



## MIRŠAKAR, MIRSAID

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**MIRŠAKAR, MIRSAID** (Mir-sayyed; b. Sindev, 5 May 1912; d. Dushanbe, 1993). Tajik poet, dramatist, and children's author; People's Poet of Tajikistan, 1962.

Miršakar was born into a modest peasant family in Badaḵšan (Pamir), one of the more remote regions of Tajikistan, where he absorbed the stories and songs of the mountain people that became essential sources for his later poetry, plays, and stories. Decisive also were the three years he spent at a Communist Party-run school in Dushanbe. Upon graduation in 1930 he was drawn into the party's organizational and propaganda work, which, in a sense, he never left. He was, at first, active in the Komsomol (see [EDUCATION xxviii. In Tajikistan](#)) and later held various official posts, notably secretary of the Union of Writers of Tajikistan (1946-60). Beginning his career as a poet in the early 1930s, he discerned no contradiction between writing poetry and promoting social and economic progress. Quite the contrary, he eagerly placed his art in the service of building socialism, a commitment he maintained throughout his career.

Before World War II he wrote mainly short poems, a form he found suited to the social messages he wished to convey. He accepted the mission the Communist Party assigned to poets (and other writers) that they not merely observe the reality around them, but use their talent to change that reality. He was influenced by the new themes, forms and rhythms of Russian poetry of the time, as represented by Mayakovski, which reinforced his commitment to promote the new Soviet reality taking shape in Tajikistan.



His poems by and large retained traditional forms and meters, but he endowed them with new content. He supported collectivization of agriculture and the creation of a new life in the countryside (“Èy komsomolon!”), and he railed against those who stood in the way of the new Soviet order (“Dušmanro kun torumor”). A constant theme was the freeing of women from the bonds of the old order (“Duḡtari Vatan”) and their right to partake fully of the rewards and responsibilities of society (“Duḡtari paḡtakor”). Using satire to good advantage (“Qurbon idi kist?”), he attacked the Muslim clergy as irreconcilable foes of progress. His first long poem (*doston*, *dāstān*), “Livoi zafar” (1934), was in praise of socialist construction, specifically, the Vaḡš dam and irrigation project (see [ECONOMY xii. In Tajikistan](#)).

During World War II Miršakar concentrated on poetry with social and patriotic themes, but now he wrote longer works. Many poems, such as “Qasami Tišaboy” (1942), dealt with the bravery of Tajik soldiers at the battlefield. Equally heroic, in his eyes, were the labor and sacrifices of men and women on the home front. The long poem, “Odamon az bomi jahon” (1943), is a moving portrait, based on personal knowledge, of the miners of his native Pamir region. The central theme of “Qišloqi tilloī” (1944) is the Soviet Union as the earthly promised land. Adapting a folk legend and using classical meters, Miršakar tells of villagers from the Pamir who set out to find the mythical “Happy Land.” After a long and fruitless search they returned home to discover that the happy land was in fact their own village, which in their absence the builders of the new Soviet order had transformed into a thriving community.

In the postwar era Miršakar adhered to official cultural injunctions to observe (and praise) the successes of communism. Thus, the mood of his poems is optimism born of confidence in Soviet men and women to overcome all obstacles to a better life. He felt a sense of responsibility as a poet to improve society, a stance that underlies all his creative work. It takes precedence over his sense of himself as an artist, and thus he was never a proponent of art for art’s sake. Yet, he practiced his craft diligently and aimed at perfection within the limits he had imposed on himself.

The themes he treated reflected his commitments. Numerous poems recorded the triumphs of the Soviet system, as in “Paḡta šukuft.” He was also fully engaged in the struggle for peace and condemned “warmongers,” who were easily identifiable as America and its allies. Lenin was a recurring subject which dated from his 1930s “Ruboiyot dar borai Lenin” (1938) and perhaps



reached a culmination in the long poem, “Lenin dar Pamir” (1955). In the latter he celebrates the transformative power of Lenin’s “immortal” ideas in consolidating the Soviet regime. Many poems were careful observations of contemporary life and strivings to reconcile the individual with society, as in the collection *Tay namudem rohi bis’yore* (1968).

Miršakar’s most important poetical works of the postwar era were undoubtedly his long poems. They cover familiar ground. “Kalidi bakt” (1947) tells how the people of the Pamir subdued the refractory mountains and thus illustrates the superiority of the new order over the old. The purposes of “Panji noorom” (1949) are similar, but here the contrast is between the happy life of Soviet peoples and the suffering of peoples in the Western colonial empires of the East. In “Dašti laband” (1964) the standard theme of material prosperity under the Soviet system is extended to the opening up of new lands to cultivation. The heroic actions of a Tajik female pilot in World War II in “Varaqhoi muhabbat” (1975) speaks to the equality of women.

After the war Miršakar embarked upon a second career as a dramatist. He achieved much success largely because he dealt with problems of day-to-day existence, often in a humorous vein. His major themes were the same as in his poetry. Thus, “Qišloqi tilloī” (1949) was intended, like the poem, to persuade audiences that they were right to work and sacrifice to create a new Tajikistan. But he also broached themes that lay on the edge of the social and ideological orthodoxy of the time. In two plays, in particular, he approached the delicate question of national sentiment. In “Šahri man” (1951) he traces the differences in aesthetic principles guiding an established architect and his younger colleague as they plan the building of a new city. At issue is what constitutes the “Tajik style.” The younger man, who favors the utilitarian lines of modern architecture, prevails. But in “Fojiai Usmonov” (1957), which examines the fortunes of a composer who ignores the native musical tradition, Miršakar shows why, in the end, the Tajik style triumphs. His versatility is evident in the numerous one-act plays he wrote. They were satires and comedies directed mainly against “remnants” of the past in the behavior and thinking of ordinary people.

Miršakar merits recognition as the leading practitioner of children’s literature in Soviet Tajikistan. From the very beginning of his literary career, he produced a variety of long and short poems, songs, and stories adapted from Tajik folklore, as in the collection, *Bahori Tojikiston* (1959). He wrote to entertain his young readers, and to do so he chose the rhythms and favorite



characters of Tajik oral literature. But, as we have seen, he believed in the social function of literature, and, thus, many poems had a didactic purpose. He taught patriotism, as in “Mo az Pamir omadem” (1940), which shows how Tajik pioneers on their way to Moscow became acquainted with their Soviet homeland. He also wanted to instill in young people a love of work, as in “Ne’mat” (1942), because it was the foundation of happiness and prosperity in the new communist world.

Miršakar’s contributions to the development of Soviet Tajik literature were not limited to his poetry, dramas, and works for children. His memoirs (*Ayyomi javonī*, 1972; *Yodi yori mehrubon*, 1979) are valuable, if limited, records of the intellectual life of his time, and his critical essays on Tajik poetry and drama and on the nature of children’s literature (*Kulliyot III*) were thoughtful discussions in an ongoing literary debate.

See also [CENTRAL ASIA xv. Modern Literature](#).

*Works.* The most comprehensive collection of Miršakar’s works is *Kulliyot*, 3 vols., Dushanbe, 1970-73. Among representative selections in Tajik are *Asarhoi muntakab*, (Dushanbe, 1982) and *Varaqhoi muhabbat (Dostonho va še’rho)* (Dushanbe, 1978). For a selection of his plays, see *Muallimi išq: majmūai pesaho*, Dushanbe, 1985. His memoirs, *Yodiyori mehrubon* (Dushanbe, 1979) offer insights into the intellectual issues of the time. Of the many translations of his works into Russian, *Izbrannoe* (Moscow, 1986) provides a representative selection.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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The standard account of Miršakar as poet with analyses of his longer works is Ҷ. Mirzozoda, *Mirsaid Miršakar*, Dushanbe, 1962. A critical assessment is “Mirsaid Miršakar,” in *Ocherk istorii tadzhikskoi sovetskoï literatury*, Moscow, 1964, pp. 421-58. A brief account is Jiři Bečka, “Tajik Literature from the 16th Century to the Present,” in Jan Rypka, ed., *History of Iranian Literature*, Dordrecht, 1968, pp. 485-605, esp. pp. 580-81. On Miršakar’s works for children, insightful are J. Bobokalonova, *M. Miršakar—šoiri bačagon* (Dushanbe, 1976) and Bobo Ҷudoydodov, “Vosifi olami bačagon,” in idem, *Se*



*očerk dar borai se adib*, Dushanbe, 1983, pp. 190-235.

(Keith Hitchins)