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THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT AND INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM IN AZIZAH JAFARZADEH'S "ZARRINTAJ-TAHIRA" AND DORIS LESSING'S "THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK"

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Abstract. In contemporary literary studies, the relationship between the individual and society, as well as the influence of the social environment on a person's worldview and life position, is regarded as one of the most significant research areas. This article examines the problem of social environment and individual freedom in the works of the prominent Azerbaijani writer, People's Writer and Professor Azizah Jafarzadeh, and the Nobel Prize laureate and one of the most distinguished representatives of English prose, Doris May Lessing, particularly in her novel *The Golden Notebook*. In both works, the relationship between the individual and society, as well as the impact of the social environment on a person's worldview and social position, is analyzed. In Azizah Jafarzadeh's historical novel *Zarrintaj-Tahira*, the struggle of a woman against religious and social restrictions and her determination to achieve spiritual freedom are depicted. In Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, the influence of the social environment and political ideologies on individual behavior in modern Western society is presented. Furthermore, the impact of radical ideas on the protagonist's life is artistically illustrated. The study concludes that although the idea of individual freedom is presented within different social and cultural contexts in these novels, both authors approach the relationship between society and the individual from a critical perspective.

Key words: historical novel, political novel, individual freedom, female character, feminism.

Introduction. It is well known that the relationship between the individual and society, as well as the influence of the social environment on a person's worldview and individual position, constitutes an important area of research across different cultural and literary contexts. A comparative analysis of the artistic representation of this problem in diverse cultural and literary environments plays a crucial role in revealing the ideological and aesthetic characteristics of literature. In this regard, the study of the problem of social environment and individual freedom in Azizah Jafarzadeh's *Zarrintaj-Tahira* and Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* is of particular importance. The research primarily employs comparative analysis and literary-theoretical methods to investigate the issue.

Discussion. One of the works in 20th-century Azerbaijani literature that portrays characters devoted to the ideal of freedom as central figures is the novel *Zarrintaj-Tahira* by the People's Writer Azizah Jafarzadeh. The work is dedicated to Tahira Qurratulayn, a poet and a revolutionary woman who was active in the first half of the 19th century in the territory of present-day Iran and became an unwavering advocate of women's freedom in the East. The novel was first published in 1994 in the journal *Azerbaijan* under the title *Zarrintaj*. Holding a special place in Jafarzadeh's historical prose, *Zarrintaj-Tahira* is of significant value in Azerbaijani literature as a representation of personal freedom and the promotion of independence.

In writing the novel, the author made extensive use of various historical and literary sources, including *Early History of Tahere Life*, Alakbar Mushir Salim's *Zanani-Sukhanvar*, Aliakbar Dehkhoda's *Loghatnameh*, Fakhri Qumi's *Zanani-Mashhuri-Iran*, Yahya Aryanpur's *Az Saba ta Nima*, Molla Huseyn Bashiriyya's *Nasekhut-Tavarikh*, Mirza Kazim Bey's *Bab and the Babis*, Atrep's *Babism and Baha'ism*, M.S. Ivanov's *Babid Uprisings in Iran and Essays on the History of Iran*, Belyayev's *Muslim Sectarianism*, A. Massé's *Islam*, Maqsd Hajiyyev's *Five Years in a Neighboring Land*, G. Karimov's *Sharia and Its Social Essence*, Mohammadhasan Khan Maraghai's *Al-Maasir val Asar*, and M.F. Akhundov's *Letters of Kamaluddovla*.

In the section titled “My Preface,” the author notes that she relied on a wide range of materials, documents, essays, and articles in writing the novel. By portraying the historical figure Tahira Qurratulayn, she highlights the issue of women’s welfare and freedom in the East during the first half of the 19th century, presenting Tahira as a symbol of women’s liberation. Although the theme of the novel is derived from theological discourse, the author’s primary aim was not to depict the struggle of Babism against Islam or Shiism. It is well known that in the 20th century, the Soviet Union’s policy toward women had a dual character: on the one hand, it promoted equal rights and opportunities, while on the other hand, this policy often remained episodic in practice. Despite various measures, traditional attitudes toward women persisted. From a retrospective perspective, despite constitutional principles and legal frameworks, genuine gender equality was not achieved in the former USSR. One of the main reasons was the lack of support for these legal provisions within public opinion.

Researcher Yavuz Akhundov notes: “Depicting a historical figure within the context of the socio-political events of their time, as well as the national liberation movement of the people to which they belong, allows for a broader, more multifaceted, and vivid representation of the character” (Axundov, 1988, p. 87). In the novel, Azizah Jafarzadeh portrays the female protagonist Tahira Qurratulayn as a symbol of freedom, independence, and equality.

In the section of the novel titled “*Babis*,” the power and authority of Babi Sahib–az-Zaman are discussed. The scenes presented by the author demonstrate that ordinary people gathered in the marketplace engage in discussions about this religious movement, reflecting on it through concepts preserved in the collective memory of history. It becomes evident that young adherents of the Babi movement actively promote its teachings and interpret its essence. In the “*Babis*” section, reference is also made to the resistance movement of Imam Shamil and the creative ideals of the poet Nabati. In the section titled “*The Second Front*,” the author emphasizes the importance of the struggle for freedom and highlights the intellectual trajectory of those engaged in this cause. Observing the lack of organization and internal unity among the younger generation of that period, the writer implicitly refers to events taking place in Northern Azerbaijan. In the passages depicting conversations among local inhabitants, the following is noted:

“What is this? Poor, simple villagers returning from the summer pastures saw that their homeland – the most fertile, well-watered lands – had been filled with Armenians brought from Iran and Turkey. It is the policy of Russia... The people were left helpless. They knew neither the Armenian language nor Russian. To whom could they complain? Where could they turn? Thus, they turned toward Iran, already burdened with countless troubles...” (Jafarzadeh, 2023, pp. 20–21). In the section titled “*Husband*,” Tahira’s inclination toward the Babi movement and her admiration for the Bab become evident during her conversation with her husband, Molla Mohammad. Upon seeing his wife’s poem, Molla Mohammad is horrified:

“What is this? What does it mean?
The dust of your doorstep is my Kaaba,
Your face illuminates the world.
The bow of your eyebrow is my qibla,
Your hair is the chain that burns me.” (Jafarzadeh, 2023, pp. 20–21)

In the novel, during a dialogue with Molla Saleh, Zarrintaj expresses a remarkable idea: “We have a beautiful language – sweet as honey, pure as spring water, as clear as tears... Why is it that in madrasas the works of poets like Fuzuli are not taught, while Hafez and Saadi are? Why not Fuzuli or Saib Tabrizi? You are the spiritual fathers of the people – why do you allow our language and national identity to disappear?” (Jafarzadeh, 2023, pp. 20–21)

Azizah Jafarzadeh does not explicitly present Babism as an entirely reactionary movement; however, she criticizes the harsh persecution of its followers. In the section titled “*Zarrintaj, Zahra, Fatima, Zakiyya, Qurratulayn*,” Zarrintaj raises the issue of individual freedom. Her speech, which

highlights the strength of women in society, is one of the most powerful moments in the novel: “Hazrat Qa’im himself stated in his *Bayan* that God created men and women equal, with the same rights. Is it then right to keep women eternally imprisoned in the veil? Of course not. A woman is the continuation of humanity, the mother of future generations.” (Jafarzadeh, 2023, pp. 20–21)

Zarrintaj stands in opposition to the immanent norms and constraints of her time. Commenting on the support for Tahira Qurratulayn, Mirza Kazim Bey, interpreting the views of the Iranian historian Sepehr, writes: “The historian attempts to explain it as follows: the daughter of the Mujtahid of Qazvin was exceptionally educated – even a scholar – with excellent oratory skills, and at the peak of all these qualities was her incomparable beauty. For this reason, the historian claims, she managed to surround herself with a crowd of admirers. However, such an extraordinary phenomenon could only be described in this way by a biased Muslim observer. What is overlooked is that this ‘crowd of admirers’ was under the woman’s spiritual influence...” (Kazim Bey, 2018, p. 183) With the novel *Zarrintaj-Tahira*, the writer Azizah Jafarzadeh demonstrates that when the fate of an individual and that of a nation are perceived and articulated as a unified problem, regardless of time and place, what emerges is “great literature.” In the author’s wise prose, the people themselves are presented as the true subject and driving force of literature, embodying both the aesthetic potential and the objective social forces that shape historical development. A prominent figure in English literature, Doris Lessing began her literary career in the 1930s. In her works, she consistently reflected Eastern literary, artistic, and philosophical traditions, often influenced by Sufism. Later, she turned to new thematic directions in her fiction. In the second half of the twentieth century, Lessing produced a wide range of works in various genres, including novels, short stories, science fiction, autobiography, drama, poetry, and essays, many of which carried a strong spirit of intellectual and social critique. Among her most notable novels are *The Golden Notebook*, *The Summer Before the Dark*, and *Memoirs of a Survivor*. Lessing was shortlisted for the Booker Prize three times and received critical acclaim for works such as *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971), *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* (1981), and *The Good Terrorist* (1985). She was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for her psychological novel *The Golden Notebook*. Although feminist perspectives occupy an important place in her work, the author herself never explicitly identified as a feminist writer.

The Golden Notebook, which holds a special place in Lessing’s творчество, was written during the 1950s and 1960s. Composed while the author was living in London, the novel was published in 1962 and is regarded as one of the notable examples of postmodern literature. The narrative is primarily set in London, while also depicting events in colonial Africa. The novel’s structural fragmentation – dividing life into different phases – as well as its exploration of social disintegration and the tensions between communist and anti-communist ideologies, are of particular interest.

In the preface to the novel, the author writes: “It is not possible for reviewers and critics to provide what they purport to provide... always in terms of comparison, at success, and of failure.” (Lessing, 2007, p. 15). In this passage, the author criticizes the early inculcation of meaningless comparisons within society and draws attention to their detrimental effects, thereby enhancing the social significance of the work. In *The Golden Notebook*, Doris Lessing portrays the life, memories, and written records of Anna Wulf, a young writer and activist woman living in the 1950s, both in London and within the colonial context of Africa. Considered innovative in both form and content, the novel was described as a manifesto of feminism following its publication. It represents a monumental achievement not only in Lessing’s творчество but also in twentieth-century literature.

The novel consists of a section titled “*Free Women*”, which narrates the lives of Anna and her friend Molly, as well as four personal notebooks kept by Anna. The “Black Notebook” records the traumatic experiences she encountered in Africa; the “Red Notebook” reflects her reluctant candidacy for the Communist Party of Great Britain and her subsequent rejection of it; the “Yellow Notebook,” through the story titled “*The Shadow of the Third*,” portrays Ella’s confrontation with the pressures

imposed by arrogant men. This section begins as the manuscript of a novel inspired by Anna's own life, depicting the contradictory relationship between Ella and Paul and culminating in Ella's disappointment. The "Blue Notebook," on the other hand, consists of personal diaries reflecting insecurity and inner conflict, including Anna's sessions with her psychoanalyst, Mrs. Marks. Ultimately, Anna brings together her thoughts in the "Golden Notebook," symbolically integrating her fragmented identity. In the novel, Anna's inability to find love and freedom leads to a profound sense of alienation within her inner world. The relationship between Anna and Saul clearly illustrates how this alienation affects her psychological state. The progression of this relationship toward madness reveals the character's internal turmoil and resistance. Critics have repeatedly engaged in polemical debates regarding whether *The Golden Notebook* should be classified as a modernist or postmodernist work. Anna Wulf emerges as a character constructed both autobiographically and socially in a realistic manner. At the same time, she functions as a symbolic device employed by the author to articulate psychological fragmentation and the search for individual wholeness. The black, red, yellow, and blue notebooks written by the protagonist Anna Wulf represent different fragments of a disintegrated self. As a writer, Doris Lessing expressed dissatisfaction with the tendency to interpret the novel primarily through the lens of "free women." Nevertheless, even today, women continue to evaluate *The Golden Notebook* as a work that rejects dependency and emphasizes the importance of responsibility and self-determination. This novel, which incorporates elements drawn from life experiences, is considered one of Lessing's highest artistic achievements. *The Golden Notebook* affirms, above all, the idea that individuals are reflections of one another.

Conclusion. In twentieth-century Azerbaijani literature, the character of Tahira Qurratulayn created by Azizah Jafarzadeh, and in English literature, the character of Anna Wulf created by Doris Lessing, share a number of significant similarities. Both figures are writers who demonstrate resilience and determination in confronting the severe challenges imposed by society, particularly as women. The foresight of both characters, their endurance despite difficulties in family relationships, and their role as sources of support for other women provide a strong basis for comparative analysis. As one of the novels dedicated to the aspirations and ideals of women, *Zərrintaj–Tahirə* by Azizah Jafarzadeh was widely acclaimed within the literary sphere. Similarly, Doris Lessing's experimental novel *The Golden Notebook*, which opened new horizons in both form and content, was described as a feminist manifesto upon its publication. However, beyond this label, the novel holds particular significance for its critical exploration of the protagonist's life, its condemnation of imperialist traditions in European history, and its exposure of existing social limitations. The novel stands as one of the monumental literary achievements of the second half of the twentieth century and represents an important source in the history of feminist thought. In both works, themes such as female identity, inner psychological turmoil, the fate of women writers, ideology, political engagement, and disillusionment emerge as shared and central elements.

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