

Concept Of Nationalism As Projected In The Poems Of Ahmad Shauqi Bek In Modern Arabic Literature- A Critical Study

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Abstract

The years between 1517 to 1800 was the darkest period in the history of Arabic literature. When the Arab lands were under the subjugation of the Turks. The modern period of Arabic literature started with the invasion of Egypt by the French under Napoleon in 1798 and with the occupation of that country by the British in 1882. During this period, for the first time Egypt came in contact with the European culture, its scientific progress and literatures. This contact contributed to the Arab renaissance and thenceforth with other branches of knowledge, the modern Arabic literature also began to develop towards its perfection. During the 19th century historical events, social, political and cultural developments influenced the modern Arabic poetry in two ways: 1. Neo-classicism 2. Pre-romanticism.

Keywords: European Culture, Renaissance, Modern Arabic Literature, Nationalism, Neo-classicism, Pre-romanticism.

Definition of Nationalism and the Background of Arab Nationalism in the works of Ahmad Shauqi Bek :

Nationalism means advocacy for national independence or one's attachment to his own country. It is historical true that when a calamity falls upon a nation, some one from thinker, writer, scientist, journalist, Translator, philosopher, political leader, painter, poet, hero, singer, litterateur stands against it, preach his views in his own actions based on the principles of National Independence. Pre-Islamic Arabs believed the poet as the savior of the nation. If we study history, we can understand that freedom comes to a nation from sacrifice of some great personalities. We can say that entire nation asleep when the pen of literature stop writing. The great war resulted in the dissolution of the ottoman empire and the placing of its remaining Arab Provinces as under British and French mandate. Egypt, already under British occupation was declared a protectorate in 1914. The strength of nationalist feeling erupted gradually in a series of major revolts, first in Egypt (1919), then in Iraq (1920) and in Syria (1925). The search for specifically Egyptian literature and for many authors in Egypt, whose slogan was only the Egyptian identity, specially a group of young men associated with what became known as al-madrassa al-haditha. This is the period in which Arab countries tried to shake off foreign domination and attain statehood. In Egypt attempts were made by, for example Tala't Harb to establish national industry and banking. The desire to achieve progress and modernity was keenly felt and this feeling aroused controversy with the rejectionist. Two famous debates took place after abolition of the caliphate of Kamal Ataturk in Istanbul in 1924, For the influence of two revolutionary books of Ali Abd al Raziq, one of the two book was-Al Islam Wal Usul Al-Hukm. Many a litterateur contributed to nationalism of Egypt, being influenced by European literature. Like other litterateur Ahmad Shawqi Bek also did a lot for the independence of his own country, projecting nationalism in his poetic talent. He was a nationalist poet of Egypt, endowed with revolutionary zeal, he raised his voices in his own style against the dominion of

France and British colonialism. He sang the song of freedom, he wanted to make his nation strong and great. He tried a lot to make the people alert of his own country. The poet awaken the people of their own land to defend their freedom and save their lives and properties, and wanted to make the Egypt free from foreign power. He roused the national sentiments in his poem against western colonialism.

Objective:

In order to discuss the mentioned above nationalism projected in the poems of Shauqi Bek, the great emphasis will be given on the following aspects :

1. Study of the deplorable social, religious, economical, moral, intellectual as well as historical condition along with a special glimpse to the political and cultural condition of Egypt between the two world wars.
2. Study on the Trends of literary revolution of Shauqi Bek against the colonial rule in Egypt.
3. Study on the contribution of literature towards nationalism, specially the role of the Shauqi Bek played in the independence movement of Egypt.
4. Evaluation of Shauqi as the spokesmen of extreme nationalism of Egypt and relevancy of his revolutionary spirit in present time.

Therefore the aspects as already mentioned above bear great significance and hence in the present topic everything will be made in a threadbare discussion and analysis.

Methodology

The present study adopts a **qualitative and analytical methodology** to explore the concept of nationalism in the poetry of **Ahmad Shawqi**, a prominent figure in modern Arabic literature. The research primarily involves **close textual analysis** of selected poems to identify key nationalist themes, such as patriotism, anti-colonial sentiment, cultural pride, and historical consciousness.

To contextualize Shawqi's nationalist vision, the study incorporates a **historical and socio-political framework**, focusing on the period of British colonial rule in Egypt and the broader Arab **Nahda (Renaissance)** movement. The poems are examined not only for their thematic content but also for their **linguistic style, classical references**, and rhetorical strategies.

A **comparative literary approach** is also employed to situate Shawqi's work within the larger spectrum of nationalist Arabic poetry, drawing parallels with other influential poets such as **Hafez Ibrahim** and **Mahmoud Darwish**. Additionally, the study consults **secondary sources**, including literary criticism, historical accounts, and scholarly analyses, to support interpretations and provide depth to the discussion.

Where necessary, **translations** of the original Arabic texts are provided, ensuring the essence of Shawqi's poetic voice is preserved for readers unfamiliar with Arabic.

Ahmad Shauqi Bek and His Poetry: (1868-1932)

Ahmad Shauqi Bek was born in Cairo and brought up there. The Aristocratic poet Ahmad Shawqi was a mixture of Arab, Turkish, Circassian Kurdish and Greek lineage. His Father was somewhat extravagant, what ever property he inherited as his patimony, he lost very soon. When he was four years old, he was admitted into the school of Shaikh Saleh in Cairo. After completion of his elementary and secondary education, he was admitted into the law college, where he studied for two years, and graduated in 1887 from its department of translation with a mastery on French. His total education was secular and European as opposed to the traditional education of al-Azhar. For the first time Khidvi Tawfiq appointed him at the palace secretariat and included him among the officials and sent him to France to study law and literature, where he spent six years. Shawqi travelled widely in Europe acquiring all aspects of its culture. After receiving higher literary and law degree from

Mumbelia and Perish, came back to Cairo and took responsibility of his former department. He became the chief spokesman of the next Khedive 'Abbas II', then gained the position of Directorship in the European department. Shawqi praised the ruler to the extent that when British dethroned the ruler Khidvi Abbas - II, the poet Shawqi was also compelled to leave Egypt for his former attachment with the palace and for the odes, composed in praise of the exiled ruler. Then he took shelter in Bercelona, one of the province of Spain in 1914 and stayed there throughout the wars.

Exilement suffered Shawqi, because he missed the palace, its carefree life and Egypt. Then he changed his poetical attitude from the palace to poor people and frustrated nation. He saw human cares and sufferings of destruction and killings of the war. His heart filled with tears after observing the Egypt's condition in the revolution of 1919. He responded to the mood of nation and took up the cause of common men. When his *Dewan* was reprinted, he was declared as *Amir al Shuara* by a general consensus of eminent poets. A prolific poet, Ahmad Shawqi wrote more than any of his contemporaries. His *Dewan al Shawqiat* was published in two volumes in 1898. He composed social, elegy, eulogy, descriptive and occasional poetry. He wrote six verse plays: *Masra cleopetra*, *Majnun Layla*, *Qamabiz*, *Ali al Akbar*, *Antara* and *Alasta Huda*.

Shawqi's main guide was al-Barudi, whom he closely followed in style, classical poetries of Abbasid period was enthusiastically read by him. He praised his patron in the same way and used similar contractions like al Mutanabbi, the greatest Arab eulogist. The impact of Abbasid poet, Abu Nuas in using lighter metres and short verses is vividly seen in his wine poems, he copied rhyme and metre of al-Buhtari.

He composed on Egyptian history : *Kibar al Hadith fi wadi'l Nile* was recited by him in 1894 at the conference of orientalist in Geneva. Shawqi followed the French romanticist, Alfred de Musset, Lamartine and Victor Hugo. His tenure at palace affected the form and content of his poems. Shawqi devoted himself to the study of Arab classics generally and Andalusian poetry in particular. He was very careful about his verse, took extra pain and carved out almost flawless verses that charmed the majority of his readers. He projected his new ideas and contemporary values in the framework of the Arabic *Qasida*. His compositions are the best tradition of Abbasid poetry characterized by an elegance of form (*Al-rasana*) and purity of style (*Al-Jazala*). His construction were powerful and smooth following. Shawqi selects his words with care, realising that the vocabulary that has emerged during the renaissance fell short of his poetic requirements. He revived a number of forgotten words from old Arabic and used them in new shades and meaning. His verses were melodious and musical with a refined taste. He used long sonorous metres for poems on political themes. He used metaphors and similes of classical poetry. The poem *sphinx*, *The Nile*, *Andalusia*, *Damascus*, *Zahla* are coloured with historical and imaginative flashbacks. Fine thoughts and feelings are portrayed with great sensitivity in the poems of Shawqi- e.g. *Aminah*, *His cat*, and *His lost youth*, *Tutankhaman*, *Qasar Anas al wajud*, on the fort of the Pyramids, poems on Andalusia, Rome, Paris, Tokyo, Nepolian are some of his historical poems.

He composed many poems on Islam, on Books on places on heroes of Islam e.g. *al-Hamziytaal Nabawiya*, *al-Burda* and on the life of some national leaders like Mohatma Gandhi, while he was passing through Egypt on his way to the Round Table Conference in 1931.

He wrote some rhymed prose namely - *Asuwak as jahab* and some stories like *La Yas*, *Warakat ul As*, *Midh Karat*, *Bita thaur*, *Amirul Andulas* etc., and *Kitabul Ujma* as child book, *Al-Basfur Ka anna ka tarahu* is one of his descriptive poems.

Shawqi's output was prodigious. He was a versatile poet who contributed to the development of many old and new poetic types. His poetry demonstrate a stupendous command of language and a captivating sonority. In his poetic diction and techniques he depended heavily on the Abbasid master, but he was also capable of deviating from classical conventions and exploring new poetic moods and genres.

Shauqi's Poems on Nationalism

Shauqi's poetry is dealt with national sentiment such as the conflict of Arabs with the imperialist powers, their struggle to improve the lot of the poor and their effort for social upliftment and education and contemporary issues, composed in the second stage of his poetic career, i.e. last 13 years of his life. He requested the countrymen to remove backwardness and dishonour and to struggle against imperialism. Love for his country is brought out in many of his poems about nationalism. He described the Arab world as an organic whole, a human body, where every part feels the pain or calamity that may strike one corner. The poem on the French bombing in Damascus is one of his most relevant patriotic poems. He tried to compare their present with their glorious past to take support to awake the common people easily against the western influence. Consequently not only Egypt, but also entire Arab countries were getting inspirations and woke up from the long slumber. Therefore they determined to throw away the yoke of the imperialist. In order to enhance his susceptibilities, national spirit and the Egyptian began increasingly praising and co-operating in his national campaign. The Egyptian people held a public celebration in honour of this great nationalist poet in the Govt. Opera house. Shawqi invented long narrative poems on the Arab nationalism and on general events. We find extreme nationalism in his following poems : Dualul Arab, Wadiun Nile, Arjujah, Ayatul Asre Fi Samaye Mesre, Sadaya al Harb, Aya sufia, Majkeratu Yata shaur, La Yas Warakatul As, Ar Reqqu Wal Hurriyat and Nashidul Watane.

Ar Reqqu Wal Hurriyat

Shawqi in his poem Ar Reqqu Wal Hurriyat, refers to a canari bird in cage as the sign of slavery of Egypt under the British rule. He gave a vivid description of the imprisoned bird, living in a sad, deplorable as well as unhappy condition in the cage, though the cage might be made of gold, and although the bird is given delicious food to it. The bird was sad because it needs freedom, which is the most valuable, in born and fundamental right of a living being. Exploitation and cunningness of the strong one upon the weak one is vividly portrayed in this poem. In the concluding lines of the poem, the poet again thought of his country Egypt and is reminded of its slavery and therefore he asked the canari to sing and to bear the glad tidings of its bright future to the sons of the Egyptian nation.

Nashidul Watan :

Towards the end of the 19th century, when Egypt came under the British domination, Egyptian were shocked greatly and humiliated. Their patriotic sense was awakened and they tried to regain their lost independence, past achievements, pride and glory of their nation. The poem Nashidul Watan was contented with patriotic feelings and sentiments making a direct appeal to nationalism. The poet, Shawqi wanted to arouse the Egyptian people, reminding their glorious past and requested the Egyptian to defend their freedom and save their homeland and properties and their lives by ransoming the whole world, if required.

Conclusion :

Ahmad Shauqi Bek was a great nationalist poets of Egypt. He could not tolerate the deplorable and painful condition of Egyptian people and of the unhappy Egypt under the British as well as France domination after the great wars. Shauqi preached his command of Jihad (Holy war) through his poems and patriotic songs to awaken and to fight against the western colonialism and to regain their lost independence and to save their lives and properties from the cruel hand of foreign power. He compared the past Egypt along with its peace, prosperity and glorious achievements to rouse the national sentiment of the common masses against the foreign rule. He wanted to make his nation mighty, strong and powerful. Therefore, in the leadership of Madrassa al-Haditha the Egyptian wanted to throw away the yoke of the imperialist to attain statehood of their own. He called

upon the general people to make themselves free from the slavery of British as well as France rule. The poems of Shauqi exhorted great influence on the whole of Arabia and Egypt that they woke up from their long slumber and prepared themselves to fight and resist the foreigner and tried to free the country from the shackles of colonial rule and to attain statehood of their own.

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