

# General Spirituality: The Turkish Lifestyle at the Tatar Literature of the Late 19th – Early 20th Centuries<sup>1</sup>

Zilya Ravilevna Abulhanova<sup>2</sup>, Liailia Ihsanovna Mingazova<sup>3</sup>, Gelyusya Faridovna Kayumova<sup>3</sup>, & Aigerim Tarbinovna Ibrayeva<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

In the 19-20<sup>th</sup> centuries the most progressive Tatar intellectuals and writers in one way or another kept in touch with Turkey and Istanbul, in particular. They also expressed their thoughts and feelings regarding this country in their fictional works and memoirs. In this respect, along with the works by Sh. Marjani, G. Iskhaki and I. Bikkulov, the ‘Möhäžirlär’ (Immigrants) story by M. Galyau is one that deserves attention as well. Despite the geographical distance, the Tatar-Turkish literary and cultural relationships, as well as economic, trace back deep into the history. Some extant documents prove that the Golden Horde, later the Kazan Khanate, and the Ottoman State were connected on a political-diplomatic level, as well as cooperated in business and trade back in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. Speaking of cultural, academic and literary relationships between the peoples of Turkey and Tatarstan, the authors of academic research works primarily refer to the 19 – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the time when Istanbul was known as a cultural and academic centre and home for publicistic, academic literature and literary fiction. The relevance of this paper can be explained by how poorly this topic – representation of Turkish realia in literary fiction, publications and travel writing of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Tatar academics and writers – is explored. The literary, publicistic and travel writings of Sh. Mardjani, G. Iskhaki, M. Galau, K. Bikkulova have given us materials proving the close relationships between two kindred nations, Tatars and Turks, in the late 19 – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Keywords:** Tatar Literature; Prose; Memoir; Travel Writing; Turkey.

## 1. Introduction

The Tatar literature has a centuries-long history and has gone through many various stages of development. Naturally, this history was heavily influenced by many historical events, the people’s lifestyle and the fate of the country. At the same

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<sup>2</sup> Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Tatarstan, Russia

<sup>3</sup> S. Toraighyrov Pavlodar State University of the Faculty of Humanities and Education; [Leila69@inbox.ru](mailto:Leila69@inbox.ru)

time, our talented writers were interested in the life, traditions of other peoples and historical events in other countries, so these themes found their place in literary pieces of various genres. The one that drew particular attention was Turkey, which is quite understandable (Genette, 1982). Turkey, as an independent Turkic country, has been a great support for Tatars since the olden times. As for the specific historical materials, 'before the 1917 Revolution there was, in general, quite a small number of Tatar figures, scholars and writers who did not speak Turkish' (Galimullin et al., 2016). Along with the Tatar students, Turkey welcomed some Tatar intellectuals who were forced to leave the country, such as G. Iskhaki, Y. Akchura and S. Maksudi. There is a reason why our famous author M. Magdeev wrote: 'Istanbul is not just any other city for our literature. The first Tatar prosaist M. Akyegetzade was here. Dardemand, Sh. Kamal was here. Here, during the Balkan war, was the editor of the 'Vakyt' (Time) newspaper, F. Karimi'. Finally, 'in the late 1912 G. Kamal visited the city as the editor of the 'Yoldyz' (Star) newspaper'. So the representatives of Tatar intelligentsia have traditionally had respect for Istanbul, interest in this city, which is why they have put their thoughts and feelings in its regard on paper. In truth, the victory of Bolsheviks resulted in the breaking off of all the relationships with Turkey for many years. During the 30s of the last century, even a small connection with Turkey was considered a serious crime (Galimullin et al., 2014; Safin, 2015).

When it comes to the role of Istanbul and the life of its residents in the Tatar literature, it has been depicted in literature since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Galimullin et al., 2016). For instance, the works by Shikhabetdin Marjani, a historian, Tatar national history specialist, thinker, philosopher and writer-illuminator, who lived and created in 1818-1889. In 1880, during his hajj, the 62-year-old Sh. Marjani made a stop in Istanbul, while keeping a diary of his trip: there he wrote about Istanbul, its great and common people, traditions and everyday life in Istanbul in a very interesting, informative and extensive fashion. His travel writing 'Rikhlätel – Märžani' (Ganieva & Yarullina, 2007) can also be evaluated as a document describing the lifestyle of the cognate Turkish people in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One of the other works based on documentary facts is the literary publicistic piece 'Istanbul mäktüpläre' (The Istanbul notes) by Fatikh Karimi. Left to Turkey in 1891 to study, F. Karimi gathered in this work his thoughts on Istanbul, its state activists, writers and scholars (Safonova & Erofeeva, 2016).

Famous Tatar poet of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century G. Tuqai spoke proudly of Yusuf Akchura and Fatikh Karimi who at the time were covering the cultural and political life of the Turkish State in printed media (Rizaetdin Fakhretdin, 1993). Notably, the works of G. Tuqai equally reflect the reality of modern to him Turkish world alongside the Tatar and Russian reality. While the development of Turkish literature and culture at the time was promoted by political and economic relations with the European countries, the relationships between the Tatar and Turkish culture and

literature were mainly based on the common traditions, religion and views that these two nations shared (Karabulatova et al., 2013; Hassan et al., 2019).

Thus, the study of literary expression of Istanbul images in the works of Tatar authors of the late 19 – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries provides a reference point for modern researchers of the Turkic literature that allows them to look at the Tatar literature and the works by Tatar authors from a wide historical and literary angle by recognizing the similarities and differences in literature of the Tatar and other Turkic peoples, and to determine the level and nature of this literary interplay. However, comparative analysis of Turkic literary pieces, including the Tatar and Turkish ones, on the diachronic and synchronic levels within the broad historical and cultural framework of the Russian and worldwide literary development has never become a subject for an academic research (Marandi et al., 2018).

## **2. Materials and methods**

The issue of interaction between national literatures is a traditional subject of the comparative literature studies, founded by A.N. Veselovsky. Various forms of comparative literature studies (historical genetic, comparative historical, historical typological etc.) make it possible to trace the continuity of art treasures in different national literatures, typological convergence, determine the interconnections and influence of literature, which were eventually specified in the works of comparative literature theorists M.P. Alekseev, V.M. Zhirmunsky, N.I. Konrada, I.G. Neupokoyeva, who developed the main theoretical provisions of the national comparative literature studies (Konrad, 1972; Neupokoyeva, 1976).

The comparative approach to interconnections of Turkic literatures implies recognition of the nature of interliterary communication, which, according to D. Dyurishin, can be divided into two types: genetically contacting literary connections (direct and indirect, external and internal, influences and borrowings) and typological convergence in terms of literary methods, genre peculiarities and specific nature of living in a particular national environment (Dyurishin, 1979).

## **3. Discussion**

The talented writer, our classic, who lived in 1886-1938 and greatly contributed to the development of the historical novel genre, Makhmut Galyau had made a particularly big contribution to this field. The life and work of the writer, whose family tree connects to the pride of the Tatar people, the illuminator Sh. Marjani, was exceptionally complicated. His true name comes to the nation's knowledge quite late as well. The reason for that is the years of 1937-38 that were left in the national history as a 'blank space', the years of 'the cult of personality', 'the Stalin repressions'. The author gets arrested as an innocent victim, and his life tragically ends. The author's prosaic and dramatic oeuvre features a big two-part

historical novel, standing out among his other works as a 'gem'. The first part is titled 'Bolganchyk ellar' (Troubled years), the second part, the one that is connected to Istanbul, is named 'Möhäzirlär' (Immigrants). The novels hold a great value for portraying the everyday life of Tatar-Turkic villages, their customs and traditions, capturing the history and fate of the nation. Evaluating the second part, the scholar R. Yarullina wrote: 'The novel 'Möhäzirlär' is the historical truth of the period. The events described in it are the historical facts' (Ganieva & Yarullina, 2007).

In fact, there are some interesting documents concerning these historical immigrations found both in Turkey and Russia. For instance, according to the teacher in the historical department of the literary faculty of the Istanbul University Ali Arslan, the massive immigration of Kazan Tatars to Turkey dates back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. 'Such factors as the interference of Russian leaders, the indifference of Ottoman leaders and the tension between Turkey and Russia posed some challenges in the period of immigrations to Turkey', he wrote in his work 'Kazannan Törkiyagä möhäzirlek häm anyñ üzenchälekläre' (Immigration from Kazan to Turkey and its specifics' (Arslan, 2002). These were exactly the obstacles the characters in the M. Galyau novel 'Möhäzirlär' had to face.

Truly, this literary writing captures the most tragic pages of the Tatar national history – the famine of 1877, the census of 1897, being announced as a way to count Tatar people as subjects to forced baptizm, which caused Tatars, who sought to avoid forced conversion, to immigrate with entire villages to Turkey in search for a better life: '– We have to move to Turkey! Living in the land of Holy Caliph must be better and easier!' (Galyau, 1968). Thus, the people of the Maulya Koly village, inspired by their big dreams, wended their way to the Turkish city, Istanbul.

The first description of Istanbul comes in the novel in connection with its nature. The sun that suddenly rose up by the city after 'the frightening grey darkness' is obviously described as a way showing the psychological state of the people: 'The ship is ought to arrive in Istanbul today! The wind has settled in, the clouds have parted, and the sun have risen to the turquoise blue sky again' (Galyau, 1968).

In his novel the author extensively describes the beauty of Istanbul and the homelike feelings of Tatar peasants towards the city. The author's attention to this factor is also apparent in careful use of words in the city description and his efforts to paint a full picture in short sentences: 'Further out is the Sultan Ahmet Mosque, the Süleymaniye, Bayezid, Fatih Mosques (Kristeva, 1980).

The Maulya Koly peasants were completely stunned by the amazing view that opened up in front of them... they watched the fairytale-like scenery in awe' (Galyau, 1968).

As we see, the author uses such words as 'were stunned', 'fairytale-like' for describing the beauty of the city, and this scene perfectly depicts the thought he was trying to get across. Perhaps, with this the author shows his own fascination with how beautiful the city is. Generally, different colours of the dipection devices in the plot

(longing for happiness, broken dreams, sorrow, the author's compassion for his characters) are all bundled together. Therefore, the novel presents a full picture of life consisting of many different pieces (Mingazova, 2009).

As seen from the forementioned examples, when writing about Istanbul the author rises his feelings towards it above the mundanity to some level of greatness, unmatched beauty. In his phrases such as 'The Tatar peasants rushing to step foot on the holy ground of Istanbul...' and '...here is the anticipated 'holy' ground!' the author points out how naïve yet courageous they step into the city (Galyau, 1968).

However, as the author describes it, the life of Turkish people is also not so easy. To capture their situation, the author turns to another compositional device, the epistolary style. One of the main heroes Gabdrakhman Khazrat has correspondence with his son Suleyman, who is a student in Istanbul. In these letters the life in Istanbul is evaluated in a very real way. And, as one may have guessed, it quite differs from the Tatar peasants' perception of it: 'There are many agents and representatives of large European and American companies in Istanbul. But at the same time, there are also many people of various professions from all over the world – criminals and fugitives banished from their homelands' (Galyau, 1968). 'People who are forced to suffer from the extreme violence and cruelty of the Sultan and meet the requirements of ever so worried European countries are almost out of patience. They face persecution, lawlessness wherever they go, forced to pay heavy taxes. Any sort of resistance is considered a political crime' (Galyau, 1968). As the plot unravels, this unfair treatment wakes resistance among the Istanbul national intelligentsia and the progressive part of the Turkic intelligentsia, as it naturally would in any other country. When dwelling on this issue, Suleyman mentions in his letter a secret organization called 'Yash töreklär' (Turkish youth) that fights against the injustice in the country. He also mentions a few other organizations: 'There are several political organizations among Turkish intelligentsia other than the 'Yash töreklär'. The ones that deserve the most attention are Ottomanists (the main goal of this organization was to unite all the peoples living in Turkey into one nation called Ottomans), Pan-Islamists (these aimed to gather all the Muslims in the world and unite them to be ruled by one Caliph-Sultan) and Pan-Turkists (whose aim was to acknowledge the modern sultanate-caliphate as the homeland of all the Turkic peoples and eventually turn it into the Great Turan)' (Galyau, 1968).

In such conditions the people of the Maulya Koly village is obviously unable to find that happiness they had such high hopes for. For this very reason, as the travelers leave the Istanbul city and set forth to the uncertain future – later to a village called Kadyń-köy, the author integrates a song into his novel as a form of expressing the psychological state of these characters and depicts the events with the use of folklore:

Al idek bez, göl idek bez  
Tugan-üskän illärdä

(We were fine, we were blooming  
In the lands we've been born and raised) (Galyau, 1968).

Of course, the folksong was included here on purpose. The song shows how the Tatar people miss their homeland as they roam the foreign country, and although their faith in a happy future is not as strong, the author shows that the hope is still there.

#### 4. Conclusion

All in all, despite the national differences, Tatars and Turks are united by common literary roots, common goals and interests, moral, spiritual and cultural values, ethics, aspiration to preserve and develop the traditions of Turkic culture. In addition to all of that, they work on one common to all problem: preservation of national distinctness of language, literature and culture of every ethnos and people entering the dialogue, on one hand, and maintenance of unity in the literary multicultural space of Russia in its entirety and the near abroad, as well as comprehension of a special place that Turkic literature takes in the world literature and, even wider, in the process of cultural globalization.

Thus, the 'Möhäzirlär' novel by M. Galyau takes its own place in the history as it depicts the events of the period of immigrations of Tatars to Turkey and to Istanbul, in particular, which had a big impact on the world political situation.

The prominent Tatar intellectuals have different reasons for their connection with Istanbul: some went to the capital of Turkey for education, others fled there as they were unable to serve their nation in their homeland, yet others turned to Turkey for protection, or even for profit. Later these intellectuals expressed their experience regarding Turkey and their life there in their literary works. All in all, these literary pieces help us to get a better understanding of the events in the history of other cognate nations and have an objective opinion about the political situation in the country.

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