

# The Reflection of Constitutionism in the Poems of Ahmad Shoqi and Mohammad Taqi-e Bahar

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**ABSTRACT:** Public awareness, freedom, justice, legalism, fighting against tyranny, patriotism, and in a word “constitutionalism” are considered as important contemporary events of Iran and some other surrounded countries. Therefore, this research examines the common theme in the poetry of both contemporary poets “Ahmad Shoqi”, the Egyptian poet and “Mohammad Taqi Bahar”, the Iranian one. Ahmad Shpqi and Mohammad Taqi Bahar speak in two different languages and live in two various countries, but constitutional themes are common in the poems of both poets. It reflects the social and cultural relations between Iran and Egypt. These two poets are demanding for constitutional and parliamentary system based on law and justice with capable, competent and wise ruler. It is a system which provides people’s welfare and progress and prevents cruelty. However, unfortunately, the constitutional system during these two poets era is not growing as it should be in Iran and Egypt. The opponents of constitutional category rule over the assembly and other organs of the state and country faces with chaos and confusion. Hence, both the poets call for the people to preserve and protect their country.

**Key Words:** Ahmad Shoqi, Mohammad Taqi Bahar, Constitutionalism, Egypt, Iran.

## INTRODUCTION

Revolution in France and other western countries and establishing governments which respect to the people’s role and consequently the scientific and cultural development have influenced other countries of the world. The relation of Islamic countries’ people such as Iran and Egypt with western countries in recent decades has paved the way for their awareness. This awareness causes major political, social and cultural changes in these countries and brought about freedom thoughts, justice, legalism, fighting against domestic tyranny and foreign imperialism, patriotism and etc.

The establishment of constitutional law in 1923 and parliament in 1924 was considered as turning point of these developments in Egypt. (Yaghi, 1421: 264) Since the signing of constitutionalism decree on 1906 by Muzaffar al-Din Shah Qajar and the formation of first national assembly and the drafting of constitutional law in the same year were considered as the turning point of developments in Iran. (Kasravi, 2005: 172)

Seyyed Jamal al-Din Asad Abadi was one of the Iranian fighter characters and founders of National Islamic Unity who had an important role in awareness of Islamic people, for protecting them against domestic tyranny and foreign imperialism. He lit up the seed of freedom and fighting against tyranny and imperialism in people’s minds by his fiery and strong words when saying: “strong breeze of regeneration blows in the East the autocratic rule would be fallen down. Be determined and destroy the basis of this authority.” (Agand, 1984: 18) The first blow against Qajar tyranny was because of the words and movements of Seyyed Jamal al-Din and in this way, Naser al-Din Shah, the autocrat king of Qajar was killed by one of his disciples named Mirza Reza Kermani (Ibid, 18)

He was also active in Egypt against despotism and colonialism and in addition to the formation of local party and newspaper publication, he trained disciples like Mohammad Abde and Saad Zaghloul who had an

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important role in establishment of constitutional and parliamentary system in the country. (Modarresi Chahardehi, 2002: 188-189)

Constitutional revolution and the rule of law are considered as an important event a turning point in the history of Iran and Egypt which changed extensively the structure of these two countries and raised enthusiasm in different social groups and introduced new aspirations in which the literature of this period played a significant role in the expression of these ideals.

The literature of constitutional era played a new and critical social and political roles, since then, new themes and ideas resulted from constitutional movements were introduced in this era. Consequently, the poets joined to the liberals and revolutionaries and carried on some of their responsibilities and duties.

### ***The Life of Ahmad Shoqi***

Shoqi was born in Cairo in 1868 at the time of Khedive Esmail. He was recognized as the poet of Abbas Pasha Court in 1891. With the onset of World War I, Britain declared Egypt as its own protectorate and dethroned Abbas Pasha and exiled Ahmad Shoqi, the poet of Abbas court to Spain by the permission of selecting the place to be exiled. Shoqi selected Spain, because it reminded him the memory of Amjad Arab. (Fakhuri, 1998: 974)

Thus, Shoqi felt poverty, sorrow and homesickness and it is the same thing that Shoqi Zeif refers to it, in this way the new poem of Egypt required the growth of Shoqi's soul to be developed and be close to his countrymen. (Zeif, 1953: 32)

Shoqi returned to his country in 1920 after the World War I, and participated in political and social activities instead of interring to the palace and started to fight against foreign imperialism and domestic tyranny and dedicated his poem to the protection of national and ethnic issues. He became one of the members of Egyptian representatives' assembly in 1927 and a memorial ceremony was held for him at the same year in Cairo Opera House. Hafiz Ibrahim, on behalf of Egyptian poets and Arab world joined to Shoqi as "the Master of Poets". (Zeif, 1953: 37)

"Ahmad Zaki Abdolhalim" refers to this category in his book titled "Ahmad Shoqi, the National Poet" and adds that Shoqi is one who fought against tyranny and could to complete his national duty. So, no doubt that Shoqi deserves the title of "the Master of Poets" and also the title of "National Poet". (Atavi, 1989: 12) Shoqi spent his time to poetry since 1927 and eventually died on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1932.

### ***The Life of Muhammad Taqi Bahar***

Bahar was born in Mashhad in 1877. Since, he composed an ode in praise of Muzaffer al-Din Shah, he titled "the Master of Poets" of Astan Quds Razavi at the age of 18 after his father. (Bahar, 2009: 6) He participates in political activities at the age of twenty and joins to the liberals and constitutional activists and takes part in national destiny of Iranian people. He also produced Khorasan newspaper by the help of liberals and published his first literary work and political-social poems containing the basic concepts of "freedom" and "patriotism" in this newspaper. (Sepanlou, 2003: 15-16)

Bahar was selected as the representative of Khorasan and Tehran's people in National Consultative Assembly and he was exiled to Bojnourd, because of opposing the ruling powers in 1915 and 1933. Political actions did not result in stop of literary works by Bahar. In the way that, he produced the faculty's literary magazine and introduced the European literature to people. This magazine had a profound influence on the revival of literary movement of Iran. (Ibid, 31-32)

The political activities of individuals like Bahar were stopped in 1925 by the demise of Qajar dynasty and starting the reign of Reza shah and beginning of his dictatorship. He restarted his political and social activities in 1941 with the fall of Reza Shah and wrote and published essays titled "A Brief History of Political Parties" (Ibid, 121)

He died because of tuberculosis on April, 1951.

### ***Commemoration of constitutional system and support it***

Shoqi and Bahar who were strong speakers of people were demanding constitutional and parliamentary systems and were calling people for preserving and protecting the homeland and constitutional system.

A system which aims to limit and constrain tyrannical power of king, formation of national assembly and legalism and providing a condition in which people are involved in their own destiny, establishing freedom, justice, prosperity and country's independence.

Yes, both poets were from believers and lovers of constitutional system and believed deeply in constitutional system and legalism.

Ahmad Shoqi enunciates the establishment of constitutional system and law and consultative assembly by Caliph "Sultan Abdul Hamid II to the Egyptian people in a qasida titled "Alosmani Order" and considers it approved by God.

Good tidings to people near and far, supporters of the caliphate who protected caliphate by constitutional law. When the caliph found out that caliphate is not valid, he made an attempt to develop it by help of consultative and representative assembly.

It is the same council that God states it. God's Book deserves it and considers it valuable. (Shoqi, 2008: 212-213/1)

Ahmad Shoqi's great emphasis on the category of legalism demonstrates his knowledge and enlightenment. He believes that rulers and ministers develop and construct their lands by establishing constitutional law not with swords and spears.

They construct their lands by establishing constitutional law not with swords and spears. (Ibid, 384/1)

He believes that the legitimacy of every government should be depend on constitutional law, otherwise no coronation is legal and proper and if it was not according to the law, it is invalid. (Ibid, 384/1)

He also calls Egyptian people for welcoming the draft of constitutional law and wants them to obey it.

Now, welcome the era of "Guidance" whereas it is based on the law from the beginning. (Ibid, 131/1)

Shoqi also attributes the glory and victory to the constitutional law and says:

"The truth is obvious and it is placed in a leathery space and the glory and greatness belong to the law. (Ibid, 395/1)

He also addresses "Fuad I", the brother of "Hussein Kamel" and opposes to the dictatorship ruling which is against freedom and says:

O Pharaoh! The dictatorship period has been passed and arrogant and rebellious government has been changed and the rulers in every land obey the peasants' words. (Ibid: 203/1)

He also states elsewhere:

The worst government is the one which has one person in charge of political affairs while it is consisted of so many people. (Ibid, 129/1)

Bahar approves and respects the constitutional system and legalism and this category is obvious in a qasida titled "in the praise of constitutional law's endorsement" written in praising the sign of constitutional law by Muzaffer al-Din Shah in Mashhad in 1905:

The kingdom is a house, its basis is justice

It is not house, if there is no base

If a country is constructed by generosity

It is better to its fence be built by iron and steel

Thanks God, the king employed generosity in construction of the country

The justice king, Muzaffer al-Din Shah

One who resist against oppression by his justice

Because of establishing law in such country

The kingdom always remains fresh and pleasant (Bahar, 2009: 48)

Since the formation of constitutional law and commitment to it is the essence of constitutionalism, it is said that the justice is established in the shadow of law and in this way the violation disappeared, so one of the consequences of constitutionalism is justice and and elimination of oppression. Regarding this category, Bahar says:

Both the government and religion are related, but

These are sons considered as justice and the law is their mother

The mother should train his son

The law should be established in order to the kingdom be pleasant

The kingdom would be destroyed by tyranny of king

The village is deconstructed by the oppression of ealdorman

The kingdom which employs justice and law

It will be raised up to the tower of Gemini

(Ibid: 49)

Bahar is pleasant and satisfied by constitutionality and consultative assembly which is against Qajar tyranny and remembers it as the human head which is the command center and body balance. He believes that the ancient tree of tyranny is dried by assembly and law. The tyranny which has seized freedom from people and stifled the voices, now, the force of law and assembly can take power away from him and give the individual-centered category to the memory of the history. Regarding this, Bahar says:

Today everyone is hopeful, because the assembly is based on law

The head should be safe to preserve the body

The body cannot resist against the death

Nothing but the national assembly can cause the falling down of tyranny  
The angles oppose to the evils  
Nothing can be kept on by the power of law  
The train only moves upon the iron roads  
(Ibid: 592)

### ***Encouraging People for Electing the Qualified Representatives***

According to these poets the issues of assembly and law are more important to the extent that they ask people to elect ones as representatives in assembly who are qualified. Therefore, Ahmad Shoqi asks people to be careful about the election of parliament's representatives and select the wise and qualified persons.

I beg you and adjure you to the pure blood of our countrymen "don't send the ignorant people to the assembly". (Shoqi, 2008: 140/1)

Then, he warns that the seat of Parliament belongs to erudite, thoughtful, competent, trustee and intelligence people not stupid and slow-witted men, because they do not perform their duties pleasantly.

The questioner should ask the parliamentary seats whether they have carried a sewage human or a troublesome one. If you send an ineffective or inefficient representative to the parliament, he will not be a competent and sample one in future.

Select trustee individuals for these seats and consider sagacious ones as the best among them. (Ibid: 140/1)

The courage of expressing opinion and thought is one of the features which a representative should have and everyone does not have it. It is obvious in individuals who are responsible and humble. Regarding this category which everyone should have this feature, Shoqi says:

The courageous levels are more among men and the courage of expressing opinion and thought is the superior one. (Ibid: 20/2)

Therefore, people should consider this characteristic as one of the features of their own representative. Due to this category, he can defend the country and its people. Of course, in elsewhere Shoqi states that the number of such people with this feature are less: truly the courage in heart are more and on the contrary it is less in minds. (Ibid: 138/1)

Bahar addresses people and asks them to elect the representatives consciously and deliberately and think to their own prosperity behind their choice through his poems.

Think about an artful representative

But not according to the previous periods

Today it is not acquired that a representative should have a huge body and long beard

Ignore an appearance with no morale sense

And think about a scholar with no action

Today which is a prosperity day

Try in your prosperity too

Today, we should be careful about

Throwing the arrow which belongs to our religion

If we throw it wrongly

We will be encountered with more discomforts

I advise you sincerely

Listen to it from your bottom of heart

Don't forget that the fortune will help us

Be alert that it is the time of work (Bahar, 2009: 138-139)

He also has composed a poem and has criticized the way of election and different opinions and believes of persons who were gathered in election meetings according to specific purposes and introduced their friends as candidate. He complains and ask them to elect the persons who are fond of their homeland, because the assembly is the place of humans who are competent in all situations.

The last night, in the group of vote sellers

In the pure customs, this deed is not pleasant

He said to the pious men, don't sell the votes

Because the wise man who is fond of his homeland will protect you

Give your vote to him

He is not interested in ours properties and money

One who pays money to be the representative

In this way every competent and incapable person will entered to the assembly

The seats of assembly are not the stands of a shop

Only he knows tyranny and oppression

One who is the servant of cruelty

In all situations is alone (Ibid: 568-569)

He criticizes the people who pays attention to the appearance of individuals in election while laziness, timidity and other unpleasant features are considered as their innate characteristics. He addressed them in a poem titled "election cabal" and says:

Being representative is neither due to the modesty and well education

Nor understanding history, law and chemistry

But it is due to the laziness, timidity and disturbance

With boot, hat and a kind of hair style

Or due to praise, turban and the fold of it passed under the chin

The election was held and it is the beginning of cabal (Ibid: 179)

Frustration of constitutional settlement and criticism of its opponents

The constitutional movement was set up to people experience the sweet taste of constitutionalism outcomes which are justice, unanimity, fairness and freedom. But those who were opposed to the constitutional system prevented the realization of constitutionalists' desires. Therefore, the country was encountered with disturbance and Ahmad Shoqi and Bahar criticized this distressed situation in their poems. Shoqi shows his painful cries in his poems and suffers from the affliction of people and destroying the constitutional system which has been lasted for a short time. He claims that its reason is ignorance and foolishness:

Once I saw my tribe in more darkness

And I saw the constitutional law destroyed while it is in its early days

And the law did not remain safe against the tricks of the enemy and invaluable friend

I am sure that the ignorance is the pain of every unhealthy society (Shoqi, 2008: 165/1)

Bahar has blamed this assembly through a gasida titled "14<sup>th</sup> assembly". Because this assembly was not accepted by public and instead of renowned and competent representative, those occupied the seats who their national reputation was suspected. He says that:

Alas! This assembly and government

All they are ready for destroying the country

It is better the God is the owner of this universe

By two wise men, it would be prosper

But alas, this hypocritical group will not be silent

When a person comes to modify the situation

All are afraid of foreigner and defeated by covetousness

All are the brokers and carriers of evil

There is no choice, by God I am confused

To what extent the people of this state are patient (Bahar, 2009: 572)

Since freedom is one of the outcomes of constitutionalism, Bahar feels that it is in danger in the period of tyrannical reign of Mohammad Ali Shah-e Qajar. He considers the king against the freedom and cause of the disturbed situation and states his anger through this poem:

It is wrong to talk about freedom with the king of Iran

Iran's future would be in the hands of God (Ibid: 124)

Due to the fact that he wants to alert people and warn them about tyranny, he claims that the previous governments have fallen down because of tyranny and despotism. He composes:

At the beginning, the government was established by justice

But at the end, it encountered with tyranny and despotism

Due to this tyranny, he lost his kingdom

Yeah, truly the kingdom would be destroyed by tyranny (Ibid: 64)

## CONCLUSION

Both poets considers law and assembly as essential categories for establishing freedom and security and abolishing tyranny and limiting the king power. Shoqi considers a government legal, when it is approved by the law. He knows the law as the more efficient category in building lands than sword, spear, war and defend. Bahar also considers law necessary for prosperity but he demands a law which leads in justice, because the law without injustice is invaluable. Both of them define some features for representatives. According to Shoqi, they are being learned, courage in stating the opinion, and righteousness. Bahar considers a person as competent one who is a learned man that performs his promises and is a wise man who is fond of his land and he is unique in all situations specially in speaking and in not in relation with tyrants and those who are fond of worldly matters otherwise he will be a tyrant one. Additionally, Bahar warns the people to elect representative according to their nature not appearance. What a beautiful appearance which lacks a beautiful nature. Taking

vote by money is what annoys Bahar in the way that some incompetent persons enter to the assembly and one who is qualified remains out of the field. Bahar is more careful than Shoqi in this category and refer to essential points in electing the representatives.

Shoqi becomes aware of tricks of the enemy and friends' love in vain in short period of constitutionality and he considers ignorance and foolishness as the main reasons of constitutionality's failure and its short period and Bahar states that its reason is due to the disagreement of representatives with people in the way that they prefer their own interests rather than the peoples' and agree with enemy and be in accordance with them. Also the the tyranny of Iran's king is another factor which led to the deviance of law and assembly in people's opinion. Bahar courageously discourages the king to be tyrant and addresses him and reminds an example of despotism and tyranny of previous governments which were the reason of their failure. Due to the fact that Bahar has entered to the assembly as representative for several times and has observed the problems, he is more accurate in this category.

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