



The Pattern of Muslim Clergy Repressions in Tatar Literature

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Abstract

The paper systematizes statistical material on the scales of the defeat of religion in 1930 by the example of the Muslim clergy, reveals a range of works of Tatar literature which conceptualize this tragedy. The analysis is based on the principles of a system-integrated analysis of the structure of literary work that combines the elements of historical and comparative research methods. The work by imam khatib Sirazetdin Zakirov, being exiled and died in the Siberian camp in 1930, is introduced. The features of the genre form, complaint, come to light. In the paper, it is proved that N. Isanbet, developing the theme of Muslim clergy in the autobiographical story *Childhood*, is committed to enlightenment. His goal is to create the image of the advanced mullah of his time. Gilyazov, tracing his Muslim ancestry in the autobiographical novel of memoirs *Let Us Pray!* Exploits the model of “colonial trauma”. Yunis in the novel *If a Child is Orphaned Early in Life* reconstructs a scheme of life of the Muslim clergy on the example of a rural mullah’s family.

Keywords: Tatar Literature; Prose; Naki Isanbet; Mirgaziyan Yunusov; The Muslim Clergy.

1. Introduction

The theme of Stalinist purges occupies a specific place in the Tatar literature of the 1990s (Finnin, 2014; TOL, 2016; Zengin, 2020). This tragic chapter of Soviet history laid the foundation for the works by “Gulag returnees” I. Salakhov, A. Gilyazov, G. Tavlin. Writers F. Bayramova, R. Mukhamadiev, R. Karami contributed to the consideration of this topic. Literary scholars (Akhmetzyanova, Zakirzyanov, Motigullina, & Sheyanova, 2017; Golikova, Volkova, & Palutina, 2015; Khaybullina, Gilazov, Zaytseva, & Kurakova, 2017; Nasyrova, Khabutdinov, Khabutdinova, & Mashakova, 2017; Sabirzyanova, Gilazov, & Mutiev, 2018; Safarova, Galimullin, & Galimullina, 2016), historians (Bennigsen, 1985; Crews, 2003; Mukhametshin, 2009; Werth, 2018; Yunusova & v Bashkortostane, 2007), linguists (Angelina A. Khaybullina, Zamaletdinov, Khabutdinova, & Khabutdinov, 2018; Vildanova, Zamaletdinov, & Sattarova, 2017), delved into the “camp theme”.

Our study is novel in that the picture of the Muslim clergy repressions in 1930 is exposed for the first time to scientific scrutiny by literary scholars. The sources are autobiographical and biographical works by Tatar writers (Odintsov, 1994).

1.1. Research Objective

The essay focuses on the persecution of the 1930s in Tatar literature. The objects to be studied are the depictions of the Muslim clergy.



2. Material and Methods

Our study is based on the principles of a holistic analysis of the literary structure of a work (an analytical method developed in the Soviet Union between 1930 and 1980 by Viktor Zuckerman and Leo (Lev) Mazel) that combines the elements of historical and comparative research methods.

The goal of the holistic analysis was to understand a musical work as a totality of its interrelated parts and to do so simultaneously on all levels of structure, content, and context.

3. Results and Discussion

In the late 1920s and early 1930s repressions affected all levels of the Muslim clergy in the USSR. Mullahs, mukhtasibs, imam khatibs, muezzins, muftis, and former madrassa teachers were evicted and / or prosecuted. By 1930, in Tataria, Muslim religious institutions in the republic were represented by 26 muhtasibats, 2134 mosques and parish councils. After the visit of mufti Riza Fakhretdin in May 1930 to the Permanent Commission for Cults under the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, P. Smidovich wrote to the chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, M. Kalinin, "All Muslim religious organizations are on the eve of complete dissolution and disappearance from the scene. So far, 87% of muhtasibats (Muslim bishops) has been closed, more than 10,000 out of 12,000 mosques have been closed, 90 to 97% of mullahs and muezzins is deprived of the opportunity to conduct religious worship ... The situation in the Muslim cult is worse than in other cults, but, in general, it gives a portrayal that typifies all cults..." (Şener, 2019).

Literary works that comprehend this tragedy appeared in Tatar literature only in the 1990s. When the archives were declassified, historians embarked upon its study (Gatin, 2016; v Bashkortostane, 1999). This topic has proved to be a personal story to many people since many representatives of the Tatar intelligentsia have mullah ancestors in their genealogy.

Ayaz Gilyazov reconstructed his Muslim lineage in the autobiographical novel of memoirs *Let Us Pray!* (1991-1993). Using three generations of his family as an example, the writer revealed the tragedy of the Muslim clergy who had suffered from the dictates of the state during the reign of Alexander III and the years of the Soviet regime (1917-1991)). A. Gilyazov reconstructs the picture of expatriation of his great-grandfather to Turkey because of the threat of forced Christianization in the late 19th century, the death of his grandfather in prison during the years of repression, the circumstances of his arrest and stay in prison and in the Karaganda camp (Habutdinova, 2019; Nasyrova et al., 2017).

In Soviet literary criticism, Naki Isanbet (1899-1992) sealed his fame as an atheist, an active religion fighter, a creator of anticlerical works, and a gallery of satirical images of Muslim clergy (Hanzafarov, 1982). In fact, Naki Isanbet's attitude to the clergy was not so unambiguous and was caused by ideological dictate. N. Isanbet's father was a mullah. Reflecting on the specifics of his own religiousness, in 1973 N. Isanbet acknowledged his faith in God until the age of 16. The first theomachist verses began to appear in 1916, and his relationship with God began to take a philosophical form (Hanzafarov, 1982). By the end of the 1920s a graduate of the Jadid madrassas, the Hasadiyah Madrassa (Ufa) and Muhammadiya Madrassa (Kazan) had become an active supporter of the ideas of enlightenment and modernization of the Tatar national culture. This explains the critical pathos of his works in the first half of the 20th century. The writer ridicules the backwardness and fanaticism of the conservative wing of the Muslim clergy, the opponents of the modernization of culture.

N. Isanbet was proud of his parentage and refused to publicly break off contacts with his mullah father during the years of repression, although he worked as a teacher and led the Bureau of the Union of Atheists in Ufa (1926-1929) (Исәнбәт, 1929). The autobiographical story *Childhood* was published after the writer's death. N. Isanbet strives to perpetuate the image of an advanced mullah-enlightener, to reveal the role of the Muslim family tree in the formation of an autobiographical character. The portrait of imam khatib Sirazetdin Zakirov occupies an important place in the system of characters. A graduate of the Rasulia Madrassa (Troitsk) was a follower and murid of ishan Z. Rasuli. Having become an imam khatib in the village of Maloyaz, he opened a novel madrassa. Sirazetdin mullah spared no expense in subscribing to leading periodicals. According to his son's recollections, he was a simple-hearted and honest man, and he traded at a loss to support the parishioners. Sirazetdin mullah was responsible in his duties (leadership of the community, maintenance of the madrassa, solemnization, maintenance of vital records). He was held in respect by his fellow-villagers



and turned into a true leader of the community, defending its interests before the state. Thanks to his efforts, not only a madrasa but also a hospital appeared in the village, although he had to withstand the opposition from superstitious parishioners. The hospital staff was the Tatars.

The phenomenon of ishanism is described in detail. Sirazetdin mullah abandoned the career of ishan in 1911, and after the death of the mentor, his life became increasingly secular. The story emphasizes the mullah's gift of a musician, a singer, a poet, a calligrapher and a shamaillist artist. The life of the mullah tragically ended in 1932, when he, after being dispossessed, together with his wife, found themselves in the Siberian camp (Cheremkhovo).

In remembrance of his father, photographs and the poem *Complaint of Exiled Sirazetdin* were preserved in the family archive. This work is documentary evidence of the mullah's experience. This is a classic example of a poem-complaint, in which the convict looks back with nostalgia on his former life, where he sees himself as the owner of a tidy farm: houses, apiary, fowl. Broken-hearted, the mullah recalls the alienation of fellow-villagers after dispossession. For the mullah, the family estate was not a material thing, but it had spiritual value. There are sad lines in the poem in which the character expresses the pain of bereavement. To show the tragedy of a devastated family nest, Sirazetdin mullah resorts to vivid metaphorical comparisons. He compares himself to a bird who has lost his wings. He is painfully aware that he is not destined to hear the word "Father" from his youngest daughter's lips. The exiled mullah expresses his grief through figurative comparisons, "If my grief connected with the fire, / It would die down, incapable of burning, / If my grief fell on the dragon's head, / It would die, unable to repair to poison. / If my grief fell on a young tree, / It would fade in the bud, / If my grief were reflected in someone's eye, He would blind in the flicker of a second".

The anaphoric structure of the stanzas perfectly conveys the depth of feeling that is deep inside of the narrator (Wendland, 2019). As a Muslim, Sirazetdin mullah stoically bears all attacks of destiny and takes everything that has happened as a trial, sent from above. The lines of this poem wake the pain of the millions of the subjected to repression, torn from their homes and sent to death. The memory of Sirazetdin mullah remained with the villagers in the hospital that functioned in the Soviet period. The descendants of the mullah survived and became famous people. So, Naki Isanbet achieved international recognition as an encyclopaedist, folklorist, and Turkologist back in the 1970s although he was systematically persecuted by the authorities.

In the biographical novel *If a Child is Orphaned Early in Life* (Odintsov, 1994) M. Yunis reflects on the origins of a person's confronting adversity. The protagonist of the work is a famous oilman, an engineer, a climber, Shagit Taipov. The writer introduces the readers to the story of his family. His mother, the teacher, after the arrest of her husband, the mullah, set her four children to their feet. A huge part of the novel is the image of mullah Lutfulla, a graduate of the Bukhara Madrasa. Developing the problem of "personality and a totalitarian state," M. Yunis focuses on the fact that Shagit's father after the 1917 revolution did not give up the rank of mullah. For this, he had to go through two arrests. In 1931, mullah Lutfulla was sent to timber harvesting for three years, where he had become an invalid from work. His eldest son was arrested on a false denunciation. In 1933, the mullah's economy was dispossessed, and the family was evicted from the house. In 1937, a new arrest followed. Lutfulla mullah was shot on February 17, 1938, in Ufa. To enlarge the scale of the tragedy experienced, the writer describes the circumstances of the arrest of the grandfather of the character – Sungatullah mullah.

The tragedy of the Muslim clergy is depicted in the novel through the prism of the child's perception (father's arrest, villagers' boycott, bullying in school). The mother explains to her son the inconsistency of the negative assessments of the mullah, "One time, the mullahs in the village were the most educated people." "Your father was both a mullah and a teacher. He gave lessons to shakirdam. His duties included naming children, performing the rite of nikah (religious marriage), accompanying the parishioners on their last journeys, and resolving disputes between fellow-villagers." (Odintsov, 1994). Abysti convinced her son not to respond to the insulting comments of his classmates, to avoid fights and to perceive the expression "Mullah's son" as praise, a word of respect (Odintsov, 1994).

The mullah's son inherited the gift of persuasion from his father (the boy's monologue in front of classmates). Shagit defeated Rinat in an open discussion, being able to prove that mullahs in the Tatar environment called people who were famous for their education, moral qualities (Odintsov, 1994). The boy managed to overcome the alienation that arose among his classmates under the influence of atheistic propaganda.

M. Yunis and N. Isanbet dispel the Bolshevik myth about a mullah-freeloader. The writer describes in detail the working days of the mullahs in the field and for the good of the community. Mullah's internal monologues about religion, faith in Allah help readers understand the tragedy of the fate of a man who dares to oppose the totalitarian regime.

The writer describes a worldview crisis experienced by the autobiographical character in his teens. The boy could not understand why the state is at war with its most hardworking citizens (Odintsov, 1994).

A contrasting juxtaposition of mullah's recollections of the happy moments of marriage and the description of the hardships of widowhood sometimes translates the narrative from tragic to melodramatic tonality.

The way of life of the Muslim clergy is shown in the novel through the image of 2 mullahs' families, which allows the author to come to generalization. The novel praises the national ideal of the Tatar family. M. Yunis proves the stability of this model by referring to the book by the scholar, Ibn Bulan, who described the best traditions of the Turkic family, "The wives of the Turks are famous for their skill in cooking, loyalty to their spouses, their children are distinguished by excellent health and smartness. I have not met in any nation, such as women who have the rare gift of creating an amazingly kind and tranquil regimen in the house." (Odintsov, 1994).

A huge part in the character system is the portrait of the mullah's wife, who meets the national aesthetic ideal of the Tatar people. Religion, hard work, patience, meekness become the leading traits of abistay. The novel has an open ending. M. Yunis, in his novel, glorifies mother who managed to educate the children of a mullah who died for his faith.

In an effort to expand the chronotope, to draw the tragic fate of an entire nation on the example of an individual story, the writer reconstructs the tragic events of the period of loss of statehood during the conquest of the Kazan Khanate by Ivan the Terrible. M. Yunis acquaints readers with the history of the adoption of Islam by the ancestors of the Tatars.

4. Summary

The analysis of the autobiographical and biographical works by A. Gilyazov, N. Isanbet, M. Yunis published at the end of the 20th century testifies to the writers' desire to objectively depict the tragic events of the era, in particular, the religious policy of the Soviet state in the 1920s-1930s. The author's strategy of portraying the images of the Muslim clergy as positive characters of workers who stand out of their contemporaries with their scholarship and moral character unites these works. Due to circumstances, they are portrayed as martyrs for the faith. The writers dwell upon the way of life in the family of the Tatar mullah. The leading conflict in the works is the conflict between personality and totalitarian power. The Soviet way of life is represented in the works as something Other. A huge part of the works is "colonial trauma". All writers exploit the dichotomy of "Home-Alien". The literary works show the repression against the clergy as a national tragedy. In the system of characters, a mullah's wife equally plays an oversize role, whose image is revealed in the status of the mother, mugalim, mentor.

5. Conclusions

The autobiographical and biographical works by Tatar writers A. Gilyazov, N. Isanbet, M. Yunis are interesting sources for studying the pattern of repressions against the Muslim clergy in 1930. They immortalize the images of mullahs, reconstruct the lines of the Muslim clergy and reveal their role in the community. Describing the vicissitudes of lives of the Tatar mullahs, the writers reconstruct the tragic chapter of national history. Enlightening pathos dominates in N. Isanbet's work because he seeks to show the image of the advanced Tatar mullah, serving the interests of progress. A. Gilyazov and M. Yunis focus on the conflict between personality and the totalitarian system. Their works are permeated with critical pathos.

5.1. Contribution

The authors measured the semantic distance coefficient (SDC) for one of the semantic fields of the "Fairy Tales Heroes" Tatar realia.

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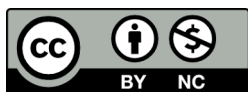
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