



ASPECTS OF PATRIOTISM REFLECTED IN THE POETICAL VERSES OF AHMAD SHAWQI: A BRIEF STUDY

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Abstract

Ahmad Shawqi (1868–1932), widely known as Amīr al-Shu‘arā’ (the Prince of Poets), occupies a distinguished position in modern Arabic literature. His poetry reflects the intellectual and political transformation of Egypt during the period of colonial domination and the rise of modern national consciousness. Among the major themes of his poetic works, patriotism occupies a central place. Shawqi’s patriotic poetry expresses love for Egypt, resistance to foreign domination, attachment to national history, the importance of freedom, unity and sacrifice, and the close emotional relationship between the individual and the homeland. This article briefly examines the major aspects of patriotism reflected in selected verses of Ahmad Shawqi. It also reviews relevant scholarly studies concerning his nationalist and patriotic poetry. The study argues that Shawqi transformed traditional Arabic poetic forms into an effective medium for expressing modern national consciousness and public sentiment. His poetry therefore represents an important stage in the development of modern Arabic patriotic literature.

Keywords: Ahmad Shawqi, patriotism, nationalism, Egypt, Arabic poetry, al-Shawqiyyāt.

INTRODUCTION:

Patriotism is one of the most significant themes in modern Arabic poetry. The political and social changes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries encouraged Arab poets to move beyond traditional themes such as praise, satire, elegy and personal love. Poetry increasingly became a means of expressing public concerns, defending freedom and awakening national consciousness. In Egypt, Ahmad Shawqi emerged as one of the most influential poets who gave powerful literary expression to patriotic feeling.

Shawqi lived during a politically sensitive period in Egyptian history, particularly under British domination. His poetry reflects the concerns of his society and demonstrates a gradual development from personal attachment to the royal court toward a wider concern for Egypt, its people and its national future. Modern scholarship commonly recognises his importance in shaping a national literature and in addressing questions of national identity, politics and society through poetry. His patriotic poems were also circulated through newspapers and reached a broad public audience.

The patriotism of Ahmad Shawqi is not limited to political slogans. It includes emotional attachment to the homeland, respect for national history, the desire for freedom, condemnation of foreign domination, calls for unity and an appreciation of sacrifice. These themes are expressed through elevated language, classical poetic techniques and powerful imagery.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

A number of studies have examined the patriotic dimension of Ahmad Shawqi’s poetry. One of the most directly relevant studies is “National Manifestations in the Poems of the Prince of Poets Ahmed Shawqi” by Abdul Halim Saleh, Mohd Hafeez Bin Mohamad Sharif and Abdul Halim Samae. The study adopts descriptive and analytical methods and examines patriotic themes in al-Shawqiyyāt. Its findings emphasise the importance of Shawqi’s poetry in expressing national themes, tracing stages of patriotism in his life and identifying the influence of his poetry on Egyptian society.



Similarly, Mohammed Hafees's comparative research on the patriotic poetry of Mahmoud Sami al-Barudi and Ahmad Shawqi investigates the contribution of both poets to the development of patriotic consciousness in Egypt. The study concludes that Shawqi gave patriotic themes a wider scope and treated national issues extensively, thereby contributing significantly to the renewal of modern Arabic poetic purposes.

Another important study examines Shawqi's concept of freedom in his poem "Yā Ayyuhā al-Sā'il Mā al-Ḥurriyyah" ("O Questioner, What Is Freedom?"). Using New Historicism, the researchers interpret freedom in Shawqi's poetry as something precious and sacred, a source of national strength and a form of sacrifice. This interpretation is especially relevant because freedom and patriotism are closely connected in Shawqi's national vision.

Yaseen Noorani, in his study of Ahmad Shawqi and world literature, argues that Shawqi drew upon the prestige of classical Arabic poetic tradition while attempting to create a modern national literature. This observation is important for understanding Shawqi's achievement: he did not completely abandon the traditional qaṣīdah, but employed its authority and artistic prestige to communicate modern political and national ideas.

Thus, the existing literature demonstrates that Shawqi's patriotic poetry should be understood in relation to colonialism, Egyptian national identity, the quest for freedom and the literary transformation of the modern Arab world.

DETAILED DISCUSSION OF THE TOPIC:

1. LOVE FOR THE HOMELAND

The most prominent aspect of patriotism in Ahmad Shawqi's poetry is his deep emotional attachment to Egypt. His love for the homeland becomes particularly intense in the famous lines:

وطني لو شُغِلْتُ بالخلد عنه
 نازعتني إليه في الخلد نفسي

Translation: My homeland, even if I were occupied with Paradise away from it, my soul would still long for it even in Paradise.

These lines express the depth of Shawqi's attachment to Egypt. The homeland is presented as an inseparable part of the poet's soul. Even Paradise cannot completely remove his longing for his country. The verse therefore presents patriotism not merely as a political position but as a profound emotional and spiritual relationship.

Another famous expression of his love for Egypt is:

لِلْوَطَنِ فِي دَمِ كُلِّ حُرٍّ
 يَدٌ سَلَفَتْ وَدَيْنٌ مُسْتَحَقُّ

Translation: In the blood of every free person, the homeland has a favour already granted and a debt that must be repaid.

Here Shawqi presents patriotism as a moral obligation. The individual receives benefits from the homeland and therefore has a responsibility to serve and protect it. Patriotism, according to this understanding, is not only an emotion but also a duty.

2. FREEDOM AS A NATIONAL IDEAL:

Another major aspect of patriotism in Shawqi's poetry is the desire for freedom. Egypt's political condition under foreign domination made liberty a central concern of modern Egyptian intellectuals. Shawqi's poem on freedom presents it as



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something sacred, valuable and necessary for national strength. Scholarly analysis has identified three important dimensions of freedom in this poem: freedom as something precious, freedom as a source of national power and freedom as requiring sacrifice.

This concept reflects a broader principle in Shawqi's patriotic poetry: a nation cannot achieve dignity without freedom. For Shawqi, political independence is closely connected with human dignity and collective strength. His poetry therefore encourages people to recognise the value of liberty and to reject humiliation and foreign control.

3. RESISTANCE TO FOREIGN DOMINATION:

Shawqi's patriotic poetry also reflects resistance to colonial domination. The political circumstances of Egypt influenced his literary consciousness and encouraged him to address the relationship between national dignity and foreign occupation. Modern reference works describe his poetry as strongly associated with Egyptian anti-colonial sentiment.

His patriotic verses did not always take the form of direct political slogans. Instead, he often employed historical references, symbolic language and emotional appeals. This indirect method enabled him to connect contemporary political concerns with the larger history of Egypt and the Arab world.

Shawqi's poetry demonstrates that literature can become a form of cultural resistance. By celebrating Egypt's identity, history and dignity, he encouraged readers to develop a stronger sense of national belonging. His poems therefore contributed to the intellectual and emotional environment in which modern Egyptian nationalism developed.

4. NATIONAL UNITY AND COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY:

A further aspect of Shawqi's patriotism is his emphasis on unity. A nation, in his poetic vision, is strengthened when its people are united in purpose. National weakness, by contrast, may result from internal division and political disagreement.

Shawqi therefore moves beyond the individual voice of the traditional poet and speaks for a wider community. His use of collective ideas such as the nation, the people, freedom and Egypt transforms poetry into a public medium. His work addresses the concerns of society and encourages citizens to recognise their collective responsibilities.

The patriotic poet thus becomes not merely an observer but also a moral guide. He reminds people that the progress and dignity of the homeland depend upon their actions. The existing scholarship on Shawqi's patriotic poetry similarly emphasises his role in stimulating national feeling and responding to Egyptian national movements.

5. SACRIFICE FOR THE NATION

The concept of sacrifice is closely connected with Shawqi's patriotic thought. Love for the homeland becomes meaningful when citizens are willing to place the national interest above personal comfort. His understanding of freedom also implies sacrifice, since valuable national ideals cannot always be achieved without courage and commitment.

This theme is also reflected in his dramatic poetry. Studies of Shawqi's historical dramatic works suggest that he frequently employed historical characters and events to promote patriotism, national responsibility and devotion to the country. Historical drama thus became another literary instrument through which he could communicate patriotic values to Egyptian society.

The emphasis on sacrifice demonstrates the ethical dimension of Shawqi's patriotism. A true patriot, in his poetic philosophy, is not simply someone who praises the homeland but someone who is prepared to work for its welfare and dignity.



6. PRIDE IN HISTORY AND NATIONAL HERITAGE

Shawqi also expresses patriotism through pride in Egyptian and Arab history. The past serves as a source of inspiration for the present. By recalling historical personalities and events, he reminds his audience that nations possess a cultural memory that can strengthen their confidence and identity.

This historical consciousness is particularly significant in a colonial context. When foreign powers dominate a country politically, the preservation and celebration of cultural heritage can become a form of intellectual resistance. Shawqi's poetry connects the present with the past and encourages his readers to see themselves as heirs to a great civilisation.

At the same time, his poetic nationalism is not simply backward-looking. He uses the past to inspire reform and progress in the present. Thus, history becomes a source of moral strength rather than merely an object of nostalgia.

7. ARTISTIC FEATURES OF SHAWQI'S PATRIOTIC POETRY:

The effectiveness of Shawqi's patriotic poetry also depends upon its artistic qualities. He remained strongly connected to the classical Arabic poetic tradition, yet he introduced modern subjects into that inherited form. This combination of tradition and modernity is one of his major literary achievements.

His patriotic poems frequently employ powerful imagery, emotional language, repetition and elevated diction. The homeland is sometimes personified and treated almost as a living being. Freedom is represented as something sacred and precious, while national decline is associated with weakness and humiliation.

Shawqi's classical style also gave authority to his political message. The traditional qaṣīdah had a respected position in Arabic literary culture, and Shawqi successfully used this prestigious form to communicate modern concerns. His poetry therefore forms a bridge between the classical Arabic heritage and the political realities of the modern age.

CONCLUSION:

The patriotic poetry of Ahmad Shawqi represents an important development in modern Arabic literature. His verses reflect a deep love for Egypt, attachment to national identity, resistance to foreign domination, respect for freedom, calls for unity and willingness to sacrifice for the homeland. His famous expression of longing for his country demonstrates that patriotism in his poetry is both emotional and ethical.

A review of scholarly literature confirms that Shawqi played a significant role in the development of patriotic poetry and modern national consciousness. His poetry was closely connected with the political and social conditions of Egypt, while his artistic method combined the strength of classical Arabic poetry with modern themes of nationalism and freedom.

Therefore, Ahmad Shawqi may be regarded not only as a great traditional poet but also as a significant literary voice of modern Egyptian patriotism. Through his poetry, love for the homeland became an elevated moral principle connected with freedom, dignity, unity and sacrifice. His patriotic verses continue to occupy an important position in the history of modern Arabic literature.

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