



## FICTION, II(H)

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### FICTION

#### ii(h). IN TAJIKISTAN

Tajik fiction in the 20th century has drawn from a variety of sources. Classical and modern Persian literature and Tajik folklore provided the foundations, while Russian and Soviet literature and the Communist economic and social system offered Tajik writers new means of expression and new subject matter. The Soviet era also imposed upon them ideological demands so stringent as to subordinate aesthetic values to political and economic goals and thus impede individual creativity. The rigidities of what came to be known as socialist realism began to be breached in modest ways in the 1960s. This trend intensified in the 1970s and 1980s as Moscow's hold on the periphery slowly loosened and in the 1990s after the Soviet Union's collapse.

At the turn of the century Tajik literature was beholden mainly to its Iranian and Central Asian heritages. Traditional forms predominated, and the literary language of Tajik intellectuals, Persian, was little affected by the vernacular. Poetry was the favorite medium of expression, while prose was limited primarily to short tales for amusement, didactic works, and an occasional treatise on social or political questions. Tajik writers worked under adverse intellectual conditions that had been imposed by the despotic rulers of Bukhara and reinforced by a conservative Muslim clergy (Hodizoda, I, pp. 7-126; Aynī).



Undercurrents of change were, nonetheless, evident in the two decades before the Russian revolutions of February and October 1917. Many Tajik writers adhered to the reform program of Central Asian intellectuals known as Jadidism, which sought to introduce modest innovations in the curriculum of Muslim schools as a way of exposing young people to modern ideas and information. Although the majority of Jadids, as the reformers were known, were Pan-Turks, Tajik intellectuals were not deterred from cooperating with them, since a Tajik ethnic or national consciousness was virtually absent at this time. In any case, Jadidism was supra-national in character, which was reflected in a strong Pan-Islamic orientation (Radzhabov, pp. 383-436). One of the immediate consequences of the Jadīd movement for Tajik prose was the creation of a newspaper press. Several Uzbek-language newspapers, including *Ā'īna* (The mirror, 1914-15) and *Samarqand* (1913), both published in Samarkand, carried prose articles as well as poetry in Tajik, while *Bokārā-ye šarīf* (q.v.; Bukhara the noble, 1912-13), published in Bukhara, was the main Persian newspaper.

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the creation of the Soviet Union were crucial turning-points in the development of Tajik literature. The formation of the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924 and a union republic in 1929 created the political framework within which the “national” talent of the Tajiks could be nurtured. New institutions that emerged—schools, universities, academies, literary reviews, and publishing houses—laid the foundations of a national culture and greatly expanded the reading public. Soviet authorities, in accordance with Stalin’s ideas on nation and language, also promoted the creation of a new Tajik literary language. Based upon classical Persian and drawing extensively on the vocabulary and forms of the spoken language, it was meant to serve as the vehicle of a new, militant literature that would be devoted to the building of a communist society and the creation of a multi-cultural new Soviet man. The Soviet regime itself supplied Tajik writers with both approved subjects—industrialization, the collectivization of agriculture, and the liquidation of “obsolete” customs and ways of thinking, especially religion—and a proper model: Soviet Russian literature.

The foundations of modern Tajik fiction were thus laid in the two decades between the world wars. The 1920s witnessed serious differences among Tajik writers about the course their creativity should take. On one side stood those who sought to preserve traditional forms and subject matter and opposed innovations in language. On the other side were those who had committed



themselves to the creation of a proletarian literature, one that would serve the needs of the new communist society in the making. The latter took the initiative in mobilizing writers by organizing the Association of Proletarian Writers of Tajikistan in 1930. Despite such efforts to regiment writers, creative debate and diversity characterized the decade to a degree that the Tajiks would not experience again until the break-up of the Soviet Union.

In the 1930s the proletarianization of Tajik literature proceeded in earnest. A decisive event was the establishment in 1933 of the Union of Tajik Writers, which served as the Communist Party's instrument for directing all aspects of literary activity. The goals of the Union were enthusiastically set forth by the poet Abu'l-Qāsem Lāhūtī at the first congress of Soviet writers held in Moscow in 1934, where he urged his fellow writers to devote all their talents to creating "works worthy of socialism" (Nikitine, pp. 349-54). What precisely he had in mind was defined by party ideologists as socialist realism, which required the writer both to portray society and the individual personality and to maintain a close attachment to the life of the working masses in accordance with prevailing party directives (*pārtiavīyat*). Furthermore, the writer had always to keep in mind that his work was not simply a depiction of reality but was at the same time a vital instrument for changing that reality.

Tajik fiction faithfully reflected the ideological struggles and the economic and social transformations of the 1920s and 1930s. Especially striking was the transition from the lyricism of classical storytelling to the new realistic treatment of plot and character, as authors described in great detail the processes of economic change and delineated the traits of the "new man" of Soviet society. They also labored to make literature accessible to the masses by simplifying the language of fiction and bringing it close to the spoken language. These changes may be traced in the literary reviews of the time: *Rahbar-e dāneš* (The leadership of knowledge; 1927-32), a monthly which maintained a certain aesthetic diversity; *Baroĵi adabijoti sosialisti* (in Roman script; Barāye adabīyāt-e sosiālistī; 1932-37), the monthly review of the Union of Tajik Writers; and its successors, *Šarqi surk* (1938-64) and *Sadoi šarq* (1964-; see L. V. Tursunova and Š. Toshtemirova, eds., *Fehristi žurnali Sadoi šarq [1926-1967]*, Dushanbe, 1973).

The novels of Šadr-al-Dīn 'Aynī (q.v.; 1878-1954), the leading figure of Tajik fiction during the period, also recorded the stages in the development of the form and content of Tajik socialist realism (Rahmatullaev, 3-110; Sayfulloev, 1978, pp. 54-68, 104-58). His first novel, *Ādīna yā sargozašt-e yak Tāĵik-e kam-*



*baḡal* (Adina, or the adventures of a poor Tajik; 1924), was about mountain Tajiks. Although the loose construction, the numerous poetic quotations, and the idealized pair of lovers, characteristic of traditional prose, remained, *Ādīna* brought innovations, too, in the form of poor peasants as heroes and a realistic style.

‘Aynī’s next three novels represented further progress in the development of realism, the predominant style of Tajik fiction throughout the Soviet period. In *Dākonda* (Dakhunda; 1930) the positive hero made his appearance as a poor peasant, who becomes a self-conscious revolutionary committed to improving the life of his community (Sayfulloev, 1966, pp. 61-112). ‘Aynī avoids the stereotypes of the typical Soviet five-year-plan novel as his description of the village and its inhabitants betrays deep affection for a way of life that he knew to be under siege. *Ġolāmān* (The slaves, 1934), the major work of Tajik fiction before World War II, reflected ‘Aynī’s abiding interest in Tajik history and brought his art closer to the ideals of socialist realism. A panorama of Tajik peasant life from the 19th century to the collectivization of agriculture in the 1930s, it glorifies collective labor as ennobling man and bringing the “new man of Soviet society to a superior moral and social consciousness” (Demidchik, pp. 65-128). But ‘Aynī shows his peasants to be real people, not simply embodiments of an ideology. In his final novel, *Marg-e sūdḡor* (The usurer’s death; 1937), a condemnation of the materialism of pre-revolutionary Bukharan society, ‘Aynī adds psychological depth to his work in his pitiless portrait of the moneylender.

‘Aynī’s long prose works were the exception in Tajik fiction, for until the end of World War II the short story predominated. Much influenced by the traditional *hekāya* and determined to cast the “building of socialism” in the best light possible, authors allowed loosely constructed plots and two-dimensional characters to prevail, as the cultural authorities mobilized writers to arouse a common Soviet patriotism and to exhort the population to sacrifice in order to achieve victory (Šarifov, pp. 8-41). No major piece of Tajik fiction was produced during the war.

In the decade or so after the war the primary task assigned to Tajik fiction was to assist in the accomplishment of crucial economic and social goals. For both the novel and the short story the conventions of socialist realism mandated the themes—the common wartime defense of the Soviet Union, the continued building of socialism, and the ever triumphant revolutionary movement—and its plots—the victory of the “new” over the “old” and of “good” over “evil.” As a



consequence, plots were predictable and heroes easily distinguishable from villains. Yet, unobtrusive experiments with form and content continued, and both the novel and short fiction matured.

Three authors, in particular, defined the novel during this period: Sātem Oloḡzāda (Sotim Uluḡzoda; 1911-97), Jalāl Ekrāmī (q.v.; 1909-93), and Raḡīm Jalīl (b. 1909). ‘Aynī by this time had turned to scholarship and the writing of his memoirs.

Although Oloḡzāda experiments with the psychological motivations of his heroes in his first, short novel, *Yārān-e bā-hemmat* (Noble friends; 1947), which described the faithfulness of Tajik wives whose husbands had been sent to the war front, he adhered to accepted formulas in subsequent novels. *Nowābād* (The new land, 1953) is a good example of the Soviet “production novel.” It describes life on the kolkhoz as the new and the old struggle for dominance in the guise of the secretary of the party organization, who is dedicated to the common good, and his opponents, the heads of two kolkhozes, who resist a merger that will cost them power and prestige. Predictably, the party secretary prevails because he is “in step with history,” (Šukurov, pp. 102-6, 117-22). The autobiographical *Sroḡḡ-e javānī-e mā* (The dawn of our youth, 1954) is a series of short stories joined together by the hero, the peasant Šāber. He is the participant and observer through whom we witness the ruin of the old order by revolution and the emergence of a young generation who will lead the rural masses to a new life (Yusufov, pp. 9-85; Šukurov, pp. 220-29).

Ekrāmī drew inspiration from the same sources and was at home with the broad canvasses offered by multi-volume novels. The first such work of his was *Šādī*, the first volume of which was published in 1940. Named after the peasant hero, it described the beginnings of collectivization and traced the emergence of a militant, optimistic peasantry, all in keeping with the prevailing guidelines of the party. But Ekrāmī discovered, as did most of his colleagues, that ideology was never more than a fragile, shifting foundation for literary creativity. He was repeatedly criticized in the party press in the late 1940s and early 1950s for his failure to portray “Soviet reality” with “clarity” and for his “errors” in describing kolkhoz life and his persistent use of “archaisms” (i.e., Persian words and expressions). He thus spent over a decade rewriting the first volume of *Šādī*. The second volume (1957) described *Šādī* after the war as the leader of a kolkhoz combating the remnants of the old order, the typical occupation of the typical hero of Soviet fiction of the period.



Jalīl was also inspired by conflicts between the old and the new. In *Ādamān-e jāvīd* (Immortal people, 1949) he described the struggles in northern Tajikistan in the 1920s of “progressive forces” to establish the Soviet political and economic order against the “nationalists”; i.e., the Jadīds and others who opposed it. Jalīl helped to develop the historical-revolutionary novel as a distinct genre of Tajik fiction. His trilogy, *Šūrāb* (1956-67), named after a mining district in northern Tajikistan, tells of the revolutionary and internationalist traditions of Tajik workers dating from before World War I to the early 1960s (Šukurov, pp. 268-80). The heroes are Communists who rise out of the working masses to become the revolutionary leaders of their people. Jalīl also accords a prominent place to Russian revolutionaries, unlike ‘Aynī in *Ādīna*, where they make only occasional appearances.

From the 1960s to the fall of the Soviet Union, Tajik authors continued to deal with familiar themes: the revolutionary movement and the role of the dedicated communist in transforming society, the masses engaged in the building of communism on kolkhozes and major construction sites, and the opposition between the old and the new. But now novelists and short story writers treated these matters with a greater sensitivity to the psychological nuances of personality and a more critical approach to historical and social realities. Ekrāmī’s *Man gonahgāram* (I am guilty; 1957) thus represented something of a breakthrough in Tajik fiction. He broke away from the traditional means of portraying character, deepening the analysis of individual motivation and broadening the social milieu in which the hero moved.

Among established writers Ekrāmī pursued the revolutionary theme in his trilogy, *Dovāzdah darvāza-ye Boḳārā* (The twelve gates of Bukhara; 1960-73), which describes the revolutionary movement of the first two decades of the 20th century as a vast educational experience that transforms the spiritual consciousness of the people. Added to the usual figures of the dedicated communists and the working masses, who remain the center of attention, are the Jadīds. Unlike earlier portrayals, where they were denounced as nationalists and anti-Soviet, Ekrāmī shows them to have been part of a complex intellectual and social movement and judges them differently at different stages in the evolution of Jadidism. He also displayed his skill in revealing character, notably by the interior monologue (Nabiev, pp. 97-108). *Zāghā- ye badmār* (Tenacious crows; 1977), which traces the adjustment to civilian life of a soldier who returns from the front, also offers something new



in the delineation of character: psychological contradictions in the hero, which prevent him from acting decisively against the evils he sees around him (Šukurov and Demidchik, 58-90).

Oloğzāda composed novels that explored the Tajik past in ways that had not been done before in fiction. *Wāse'* (Wase'; 1967), about a peasant uprising at the end of the 19th century, may be the first Tajik historical novel in the sense that it dealt with a purely Tajik theme, unlike the numerous "historical-revolutionary" novels that were internationalist in character and intent. Oloğzāda also explored the Tajik past in *Rewāyat-e soğdī* (The Sogdian legend, 1975). Although the period was remote, he nonetheless raised questions of Tajik identity, which challenged indirectly the official model of the ethnically indistinct new Soviet man. Both novels are reflections, however faint, of a growing national consciousness among educated Tajiks, one of the great contradictions of Soviet nationality policy inaugurated in the 1920s.

Among younger novelists, Fażl-al-Dīn Moḥammadīev (1928-86) was intrigued by the relations between generations. Previously, the elderly had been depicted either as relics of the past or impediments to progress, but in *Ādamān-e kohna* (Old people; 1962), *Palata-ye konjakī* (The corner palace, 1974), and subsequent short stories Moḥammadīev did not turn the sons against the fathers, but rather showed how the present was the product of the accumulated historical experience of many generations. His short novel *Dar ān donyā* (In the other world, 1966) also offered a less conventional treatment of religious sentiment. He describes a pilgrimage of the faithful to Mecca and indulges in satire at the expense of the clergy and religious faith in general. But this is not an anti-religious tract typical of earlier decades. It is, rather, a meditation on the meaning of human existence and the nature of happiness (Nabiev, pp. 74-82).

Tajik fiction of the latter 1970s and the 1980s displays new themes, while the traditional themes of socialist construction and revolutionary struggle now often provided merely the framework for penetrating investigations of character and of contemporary social and ethical questions. But what one misses are new thoughts and theories about the novel and bold experiments with form and technique. The novels of Yūsof Akāberov (b. 1937) and Moḥyī-al-Dīn Kṽājaev (b. 1938) are characteristic of the 1970s and 1980s. They wrote "production novels": Kṽājaev the trilogy *Āb-rūšnāi* (Water [is] light; 1972-77), and Akāberov *Nārak* (Nurek; 1978), both about the construction of a hydroelectric plant, and Akāberov *Zamīn-e pedarān* (The land of the fathers;



1974), about the formation of kolkhoz farms in the 1930s. They thus preserved the realistic narrative form, which had characterized Tajik fiction since 1930s. But they are no longer concerned with the details of construction. Rather, they focus on the inner world of their heroes and their spiritual and moral maturing, and they portray negative figures in all their complexity (Nabiev, pp. 84-86).

The dominant figure of the Tajik novel and short story of the period is the hero who is distinguished by a keen sense of responsibility for beneficial social change and by active involvement in bringing it about, as in Ūrun Kūhzād's (b. 1937) *Kīn-e komār* (Languid vengeance; 1978) and Moḥammadīev's *Warṭa* (The abyss; 1983) and *Šāhī-e Yapān* (Japanese silk, 1982). Their heroes differ significantly from those of the fiction produced between the 1930s and 1960s. They are before all else introspective and responsive to ideas. They are engaged in a spiritual quest and are often given to agonizing self-analysis, as in Kūhzād's *Yak rūz-e darāz, rūz-e besyār darāz* (A long day, a very long day, 1978). Sārbān (b. 1940; a pseudonym for Obloqul Hamroev) describes a specific category of such men in *Aktior* (The actor, 1984). In analyzing the thoughts and aspirations of contemporary intellectuals, he explores the successive stages in their moral development and reveals the process by which the artistic personality arrives at self-knowledge.

Another theme that occupies an increasingly important place in the Tajik novel of the 1980s is historical memory. In Kūhzād's *Ham kūh-e baland, ham šahr-e azīm* (Both the high mountain and the large city, 1983) the cares of contemporary everyday life are intertwined with reminiscences of the past, as memory not only affects the actions of the hero, but also determines the structure of the novel. Here the author is moving into a realm of ideas that had long been anathema to party ideologists: national consciousness. The hero of the novel sees himself as a Tajik and meditates on the long history of the Tajik people and wrestles with the sense of its tragedies. It is a powerful theme that links the waning years of the "Soviet man" to the desperate search for a new identity in the 1990s.

The 1990s may be another crucial turning-point in the development of Tajik fiction as new social and cultural structures are formed in an independent Tajikistan and as intellectuals seek their place in the new Central Asian and Islamic worlds. As the new generation of novelists and short story writers comes to terms with the present and as their contacts with literatures beyond Central Asia broaden, themes will increasingly be drawn from the historical



and religious past of the Tajiks in all its diversity, and experiments with form and technique will become a major preoccupation.

See also: [CENTRAL ASIA xv](#).

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