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TAK SABIR AS A UNIQUE VOICE IN AZERBAIJANI SATIRICAL PRESS

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Abstract. The history of the development of Azerbaijani satirical press occupies a special place both in the enrichment of national journalism in terms of form and content and in the process of raising the level of public consciousness. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the satirical tradition established by Mirza Alakbar Sabir created a significant turning point not only in poetry but also in the overall intellectual framework of national journalism. Sabir's sharp spirit of social criticism, his exposure of societal flaws through irony, and his reflection of enlightenment ideas in journalistic texts laid an ideological and stylistic foundation for subsequent examples of satirical press. In his poetry, he reinterpreted the confrontation between good and evil, benefit and harm, bravery and cowardice, light and darkness, life and death in a new way—particularly through antagonisms such as those between worker and capitalist, peasant and landlord, subject and ruler, and ideological divisions

Key words: Azerbaijani satirical press, Tak Sabir, Mirza Alakbar Sabir, social criticism, satire and journalism, public consciousness.

Introduction. In the history of Azerbaijani journalism, satirical publications have played a crucial role in shaping public consciousness. Although this tradition was initiated in the early twentieth century by the magazine Molla Nasreddin, satirical press later experienced periods of decline and marginalization due to political processes. However, the socio-political transformations of the late twentieth century—such as the collapse of Soviet censorship, the strengthening of national self-awareness, and the growing need for public criticism—created fertile ground for the revival of satirical press traditions in Azerbaijan. Under these conditions, the emergence of a new satirical newspaper became inevitable, and the name “Tak Sabir” has its own noteworthy history.

Discussion. In 1992, the Shirvan Charity Society was established, and upon the proposal of its newly elected chairman, Iskandar Etibar, the publication of the society's own press organ—a newspaper—was planned. Considering the difficulty of selecting an appropriate title, the members of the society entrusted this responsible task to Etibar; however, they did not agree with the name “Hop-hop” that he initially proposed. Deeply influenced by the spirit of Sabir reflected in his poetry, Etibar once again turned to Sabir's literary legacy and, inspired by the poem “Tak Sabir,” which had been published in the journal Molla Nasreddin and had gained wide popularity among the public both for its content and impact, proposed naming the newspaper “Tak Sabir.” Despite certain objections, the majority ultimately acknowledged that this title was a successful and meaningful choice for a newspaper intended to embody the spirit of Sabir and the genius of Mirza Jalil, and the publication subsequently commenced its activities. However, gathering poets and authors capable of producing engaging articles and poems under the slogans “Healthy Satire” and “Healthy Criticism” around this newly established, satire-driven newspaper proved to be far from easy.

The socio-political realities of the period played a decisive role in shaping the thematic direction of the newspaper. The late 1990s and early 2000s represented a phase of considerable economic hardship and social instability in Azerbaijan. Although the press of this period developed along vari-

ous lines, a noticeable void existed in the field of satire. The newspaper *Tak Sabir* filled this gap and became a principal platform for the satirical analysis of everyday problems. In particular, issues such as the growing influence of external forces, the influx of foreign labor, and the erosion of national values became regular objects of criticism in the newspaper.

One of the key features that distinguished *Tak Sabir* from other contemporary press organs was the abundance of authorial signatures and the distinctive character of these pseudonyms. The diversity of authors appearing under various names on the pages of the newspaper testified to the existence of a broad and creative collective composed of professional writers, educators, and individuals with a satirical mindset. These pseudonyms were not merely intended to conceal authorial identity; rather, they expanded the expressive possibilities of satire, enabled more comprehensive portrayals of social types, and contributed to the creation of memorable characters in the readers' minds. Signatures such as "Faqir," "Uzugyola," "Pinti," and "Sarımsaq" evolved into satirical symbols of specific social strata and character types, thereby enriching the artistic expressiveness of the texts. The authors of the newspaper, writing under various pseudonyms, successfully conveyed ironic, sarcastic, humorous, and black-humor elements of satire to readers through dialogic forms. Among the frequently encountered signatures in the publication were "Sarımsaq," presented as a rural correspondent; "Cırcırma," identified as a cousin; "Cüt Sabir," the brother-in-law; "Lal-kar," another in-law; "Uzugyola," the Lankaran correspondent; "Faqir," introduced as a correspondent "from the moon"; as well as "Qəmbiçən" and "Beçə," depicted as collectors of village news. In addition, pen names such as "Tak Sabir"—portrayed as the grandson of Molla Nasreddin—along with "Pinti," "Mir Sabir," "Yetim," "Siyasətbaz," "İşsiz," "Kəlləgöz," "Yadigar Mikayıloğlu," "Ümid," and "Minnətçi Tak Sabir" occupied a significant place in the newspaper. This wide variety of authorial signatures strengthened the atmosphere of collective creativity within the publication, expanded the stylistic possibilities of satire, and enabled social problems to be presented from multiple perspectives.

Tak Sabir was not merely a publication that printed satirical texts; rather, it functioned as a press organ that articulated positions on society's social and moral problems and served as a tribune that stimulated the activation of public consciousness. The founder and editor-in-chief of the newspaper, Iskandar Etibar, devoted many years of his artistic, journalistic, and organizational activity to the development of this publication. Despite working in various fields, he preserved his strong commitment to satire and consistently sustained the newspaper's social mission. His personal initiative, social sensitivity, and loyalty to *Sabir's* literary legacy constituted some of the decisive factors in the emergence and formation of *Tak Sabir*. As Ilgar Fahmi notes, whereas the objects of criticism in the journal *Kirpi* were primarily negative character types belonging to the lower strata of society, *Tak Sabir* openly and explicitly criticized the country's most prominent political figures and state officials of the time, sharply exposing shortcomings in their activities (Fahmi, 2012, p. 8).

In Iskandar Etibar's creative work, satire is intertwined with such concepts as "love for the people, a sense of responsibility for their future, and the struggle for freedom" (Maharramova, 1976, p. 39). As a result, satire becomes not only a means of targeting negative social and бытовые (everyday) types but also a tool for exposing contradictions in the behavior and activities of high-ranking political figures. Unable to remain indifferent to injustice and unfairness in life, the poet reflects these phenomena figuratively in both his literary works and journalistic articles, thereby directing society's attention to the issues raised (Xilali, 2013, p. 12). This conceptual stance played a significant role in determining the developmental directions of twentieth-century Azerbaijani satirical poetry. Iskandar Etibar's satirical worldview is grounded in a profound understanding of social processes and performs the function of an "unbreakable mirror," reflecting societal realities with unwavering clarity.

Historically, Azerbaijani satirical press has been characterized by its mission of social criticism and enlightenment. While *Sabir's* satire foregrounded issues such as the people's lack of education, social injustice, bureaucratic arbitrariness, social stratification, and problems of national identity, the news-

paper Tak Sabir continued these ideas through modern approaches within the new socio-political conditions that emerged in the late twentieth century. As noted, “it is as if the problems identified by Sabir remained the same at the end of the twentieth century, albeit having undergone certain formal transformations” (Aghabay, 2022 p.54). Indeed, issues such as corruption, social inequality, the growing influence of external forces, and the weakening of national and moral values were extensively reflected in the newspaper’s satirical and journalistic texts. In addressing these themes, Tak Sabir revitalized the sharp critical spirit of Sabir’s satire within a new historical context, successfully integrating the classical tradition with contemporary social realities.

The ideological sources of Tak Sabir’s satirical line were not limited solely to Sabir’s poetry. The newspaper possessed a broad conceptual foundation nourished by the social memory of the Azerbaijani people, the public anxieties of the transitional period, and society’s pursuit of justice. Regardless of circulation figures and financial difficulties, the newspaper consistently maintained critical engagement with social problems in its pages. During this period, “in the struggle against social calamities, deformities that hinder social progress, oppression, torture, ignorance, superstition, national and religious discrimination, and political deprivation, the role of the writer’s word and pen increased enormously” (Rustamkhanli, 2024, p 39). Bureaucratic arbitrariness, bribery, and other pressing issues were presented to readers through satirical poems and feuilletons. This approach echoed Sabir’s principle of “seeking the causes of national decline within the nation itself,” which also served as a central guiding direction in Tak Sabir. One of the most serious challenges faced by the newspaper during its formative stage was financial difficulty. The economic crisis of the 1990s had a direct impact on the functioning of press institutions, leading to a decline in newspaper circulation. Tak Sabir was not immune to these challenges; in many instances, decreasing circulation figures, rising printing costs, and the near absence of an advertising market significantly constrained the activities of the editorial board. Nevertheless, rather than suspending publication, the newspaper adopted innovative content strategies aimed at sustaining reader interest. From 1999 onward, as authorial activity declined to some extent, the editorial team introduced various format innovations to prevent the newspaper from appearing with empty pages. These innovations included the publication of weekly television program schedules, crosswords, test questions, and humorous knowledge competitions. Although such content diversification might appear as a departure from the satirical line, it was, in fact, a creative survival strategy that enabled the newspaper to endure under prevailing conditions. Consequently, Tak Sabir evolved from being solely a satirical publication into a broader educational and entertainment-oriented press organ.

The satirical orientation of Tak Sabir directly influenced its thematic choices, resulting in extensive coverage of social and moral issues encompassing nearly all spheres of society. A defining characteristic of the thematic structure of the published texts lies in the fact that criticism is not limited to the functional shortcomings of everyday life; rather, the psychological and ideological roots of these deficiencies are also revealed through artistic and journalistic interpretation. Satire, in this context, functions not merely as a means of eliciting laughter, but as a mechanism that encourages society toward self-criticism. Each ironic detail becomes a clear exposure of prevailing social behavior patterns.

Among the central themes addressed by the newspaper were problems within the system of governance. The publication frequently transformed the cumbersome mechanisms of bureaucracy, administrative arbitrariness, and irresponsible attitudes toward citizens into objects of satire. The bureaucratic figure depicted in Tak Sabir represents a modern transformation of a type well known from classical Azerbaijani satire: an individual who exploits official authority for personal interests, ignores societal problems, and trivializes citizens’ concerns. Notably, however, Tak Sabir approached this figure not solely through sharp irony but also through analytical examination as a social type, revealing the underlying causes of bureaucratic behavior—such as systemic irresponsibility, societal habituation to such conduct, the weakness of legal mechanisms, and related issues.

This approach elevates the function of satire beyond merely pointing out flaws, advancing it toward a structural analysis of the problem itself.

Tak Sabir also extensively addresses issues of social injustice. Problems such as economic hardship, unemployment, regional disparities in development, and the weakness of the social welfare system are examined through a satirical lens. The newspaper approaches these issues not merely as empirical facts, but also as manifestations of an ideological malaise. The immersion of society in individual concerns, the erosion of the concept of collective well-being, and the emergence of an atmosphere of distrust in social relations are depicted on a broad scale. In the satirical materials of the newspaper, social stratification is frequently presented against a backdrop of tension created by ironic contrasts. On the one hand, a wealthy social stratum living in luxury and detached from social responsibility is portrayed; on the other hand, ordinary people struggling with everyday difficulties are depicted. Through this juxtaposition, satire vividly exposes the magnitude of both economic and moral divides.

Among the themes addressed by the newspaper, the erosion of national and moral values occupies a particularly prominent place. Processes such as the acceleration of modern lifestyles, the influence of globalization, and the uncritical adoption of foreign cultural patterns undermine the traditional value system of society, and these developments are presented in the newspaper through sharp satirical expression. In the writings of Iskandar Etibar and his colleagues, issues such as alienation from one's identity, the weakening of national character, and the commodification of values are conveyed at times through caricature and at other times through poetic irony. The aim of addressing these topics was not solely to criticize, but also to encourage readers to reflect. The satire of Tak Sabir thus fulfilled the function of guiding individuals back to self-awareness and confronting them with the realities of an identity crisis.

Another direction of Tak Sabir's satirical line focuses on themes related to the intelligentsia. Here, the object of criticism is not the uneducated masses, but rather the intellectual class that is expected to understand the spirit of the time and provide guidance to society. The silence of intellectuals, their indifference to social processes, their preoccupation with personal comfort, and their reluctance to contribute their voices to societal problems become targets of satire. In the modern era, satire no longer targets ignorance itself, but rather those who, despite being educated, fail to demonstrate social responsibility. This is particularly significant given that the period in question was "an era that produced novels, dramas, tragedies, and epochs every minute" (Rustamkhanli, 2024, p. 39), a context in which the silence of intellectuals demands especially sharp exposure.

One of the defining characteristics of Tak Sabir's thematic line is its satirical exploration of seemingly minor aspects of everyday life that are nevertheless significant from the perspective of social psychology. The newspaper frequently depicts issues such as behavioral stereotypes, ordinary domestic habits, violations of norms of public etiquette, and the general weakening of the ethical environment. Although these issues may appear trivial at first glance, they are rooted in deeper moral problems. Phenomena such as the loss of individual responsibility toward oneself and others, the construction of social relations on indifference, and the deterioration of behavioral culture in public spaces are critically examined and satirized within the newspaper.

All of these themes collectively define the newspaper's function of social criticism. Satire is employed not merely to provoke laughter, but also to shake society, to challenge prevailing behavioral models, and to reveal the essence of social problems. Tak Sabir fulfills this function through literary language, caricature, and various satirical formats, thereby transforming itself into a mirror of social processes. Over time, the satirical essence of the newspaper became increasingly sharp, positioning it as an important cultural institution that fostered self-critical thinking among different segments of society.

The satirical world of Tak Sabir constitutes an original literary environment shaped not only by its choice of themes, but also by the multilayered nature of its modes of expression. The newspaper's

style represents a synthesis of diverse artistic components, vivid elements of folk speech, the classical model of satire, and methods of modern psychological analysis. This synthesis manifests itself at times in verse, at times in prose, and at other times in the language of caricature and the feuilleton. The stylistic diversity of the newspaper is not merely an aesthetic choice; rather, it serves to enhance the impact of satire, stimulate the reader's critical thinking, and strengthen a sense of social responsibility.

At first glance, the language of the newspaper *Tak Sabir* appears simple; however, behind this apparent simplicity lie both keen observation and a distinctive rhythm. The texts employ everyday spoken language with such mastery that the words sound familiar to the reader, while the ideas create the impression of being drawn directly from lived experience. The construction of the articles through short and concise sentences generates a particular dynamism within the satirical tone, allowing the essence of events to become clear even with minimal wording. Expressive devices such as irony, exaggeration, and sarcasm are organically integrated into the text, prompting the reader to laugh momentarily and then reflect more deeply. At times, the newspaper's language unfolds in the form of dialogue, at other times as parody, a strategy that both animates social relations and infuses the writing with artistic vitality. It is precisely through this linguistic approach that *Tak Sabir* establishes closeness with its readership. The newspaper neither speaks from a detached distance nor relies on heavy theoretical frameworks; instead, it conveys what it sees and feels in a tone drawn directly from everyday life.

One of the stages in the newspaper's development involved its transition related to the alphabet reform. Although the adoption of the Latin-based alphabet was officially approved in Azerbaijan in 1991, texts written in the Cyrillic script continued to appear in the press for a considerable period. This situation was linked to printing capacities, technical equipment, and readers' adaptation to the new alphabet. The use of Cyrillic script in some issues of *Tak Sabir* reflects the press realities of that historical period. This phenomenon can be analyzed within the context of transitional language policy and is regarded as one of the newspaper's efforts to adapt to new conditions while preserving its literary and artistic continuity.

Until 2002, the newspaper was published with a weekly circulation of five thousand copies; however, due to the sensitive nature of the issues it addressed, the occasional public exposure of certain individuals, and the influence of biased forces, it no longer sold as widely as before. Despite health problems, Iskandar Etibar continued from time to time to ensure that *Tak Sabir* maintained its connection with readers. In February 2014, in what was the first issue of that year and the 233rd issue overall, the newspaper bade farewell to its audience with the following lines: "Even if the heart is full and the mind is active, When the pocket is empty, who needs such a person's words?" (*Tak Sabir*. 2014, Issue No. 233, p. 16).

Alongside the continuation of Sabir's poetic tradition, a critical perspective addressing the new problems of the independence period also took shape within the satirical line of the newspaper. From this perspective, *Tak Sabir* was not merely a collection of satirical texts, but a press experience that played a role in processes of national self-awareness, social reflection, and the renewal of public thought.

The newspaper *Tak Sabir* can be regarded as a unique voice within Azerbaijani satirical press, distinguished both functionally and aesthetically, as well as ideologically. Its activity represents a significant example of sustaining Sabir's legacy in a modern context, fostering dialogue between satire and society, and ensuring the continuity of national press traditions.

Sabir's poetic language and satirical style occupy a special place in Azerbaijani literature, and it is possible to observe the modern manifestation of this tradition in *Tak Sabir*. Scholarly works such as Azal Demirchizade's *The Technique of Sabir's Satire* (Demirchizade, 1962, p3), Musa Adilov's article *Some Notes on the Language and Stylistic Features of M. A. Sabir*. (Demirchizade, 1962, p 152), and Rahila Maharramova's monographs *The Language of Sabir* (Maharramova, 1976, p 110). and *The Lexicon of Sabir's Satirical Poems* (Maharramova, 1968, p 142) systematically examine Sabir's

linguistic and stylistic characteristics, revealing the impact of his satirical techniques, lexical choices, and poetic devices. Tak Sabir, however, transmits this classical heritage to the contemporary reader not only on a poetic level, but also across ideological, social, and psychological dimensions. The newspaper's language preserves the natural flow of folk speech, enhances the energy of satire through short and rhythmic sentences, and engages readers in both laughter and reflection through irony, sarcasm, and hyperbole. In this context, Sabir's influence is unmistakable: he "became the visible eye and the speaking tongue of the people, flowed into hearts through his pungent speech, took root in hearts, and illuminated minds. Even though he did not regard the world as a joke, he spoke with great seriousness by turning it into one" (Zeynalova, 2019 p. 24). Tak Sabir continues precisely this tradition, conveying what Sabir once perceived through words by means of modern textual forms, visual elements, and stylistic diversity, thereby enabling classical satire to survive and renew itself in the contemporary era.

Alongside satirical texts, the newspaper also featured caricatures that complemented and reinforced the written content. The cartoonists emphasized that, through their drawings, they demonstrated a level of courage no less than that of Iskandar Etibar himself. According to Etibar, "satire and caricature are not directed at the leader in such a way that he would fear them and attempt to suppress this field. Since satire is humanistic in nature, every leader, in the name of humanity, should be tolerant of criticism directed at himself and should treat the author with respect; the more this field of literature develops, the more easily the country can be governed" (Etibar, 2005, p. 7).

The caricatures drawn by chief artist Gunduz Alizade exposed bureaucratic arbitrariness, social injustice, and moral degradation through visual metaphors, transforming the newspaper into not merely a publication but also an aesthetic school. The parallel use of caricatures and satirical writings enhanced the newspaper's artistic and journalistic value and significantly increased its social impact.

Conclusion. An analysis of the textual production, tone, and intellectual atmosphere created by Tak Sabir over many years makes it evident that this newspaper did not emerge solely out of a need for satirical expression. Rather, it became the press embodiment of an inner voice that people carried within themselves—an unease that society was unable to articulate openly, yet continuously experienced. For this reason, examining Tak Sabir solely through literary categories is insufficient. The newspaper was simultaneously a literary phenomenon, a form of social reaction, and a component of the emotional dialogue between individuals and their historical moment.

Our research demonstrates that Tak Sabir, while serving as a modern continuation of Sabir's satire, also functioned as a platform that reinterpreted this tradition within new historical circumstances and infused it with renewed vitality. The newspaper applied the humanistic essence underlying Sabir's critical laughter—its power to awaken individuals, compel reflection, and confront errors—to the harsh social realities of the independence period. This endeavor required both loyalty to literary heritage and the courage to renew it.

Although the authors of Tak Sabir wrote under various pseudonyms, a shared sentiment permeated their works—one that can be described as a form of concerned or restless affection. This was not indifference toward society, but rather an expression of care aimed at its improvement, the purification of its thought, and the strengthening of its values. Such an approach represents one of the most demanding and elevated functions of satire: preserving love within criticism. Tak Sabir succeeded in this regard and thus evolved into not merely a satirical newspaper, but a school of humanity.

The combined effect created by caricatures and satirical texts enabled the newspaper to reach a broader audience on both emotional and aesthetic levels. A single line, an image, or a moment of laughter could sometimes resonate more quickly and more deeply than an article of hundreds of sentences. This demonstrates that Tak Sabir shaped satire not only as an instrument of intellectual criticism, but also as a mechanism of emotional engagement and influence.

The closure of the newspaper due to financial reasons did not bring an end to its moral function. On the contrary, the satirical tradition it established, the value it placed on the written word, and the

mirror it held up to society remain relevant today. One of humanity's enduring needs is self-recognition—sometimes pleasant, sometimes painful, sometimes ironic. Tak Sabir fulfilled this need and entered the history of journalism as one of the rare voices capable of doing so.

What made Tak Sabir unique was not solely its satirical style; rather, its distinctiveness lay in its ability to bring satire closer to the individual, to imbue criticism with humanistic meaning, and to transform laughter into a means of moral education. This newspaper constitutes a valuable cultural memory for literary space, social thought, and self-perception alike. By building a bridge between criticism and laughter, this memory both elucidates a historical period and reminds humanity of its perpetual need for change.

The scholarly examination of Tak Sabir as a unique voice in Azerbaijani satirical press not only reveals how classical satirical traditions have been sustained in a modern context, but also represents a timely academic issue in terms of systematically evaluating the development of public-critical thought during the independence period. From this perspective, the present article may be regarded as one of the first studies dedicated to a comprehensive analysis of the Tak Sabir newspaper within both scholarly and journalistic frameworks.

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