lover, in return of that the lady was
pleased to express that the Sultan belonged to pious character, good conduct and amicable behavior.

In the course of their sweet dialogue and reciprocal conversation, the Sultan came to know the reality of the rich lady, while she also inquired of his life history. The Sultan honestly admitted that her life was better than his life considering the position that he faced. In that case, the lady was hopeful that he would remain as the Sultan of the state; moreover the lady tried to know whether he placed someone as special beloved in his soul. But the Sultan gave no any room for his love affair saying no time to consider about that due to severe engagement in the duties of the state administration. She also tried to know about her position to him whether, at least, her memory would remain in his mind or not. In reply he let her know that her memory could not be erased from his heart that the vicinity brought them together. It was till midnight and their discussion continued, but all of a sudden the muezzin gave call to the dawn prayer before its proper time; so both of them became surprise at the prayer call (adhan) and came to know that it was the plan managed by the chief justice who was the law bearer. It was the belief of the chief justice that the manumission would be completed only at the time of the muezzin’s call to the dawn prayer, whether it was the proper time of the prayer call or not he ignored thinking only the manumission of the Sultan. Under such circumstances, Sultan passed his voice that he made rejection thereof and also preferred to remain at the vicinity of the lady until and unless the arrival of the dawn prayer time. But the lady, when she saw that the trickery was out the love of the Chief Justice for the Sultan, said to him: “You are now free, your majesty!” In fact, it was due to her love for him, while she could not see him in earlier position, although the dawn prayer call was given earlier. In return of the lady’s generosity, the
Sultan gifted her with ruby taking from his turban and said: “I shall never
forget that I was a slave of you for a night.”

In fact, the idea of struggle between power and law was the
source that created the drama *al-sultan al-ḥaʿir*. How the idea came to the
mind of the playwright it is referred to in the statement as follows: “This
drama was written in autumn, 1959, when the author was in Paris, with a
passage of period he noticed there what happened in the world of today,
and the spirit of that question that today’s world placed before him in
dilemma: the ongoing problems that appeared in the world, whether they
might be solved by the rule of the sword or the law? ..... by the
supplication to power or source?”

In fact, the author was inspired with the thought related to
this drama as soon as he achieved knowledge during his stay in Paris
about the international struggle of hardship that fell between the executive
law in the United Nations and the power execution in matters of the
nuclear and hydrogen bombs. The feature of the drama has been
combined with the philosophy of a common author although it was
written by Tawfiq al-Hakim. The sole thought of the plan which connects
with his literary production, it is the estimation of his struggle against
destruction and shortcomings of age and period.

It is certain that the Sultan was in dilemma between power
and law. As he was in the capacity of Sultan had the privilege to refuse
the problem of his sale in the public auction and make the tongue silent
with the sharp of the sword, but he perceived that the committing wrong
would bring heavy loss and soon it would be inherited by the latter
generations, because they would make way to jump into the throne of
power for those who sought to rule; and the Sultan might be the first

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victim of that year. Although the Sultan made clear of the sound of law and that would be example for everyone who would come after him. Thereby the Sultan would be successful to protect himself and his power as well. In fact, in such a way the Sultan was inspired by the chief justice.  

Subsequently the process of manumission started and when the “Deed of Manumission” was placed before her, she was firstly reluctant to put her signature on it with an argument – she cannot loss her property in any way; but she wanted the Sultan to remain in his capacity. As and when her latter desire gave an affirmative signal, “Deed of Manumission” was placed before her by the chief justice. On that occasion the lady made a request to the Sultan: “You give me this night to me, Your Majesty – a single night. Honor me by accepting my invitation and be my guest until daybreak. And when the Muezzin gives the call to dawn prayers from this minaret here, I shall sign the deed of manumission and Your Majesty will be free.” In response to that the Sultan benignly accepted her invitation. It was with the witness of the chief justice, the Sultan followed the lady into her house with great pleasure.

Here mention may be made that the Sultan found an amicable atmosphere at her residence during the night. As the lady received him with a great interest which she needed as a part of her culture. They had a talk reciprocally. Thereby the Sultan came to know that the lady used to chat with the guests of her beloved husband who made her familiar with the robust culture of the modern society. Her husband was fond of art, songs, poetry and playing musical instruments.

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38 Ibid, p. 216
At her age of sixteen years only she was bought by a rich merchant who used to go to the party of poetry recitation, songs, cultural programs in view of making her educated and cultured; who then gave her freedom and married several years before his death. Even after his demise, she continued the culture, for which she faced the ill reputation in the city, although she took everything with chaste and honor. In fine, the lady had to leave all these arts, because she was a woman without husband, if she received her known guests as usual, had to face a lot of tittle-tattle and gossips. Still she was in no position to change her life and habits. So, she was intentionally insolent to the Sultan, and deliberately vulgar and impudent before the masses of people. As per intention she had continued her talking with the Sultan and expressed how she was impressed by him since his decision renouncing the use of the sword. The Sultan advocated that the real victory lies in the solution of the problem by sleight of hand. The lady was bound to praise him saying: “You have composure, self-confidence, control over your actions, the ability to do what you want with meticulous precision and resoluteness. You are far from being weak or wily – you’re frank, natural, and courageous.”

Thus the lady went ahead in conversation and sought permission from the Sultan to know whether he had special love for someone and what would be her position after his manumission. In this connection, the Sultan expressed that it is not possible to erase her memory from his heart and mind. All of a sudden the muezzin gave a call to the dawn prayer, although it was midnight. Then they had to stop their talking and came out of the house. The chief justice told her to sign the “Deed of Manumission”. There upon the Sultan was furious for taking the means of trickery with the prayer call in early time and made rejection of the demand of the chief justice; and desired to pass the rest time of the

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40 Tawfiq al-Hakim, al-Sultan al-Ha’ir, p. 154
night. Then the lady said: “No, your Chief Justice wanted to rescue you, and I do not want to be any less loyal than him toward you. You are now free, your Majesty.” And she requested to bring the deed of manumission, and when it was made available before her, she put her signature on the same. In such a way the Sultan was manumitted. As a result of which, the Sultan declared her as an outstanding woman and the people of the city must respect her.

It appears from the feature of the drama entitled *al-Sultan al-Ḥaʾir* that it consists of three acts as volume of the play. It has been pregnant with the culture and philosophy of the contemporary Egypt and outside as well. The dramatist has designed it with the story of a Sultan who was actually a slave-soldier of Mamluk period, and he ascended to the rank of monarch, known as Sultan. He found criticism of people from the point of his slavery to the earlier Sultan. It led him to the dilemma in view of taking the course that remained between the power and law of the state. In fact, his choice of law solved his problem without blood-shedding, and this philosophy was actually necessary for the countries in the world that affected with war and hostility. In this connection, the law incumbent officials can solve serious problems as in the drama the chief justice played a vital role in brain-washing of the Sultan. In addition, the lady in the drama termed as *al-ghaniya* means “lady singer” who was well nourished by her master as well as husband who trained her in different ways in respect of art and culture; her meeting with artists and scholars in different cultural parties opened her mind with chaste, but it was not understood by the vulgar and common people who critically blamed her as a whore. But her position was perceived by the Sultan as and when he found her vicinity and attachment personally. Indeed a well-bred, cultured and educated person may be the torch-bearer of a society,

\[41\text{Ibid, p. 183}\]
who honestly can solve the great problem like that of the Sultan in the
drama. The lady was successful to save firstly the slave trader from the
hand of the executioner and secondly the life of the slave Sultan who was
made free by her wealth and witticism. It appears from the drama that an
enlightened man can judge properly due to his far-sighting caliber and
intelligence; while the gossip of the shoemaker and the wine merchant is
not applicable to the atmosphere as appeared in the drama. The
executioner and the slave trader interacted with various jokes and humor,
while the latter was awarded punishment for execution, but the
executioner failed to cut off his head as the appointed time at the dawn
prayer call was lapsed under trickery. Actually the slave trader was
condemned by the minister without proper trial and when he was escaped
from the execution, his matter led to the way of the Sultan’s
manumission, of which testimony we find in the third act of the drama.

In fine, it is imperative to know that the drama al-Sulṭan al-
Ḥa’ir (السultan الحائر) is one of the excellent works of Tawfiq al-Hakim,
and his drama content consists of excellent and forceful dialogue, novel
idea, and beautiful objective. According to the nature of literature, it may
be categorized with comical comedy. The dramatist successfully
completed the roadmap of his objective within the three acts of the play.
In fact, his choice of the name of the drama is praiseworthy and suitable
to the present world, where the executive heads of different countries are
conspicuous to be fallen in dilemma either for domination or corruption.