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THE INITIAL DRAMATIC WORKS OF MAMMAD SAID ORDUBADI

ПЕРШІ ДРАМАТИЧНІ ТВОРИ МАММЕДА САЇДА ОРДУБАДІ

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Mammad Said Ordubadi, primarily recognized in Azerbaijani literature as the founder of the historical novel genre, is also the author of several magnificent dramatic works. However, unlike his novels, the majority of his plays never reached the stage.

The primary reasons cited for this are the author's time constraints and the demanding administrative roles (such as editorships, etc.) he held during the Soviet era. According to the unwritten conventions of the theatrical milieu, the production process necessitated close collaboration between the playwright and the director, including textual revisions and a significant commitment of time to the theater.

Constantly engaged in creative pursuits while simultaneously holding positions in state affairs, Ordubadi lacked the time to frequent theater corridors. Due to these objective circumstances, many of his plays, which had the potential to win the acclaim of readers, unfortunately remained without stage production.

M. S. Ordubadi's debut play is titled “Baghi-shah”, or the “The Tehran tragedy”. The author penned this drama in 1909, and it was subsequently published in 1910 within the 14th, 15th, 17th, and 18th issues of the Sada newspaper.

In this dramatic work by M. S. Ordubadi, the narrative unfolds around three primary antagonistic figures: Mohammad Ali Shah, Amir Bahadur-i-Jang, and Colonel Liakhov. The author consolidates these three characters into a singular reactionary pole – sharing the same ignoble ideology and diametrically opposed to the interests of the people: Mohammad Ali Shah is depicted as an ignorant and profoundly cowardly monarch, utterly devoid of statesmanship. He exists in a state of perpetual trepidation, haunted by the looming prospect of the Constitutionalists (Mashrutahists) ascending to power; Amir Bahadur-i-Jang, serving as the Shah’s minister, matches the sovereign in baseness and duplicity, though he operates with a higher degree of calculated pragmatism; Colonel Liakhov, a military representative of Tsarist Russia, is portrayed as the Shah’s closest confidant and the primary executor of treasonous schemes aimed at reducing Iran to a vassal state of the Russian Empire.

The composition of the play is structured around the hypocrisy of these three archetypes, who are based on real historical figures. However, certain critics have deemed the work flawed, citing the scarcity of characters and the absence of a sharp conflict as justification. In response, M. S. Ordubadi provided a compelling rebuttal to these claims, defending the play’s conceptual and aesthetic structure.

“Firstly, the dialogues of “Baghi-shah” were originally conducted in Persian, whereas my writings are in Turkish (Azerbaijani). Secondly, my objective was to portray the vacillating disposition within the Shah’s psyche, illustrating his cowardice and the resulting intensity of his anguish. Thirdly, there is no inherent reason for the lack of numerous courtiers in the Shah’s court. However, two obstacles prevented their inclusion: first, it would have transitioned the work from the form of a theatrical piece into that of a novel or a historical chronicle; second, the pen’s inability to venture into those perilous territories” [4, s. 72–73.].

At the beginning of the 20th century, Qajar Iran was deeply entrenched in an economic and political crisis. The transformation of the country into a semi-colony by Tsarist Russia and Great Britain, coupled with the plundering of local resources, had pushed the population to the brink of famine and destitution.

This intolerable situation, particularly the strengthening of national identity in South Azerbaijan, paved the way for a massive popular movement against absolutism – the Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911). Forced to retreat under mounting public pressure, Mozaffar ad-Din Shah

signed a decree on August 5, 1906, regarding the adoption of the Constitution (Mashrutah) and the convening of the Parliament (Majlis).

However, the democratic reforms were short-lived. Following the death of Mozaffar ad-Din Shah, his son Mohammad Ali Shah ascended to the throne. Relying on his foreign patrons, he abolished the constitution in 1908 and ordered the bombardment of the parliament.

This historical ignominy has also been reflected in literature. In his play entitled “Baghi-shah” or “The Tehran tragedy”, the prominent writer M. S. Ordubadi masterfully exposed the portrait of Mohammad Ali Shah as a cruel, insidious ruler who betrayed the interests of the people.

“The inaugural dramatic work titled “Baghi-shah” or “The Tehran tragedy” (1909), depicts Iranian life and the counter-revolutionary struggle of Mohammad Ali Shah against the Constitutionalists (Mashrutekhahs). In contrast, the drama “Foggy Tabriz” presents the revolutionary forces struggle for national and popular liberation under the leadership of Sattar Khan, imbued with a profound sense of patriotism:

“People of Azerbaijan! Tear out the pages of the history of captivity! Let the voices crying out for liberty tremble the Gulistan Palaces of the bloody Qajar! Let the Qajar citadel, built upon the bones of the Azerbaijani people, be shaken to its foundations! Let the lightning bolts flashing across the horizons of foggy Tabriz illuminate the paths to freedom for the entire Azerbaijani nation!..”” [2].

M. S. Ordubadi’s second play is “Yusuf and Zulaikha”. The author composed this work in 1909 under the same title. However, the play was subsequently published under the title “Sevgililər” (Lovers) in the 1927 issues (Nos. 8, 9, and 10) and the 1928 issues (Nos. 1–2 and 5–6) of the journal “Maarif işçisi” (The Education Worker).

M. S. Ordubadi authored this drama based on the themes of Surah Yusuf, one of the blessed chapters of the Holy Qur’an. In the 4th and 5th verses of Surah Yusuf, Almighty Allah states:

“Recall when Yusuf said to his father: “O my father, indeed I have seen [in a dream] eleven stars and the sun and the moon; I saw them prostrating to me”.

His father, Yaqub, replied: “O my son, do not relate your vision to your brothers or they will contrive against you a plan. Indeed Satan, to man, is a manifest enemy”” [5].

As emphasized in the Holy Qur’an, the envious brothers cast Joseph (Yusuf) into a well. Egyptian merchants discover and retrieve him, subsequently taking him to the slave market in Egypt to be sold. However, taking into account the technical difficulties of staging the scene where Joseph is cast into the well, the playwright altered the plot’s form. In the play, as the brothers intend to throw Joseph into the well, a merchant

caravan arrives, and an individual named Malik purchases Joseph from the brothers for fifty dirhams. Aziz, the vizier to the ruler of Egypt, visits the slave market with his wife, Zulaikha, to purchase a slave. Upon seeing Joseph, Zulaikha is captivated by his beauty and says to Potiphar (the Aziz of Egypt):

*Xaliq mənə verməmiş bir övlad,
Olsun ürəyim onunla bir şad.
Bu ölkədə namim itməsin ta,
Olsun evimin çıxarı bərpa.
Zira məni sevməmiş təbiət,
Övlada qoyub cahanda həsrət.
Düşməz ələ böylə bir gözəl qul,
Hər bir hərəkəti mənə məqbul [3, s. 54].*

Translated by us

*The Creator hath not granted me a biological progeny,
Whereby my heart might find its ultimate solace and joy.
Lest my lineage and renown vanish from this realm,
May the legacy of my house be restored through this ward.
For nature hath looked upon me with disfavor,
Leaving me yearning for an offspring in this ephemeral world.
Never shall one find such a noble and virtuous servant,
Whose every movement is, to my mind, most commendable.*

Thereafter, Potiphar purchased Joseph with gold and brought him to his household, after which the narrative unfolds in an increasingly dramatic fashion.

In the Holy Qur’an, it is emphasized that the wife of the Potiphar – whose name is not explicitly mentioned in the scripture but is traditionally referred to as Zulaikha by classical poets of the Muslim East – became intensely infatuated with Yusuf after he reached maturity. Exploiting a moment when the palace was vacant, she confessed her desires to him; however, as a Prophet possessed of a crystalline moral integrity, Yusuf rejected her advances.

Driven by her obsession, she attempted to force an intimate encounter and grabbed Yusuf’s garment. As he struggled to flee, his shirt was torn from the back, at which point the Aziz entered. In that moment, the “demon” within Zulaikha’s soul resorted to a hypocritical stratagem, falsely accusing Yusuf of attempting to violate her. Although the Aziz grew suspicious upon seeing that the shirt was torn from the rear, Yusuf was ultimately cast into prison.

However, after some time, Yusuf’s expertise in oneiromancy (the interpretation of dreams) offered hope for the salvation of the Egyptian people from an impending drought. Consequently, the Sovereign of Egypt released

him from incarceration and elevated him to a high-ranking position within the court. Yusuf oversaw the construction of deep canals from the Nile River to fill massive reservoirs, ensuring that the populace was supplied with water during the seven-year drought. Simultaneously, through the irrigation of grain fields, he secured the nation's sustenance for the seven-year period.

The narrative concludes with Yusuf's reunion with his father, Prophet Yaqub (Jacob), who had lost his sight due to the profound grief of separation. Upon their meeting, Yaqub's sight was miraculously restored through the sheer joy of the reunion.

In his play "Yusuf and Zulaikha", M. S. Ordubadi likely anticipated technical difficulties in staging certain episodes and chose to omit them to ensure the work remained theatrically viable. Consequently, Yusuf is not cast into prison in the play; however, he rejects Zulaikha's declaration of love just as depicted in the original Surah. Through this portrayal, the author asserts that a human chosen by Almighty God as a Prophet possesses a spiritual stature superior even to that of the angels.

Mammad Said Ordubadi's historical drama, titled "The last days of Andalusia" or "The surrender of Granada" was composed in 1914 and published in book form by the Orujov Brothers' Printing House. The work chronicles the heroic resistance of Arab warriors against the invading Spanish military forces. It is well-documented that Arabs conquered these territories in the 8th century, subsequently facilitating the migration of a significant Muslim population to the region. However, by the end of the 15th century, Andalusia was reclaimed by the Spanish during the Reconquista.

Crucially, as the Spanish forces retook these lands, they perpetrated massacres against tens of thousands of innocent Muslims. Consequently, Muslim warriors fought against the Spanish combatants, enshrining their names in history as heroes. Ordubadi, being profoundly aware of these historical nuances, penned "The last days of Andalusia" to reflect this struggle.

Regrettably, during the Soviet era, literary critics labeled his work "Bloody years" as journalistic notes written in a nationalist spirit, while dismissing "The last days of Andalusia" as a drama with reactionary content. They asserted that the author failed to provide an accurate assessment of historical events, characterizing the core ideology of the work as "mourning for Arab occupiers".

Furthermore, Soviet critics misinterpreted the essence of the narrative: they applied a distorted ideological lens to the fact that these Arab heroes were also engaged in a Jihad against Arab caliphs. These caliphs had, for centuries, committed injustices against fellow Muslims, desecrated

the tenets of Islam, and committed acts of sexual violence against women to satisfy their own lust and ego.

Dissenting from this view, Professor Yavuz Akhundlu, a doctor of sciences in Philology and a researcher of M. S. Ordubadi's oeuvre, articulates his position as follows:

"The drama repeatedly emphasizes the legitimacy of the Spanish people's struggle for national liberation. It identifies and illustrates one of the primary catalysts for the collapse of the Arab Caliphate as their unjust and harsh treatment of the indigenous population. Furthermore, young Arabs, in their critique of the caliphal administration, boldly condemn their indulgence in hedonism and debauchery, their morally corrupt and indolent lifestyles, and the orchestration of intense palace intrigues" [1, s. 120].

Conclusion. The analysis of Mammad Said Ordubadi's dramaturgical heritage demonstrates that he was not only a master of historical novels but also a formidable playwright capable of revitalizing the socio-political and moral landscape of his era through the medium of the stage. The author's plays are distinguished by their thematic diversity and conceptual depth:

– "Baghi-shah" (The Tehran tragedy): Set against the backdrop of the Constitutional Revolution (Mashruta movement), this play prioritizes the denunciation of absolutism and the depiction of the people's collective aspiration for liberty;

– "Yusuf and Zulaikha": By engaging with religious and philosophical themes, Ordubadi creates a literary reflection of moral purity and the struggle against carnal desires (nafs);

– "The last days of Andalusia": In this drama, alongside themes of national heroism, he employs historical evidence to demonstrate how internal fragmentation and ethical erosion pose existential threats to statehood.

The fact that many of Ordubadi's dramatic works did not grace the stage during his lifetime was not a reflection of a lack of talent; rather, it stemmed from objective obstacles, including the author's heavy involvement in civil service and the technical constraints of the contemporary theatrical environment. Despite certain subjective biases in Soviet-era criticism, these works remain indispensable primary sources for studying the evolution of Azerbaijani dramaturgy and comprehending the richness of our classical heritage. His plays maintain their relevance for modern audiences and readers today, both for their preservation of historical reality and their promotion of universal human values.

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