

Development of Modern Arabic Poetry with Special Reference of Ahmad Shawqi: A Study

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Abstract:

Arabic is often called the language of poets. The Arabs themselves consider poetry to be the spirit of Arabic language. This attitude towards the poetic literary genre can be explained by them considering the literary heritage that is bestowed upon them. They have a strong connection with classical poets and even today poetry is the most popular literary genre among the Arabs and the literary mode reflects their sense of self-identity, history and cultural values. In Arabic poetry the classical qasida is the first thing that comes into the mind and the strictly structured classical poems represent the elevation of the classical Arabic literature with omission of the Quran, as it has held an agreement position throughout the Arab history.

This paper highlights the gradual development of modern Arabic poetry in general and contribution of Ahmad Shawqi in particular. Ahmad Shawqi left no stone unturned for the development of Arabic poetry. He tried his best to create the height of his great poetical gifts. The fertility of his genius during the last few years of his life was truly amazing and it is a melancholy reflection that his best may have remained unwritten. So great a genius, however, is never lost to literature and repercussions of his truly original mind and well-nigh inexhaustible energy will continue to be felt for many years to come. We may conclude by a quotation from his 'diwan' which is a reflection of the movement history of the Arab society.

Keywords: Modern Arabic poetry, Shawqiyyat, social sense, self-expression, etc.

Introduction:

The most primitive examples of Arabic poetry that are available today were recorded in writing after the revelation of the Quran, but they belong to the tradition of orally transmitted poetry that goes back several centuries; by the very nature of the transfer process from one poet and bard to the next generation. The primary context of those poets and their poems are the desert atmosphere and the tribes who tended their flora and fauna there prime amongst them, camels and horses. The poems i.e., the major jewels of their literary heritage are thus full of imagery of the desert-sand, wind, the occasional rain-cloud and celebrate companionship and tribal solidarity while acknowledging the dangers of desert life and the need for sterling qualities to confront them.

The poets duly trained to serve as tribal propagandists, recited odes in praise of their tribe and its leaders. They even elegized those who had died in battle. They scoffed at their enemies in cutting lampoons. When tribes met for annual celebrations, there would inevitably be poetic jousts, adjudicated by discriminating audiences made up of the tribesmen themselves and their poets. Most notable among these very early poems in Arabic are the seven Mu'allaha. Its thematic poems are celebrating tribal values that were recognized for their length and the authenticity of their vision regarding the tribal life of the desert.

Aftermath of the Second World War brought tremendous changes to the Arabic speaking world. Many countries achieved independence in the following decade i.e.

1950s. Natures of poetry and the roles of the poet were drastically malformed as part of that process of political and social conversion. Hundreds of poets become famous in the Arabic-speaking world in the last half century.

Development of Modern Arabic Poetry:

The Arabic is often called the language of poets. The Arabs themselves consider poetry to be the spirit of Arabic language. This attitude towards the poetic literary genre can be explained by them considering the literary heritage that is bestowed upon them. They have a strong connection with classical poets and even today poetry is the most popular literary genre among the Arabs and the literary mode reflects their sense of self-identity, history and cultural values. In Arabic poetry the classical qasida is the first thing that comes into the mind and the strictly structured classical poems represent the elevation of the classical Arabic literature with omission of the Quran, as - it has held an agreement position throughout the Arab history. The pre-Islamic poetry, with its fixed construction in the form of metre and rhyme, held an influence on Arabic literature until the 20th century. During the Dark Ages, Arabic poetry came to a stand-still with no new influences reaching the Arab world, a period that was the least productive period of the Arabic cultural history. The major political changes in the Arab world of the 19th century had a great impact on the themes and form of Arabic poetry.

In the Nahda period Arabic literature started to develop again and unadventurously divided into three parts: neo-classic, romantic and modern. Attempts to break free from the form of the qasida were made already in the 19th century, e.g., in the form of blank verse, but it was until the 1950s and the poetic improvements of two Iraqi poets that the Free Verse Movement gained ground. With it the experimentations of form and content in poetry that had begun 200 years earlier had finally started to establish as an accepted poetic form, and what we today call modern Arabic poetry was introduced. This happened as a result of a decade of revolution in the Arab world in which a part of the course of development was the literary genres.

Poetry as an art form uses words and language not merely to express meaning or content, but to symbolize meaning and content the point of origin. The essence of poetry is not something above or beyond the words on the page, but the words themselves in their own right and in combination with the other levels of text, i.e. the line, stanza and poem as a whole.

The poetry is an institution that relies heavily on sense and effect motivates the study of the actual linguistic signs that create this effect, since poetry might be the one literary genre where the sense is in the closest connection to the linguistic form. The meaning of a poem could be said to be the form, and form is constitutive of content and not just a reflection of it. A large proportion of all Arabic poetry is written using the mono rhyme, qasida. This is simply the same rhyme used on every line of a poem. While this may seem a poor rhyme scheme for people used to western literature it makes sense in a language like Arabic which has only three vowels which can be either long or short.

The presence of the French in Syria, Lebanon and North Africa, and of the British in Iraq, Palestine and Egypt, produced a climate of frustration and malaise. Helpless too in the face of socio-economic problems, the intellectuals of the Arab world and Mahjar, particularly their

poets, preferred to flee from reality into an imaginary world of beauty and dreams and understandably romanticism became the predominant school of poetic expression.

In the early forties, however, the romanticists confined to the ivory tower with their escapist literature, came under heavy fire of criticism. Times had changed and with them came an increasing awareness of the problems of the masses. Some intellectuals turned to Marxism for a remedy to reduce the burden of the poor and erase corruption in public life.

An outstanding development of modern Arabic poetry is Ramziyya (symbolism). The Arab poets adopted the symbolism from the west as a reaction against the poetry of the preceding generation, represented by the neo-classicists Shawqi and Hafiz and the Apollo movement characterized by Wijdan or emotion, which extolled sentimental subjectivism and came to be condemned by avant-garde writers for its shallowness.

It was around 1935 that symbolism made it felt, remaining at first confined to small literary groups. Bashar Faris and Said Aql were among the early experiments of this school. The Arab symbolists aimed at alchemy of language based on the message of Baudelaire and of Rimbaud, Mallarme and Valery. Many symbolists make distant allusions and references and throw a thick fog round the sense of the word putting undue strain on the reader to find their meaning. Ila Za'ira, poem by Faris is particularly hard to understand.

Social realism played the vital role in the development of modern Arabic poetry. It was introduced into Arabic language after the World War I but became important only after the World War II. It called for the involvement of poetry in the problems of society, instead of its concern for the isolated individual. Realism grew as a result of national and political awakening and the acceptance by the intellectuals that individuality has no scope except within the sphere of public experience as the realism avers that it is the people at large who really count and calls for a concentrated struggle to establish the common man's dignity and happiness, whether they be the problems of Palestine or the freedom struggle. It requires that a poet should not close his eyes or look away from his environment by remaining in an ivory tower. The emphasis on the problem of the common man called for few techniques, making this poetry different from the neo-classical in metre, rhyme, musical intonations and the arrangement of verses. The prominent exponents of this school are Salah Abdus Subur of Egypt; Abdul Wahab Bayati of Iraq and Jili Abdur Rahman of Sudan. Nizar Qabbani and Kamal Nas'at are also shown realist trends in their poems.

Contribution of Ahmad Shawqi to the development of Arabic Poetry:

Ahmad Shawqi is considered the prince of poets (Amir Al Shuwara) of modern Arabic poetry. He was born in 1868 in an aristocratic family of Cairo. His father was a government official of no very high rank. He was fond of relating that he numbered among his ancestors, besides Egyptians, Arabs, Turks, Greeks and Circassian.

Opposing the traditional education, he joined the Law School and in 1887 he went to Montpellier in order to complete his Law degree. In Montpellier he came into close contact with the French peasants, with whom he loved to live and talk and how deep an influence these years in Europe had on him is reflected throughout his writings and perhaps more especially by the fact that it was at this time that he made the first draft of a drama 'Ali Bey the Great' a historical drama of the Mamelukes, which he did not ultimately complete until the years of his death. During his stay at Montpellier, he composed some of his curious poems, poems of great erudition, which might have been written by a court-poet of the fourth

century and which in his printed "diwan" is furnished with copious footnotes quite indispensable to their interpretation. He came back to Egypt after six years travelling widely in Europe and he gathered all aspect of its culture.

After his return from Montpellier, he became attached to the service of the Khedive, and enjoyed the confidence of Tawfiq with great skill. He became the chief spokesman of the next Khedive, Abbas II, gaining an envious position of authority. On the deposal of Abbas II in 1914, he was asked to leave Egypt and as a result he went to Barcelona and he lived there throughout the World War I. This exile period was the bitterest experience for him because first of all he missed his mother land, Egypt and he came to know about the human cares and sufferings which caused an end of his relation with the court. When he came back to Cairo, the country was in the grip of the 1919 revolution. He responded to the mood of the nation and turning away from the themes that pleased the rulers, he took up the cause of the common man.

Ahmad Shawqi was acclaimed 'Amir al-Shu'ara' (Prince of Poets) by a general consensus of eminent poets. As a prolific poet, he has written more than any of his contemporary poets. He 'diwan' entitled 'al-Shawqiyyat' was published in two volumes in 1898 and the third and fourth volumes published after his death which took place in 1932.

Ahmad Shawqi has concentrated in every aspect of human life. His verses consist of social poetry including eulogics, elegies, descriptions and occasional poetry. Besides the poems he wrote some valuable verse plays like Masra Kilutatra (The Fall of Cleopatra), Majnun Layla etc.

Ahmad Shawqi started composing poetry at the age of fourteen inspired by his teacher sheikh Muhammad al-Baysuni, a great poet of the age. It was a eulogy to Tawfiq which earned him a place at the royal court.

Apart from the very considerable bulk of poetry of the strictly classical type Shawqi also wrote much in which he is consciously striving after the creation of something new in Arabic verse. Among his most interesting experiments, the distinguished epic - on the history of the early Muslim Caliphs is outstanding which is written in rhyming couplets in imitation of the Persian epic and it may be regarded as marking an epoch in Arabic poetry.

The problems which faced Shawqi in his desire to create new forms were twofold like the problem of form it and the problem of prosody, with which is bound up the problem of vocabulary. His greatest and by most important contribution to the problem of form was his creation of the lyrical drama which is a unique contribution To Arabic poetry. Nobody can deny its immortal value in modern Arabic literature.

The forte of Ahmad Shawqi is imagery. He draws freely from the vast repertoire of similes and metaphors of classical poetry and deploys them such as an artist would use lines and colours in a painting. Describing the ruins, he started with a general view of the palace, half sunk in water, but which holds itself together through sheer fright and terror. He depicts the carving as if the sculptor had etched them only the day before. The paint is shining and lustrous as oil and the lines have the grace of gazelles. The sacrificial objects seem to be moving to the high altar and the priests perform their rituals in the fragrance of musk.

The theme of the poetry of Ahmad Shawqi is varied. He portrayed the pictures of human life in contemporary Egypt and for this he used the technique as a minute craftsman can be seen in his poems about nature, which he also projected with similes and images of classical poetry.

Conclusion:

Shawqi left no stone unturned for the development of Arabic poetry. He tried his best to create the height of his great poetical gifts. The fertility of his genius during the last Ten years of his life was truly amazing and it is a melancholy reflection that his best may have remained unwritten. So great a genius, however, is never lost to literature and repercussions of his truly original mind and well-nigh inexhaustible energy will continue to be felt for many years to come.

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