



# MONZEM, MIRZĀ ‘ABD-AL-WĀḤED

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**MONZEM**, Mirzā ‘Abd-al-Wāḥed (Tajik: Mirzo Abdulvohidi Munzim; b. Bukhara, 1875 or 1877; d. Stalinabad [Dushanbe], 4 March 1934), Tajik poet, social activist, and journalist.

Monzem’s intellectual upbringing began at an early age. He became acquainted with the classical Persian poets at home, in part, from his mother’s readings to him and, in part, from studies at school. When orphaned at the age of eight, he went to live at the home of Šarifjān Maḳdum (1867-1932), a judge and a patron of enlightened causes in Bukhara, who wrote poetry and prose under the pen name Šadr-e Žiā’. The new environment proved decisive for Monzem, as it introduced him to the progressive cultural currents of Bukhara. In time he joined the regular gatherings of young poets and other intellectuals at Šadr-e Žiā’s home, where they read and discussed poetry and also used the occasion to comment on politics and society in the Emirate of Bukhara (Allworth et al., pp. 2-4). They were uniformly critical of the authoritarian governance and cultural obscurantism that prevailed. It was, then, in this stimulating company that Monzem embarked upon a career as a poet and a commentator on public issues, as an ardent proponent of education and general enlightenment, and, inevitably, as a resolute opponent of the emir’s regime. He was deeply influenced in his opinions and his art by those he met in this small circle, notably Šadr-al-Din ‘Ayni (1878-1954) and Moḥammad Seddiq Ḥayrat (1878-1902). For all of them the writings of Aḥmad Maḳdum



Dāneš (1827-97), the leading enlightener of the time in Bukhara, served as a guide to understanding current issues and as an inspiration for reform. At the behest of Ṣadr-e Zīā’, Monẓem made copies of his most influential work, *Nawāder al-waqā’e*. Of importance, too, in expanding the range of Monẓem’s political and social thought was his reading of the diverse newspaper press that circulated in Bukhara, from *Ḥabl al-matin*, published in Persian in Calcutta, to *Tarjuman*, in Tatar and Russian from the Crimea.

Between the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917 Monẓem devoted himself to the founding of schools and championing the spread of knowledge by all possible means. Together with ‘Ayni he assisted in the establishment of the first “new-method” (*oṣul-e jadid*) school (see [Education xxviii. In Tajikistan](#)) in Bukhara in 1908, and he became an active member of the so-called Jadids, enlighteners (*ma’refatparvar*), whose long-term goal was to open Central Asia and its young generation, in particular, to the knowledge and challenges of the modern world (see [JADIDISM](#)). He himself wrote a textbook for the school on the teaching of writing. When the emir closed the school in 1910 on the grounds that it was subversive of the existing social order, Monẓem and a number of colleagues formed a secret society, *Tarbiya-ye atfāl*, in the same year in order to promote education and science, improve public morals, and, not least, encourage opposition to the emir’s rule. The society, true to its Jadid origins, arranged for the sending of Bukharan students to Istanbul for study (15 in 1911 and 30 in 1912), a program Monẓem helped to organize. He continued to establish new-method schools in 1913 and 1914, despite the emir’s manifest hostility to any innovations in the spirit and content of education. Monẓem expanded his role in the cause of enlightenment by supporting the founding in 1912 of *Bokārā-ye šarif*, which became the leading Tajik newspaper of the day, carrying news and commentary sympathetic to social progress. When the emir had the newspaper closed in 1913, Monẓem and his fellow Jadids opened a bookstore called *Ma’refat* and founded a society, *Barakat*, to carry on their work.

By this time Monẓem had become well known in Bukhara as a poet as well as a civic activist. He owed his intention to become a serious poet largely to the example and encouragement of ‘Ayni and Ḥayrat, whose work he deeply admired. On the death of Ḥayrat he was moved to collect all his poems and make two copies, one for himself and the other for ‘Ayni. He was much influenced also by the classic Persian poets, as his *gāzals*, *robā’is*, and *qaṣidas* often used their works as models. His love poems owed much to [Hafez](#) and,



especially, to [Kamāl Kojandi](#), as in the *gāzal* “Goftam—ba čašm,” an imitation in which he displayed unusual skill and feeling (‘Ayni, 2010, pp. 326-27). Another *gāzal*, “Āb o tēg” (published in 1920), in a difficult form to master, showed his thorough acquaintance with the most refined techniques of classical poetry. Yet, from his first *robā’is* in 1896-97 social themes were present, and in the *qaṣida* “Maktab,” undoubtedly written to support Jadid schools and the activities of the Tarbia-ye aṭfāl society, he praised knowledge and expressed a yearning for a just society.

The February and October revolutions and the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917 were major turning points in Monẓem’s career. For the next decade he was absorbed in public affairs and became a political activist committed to the overthrow of the emir and the establishment of the new, Soviet order in Bukhara. He was elected to a number of important offices, responsibilities that reflected the general esteem he enjoyed among fellow intellectuals. After the October Revolution he became chairman of the Party of Young Bukharans, as the Jadids had begun to call themselves. He and they organized public demonstrations against the emir in 1918, and when the police moved against them, they fled to [Samarqand](#) and Tashkent, which were controlled by the Bolsheviks and their allies. Soon afterwards, Monẓem was one of the founders of the Communist Party of Bukhara; he drew up the party program and was elected chairman at its first official meeting in Tashkent, 30 May to 11 June 1919. He reiterated his adherence to revolutionary social and economic ideas in a series of articles he wrote for the Communist weekly *Šo’la-ye enqelāb* of Samarqand. Characteristic of his work was his appeal, “Ey Šarq-e maḏlum,” published in *Šo’la-ye enqelāb* in 1919, in which he praised the Bolshevik Revolution and called upon the peoples of Central Asia and neighboring lands to give all possible support to such wars of social liberation (Monẓem, *Majmūai osor*, pp. 67-71). He published similar pieces in the newspaper *Qutuluš*, the organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bukhara.

After the overthrow of the emir in 1920, which Monẓem enthusiastically welcomed, and the establishment of the Bukharan People’s Soviet Republic, he took on a variety of official duties. For the new republic he supervised the sending of 44 students to take engineering and technology courses in Berlin in 1922 and accompanied them there, a task that fitted his ever-present Jadid mindset admirably. Then, in 1925 he and ‘Ayni established the first state publishing house of Tajikistan with headquarters in Samarqand, for which he



served as an editor. As a leading public figure Monẓem was elected a member of the Central Executive Committee of the Uzbek SSR in 1927, and the next year the Ministry of Education appointed him to a committee to elaborate a new, Latin alphabet for the Tajik language (see [Tajik ii. Tajik Persian](#)). He proved to be an ardent advocate of the replacement of the Arabic alphabet, which he found “inadequate” for Tajik. He recommended the Latin alphabet for its ease of use and its value as a tool for increasing literacy, because it was more phonetic than the Arabic alphabet (Tabarov, 1991, pp. 69-71, 138-41).

The poems Monẓem wrote in the 1920s reflect his preoccupation with radical social and economic change and his support of the policies of the Soviet (and Uzbek and Tajik) Communist parties to bring it about as rapidly as possible. The intent of many of these poems was to mobilize public opinion behind party initiatives and arouse sympathy for the oppressed under the old order. The *ġazals* “Tā ba kay?” (1920) and “Bayān-e ḥāl” (1920) describe the hard life and work of the laboring classes of Bukhara and express antipathy to those who exploited them before the revolution. Some poems deal directly with class struggle between the exploiters and the exploited, as in “Našavad, šod” (1929), which singled out the clergy as especially deserving of censure. Monẓem was always ready to support the cause of the day, as in the *ġazal* “Nabovad hēj,” which urged the liberation of women from the restraints of tradition and the granting to them of equal rights, and the *ġazal* “Kolkoz šod” (1930), which admonished peasants to embrace wholeheartedly the collectivization of agriculture. By 1928 he had become a kind of official poet whose main responsibility was to produce suitable pieces to commemorate important events such as the October Revolution and the death of Lenin.

The abovementioned poems gave pride of place to social struggle and ideology and tended to neglect form and technique, as the message was clearly more important than the art of expression. Monẓem was, in effect, two poets. The one belonged to the early 20th century, when he adhered firmly to the traditions of classical Persian verse; his place in Tajik literature is assured by the poems he wrote then. The other poet was the civic activist of revolutionary and Soviet times.

Monẓem’s career may perhaps be characterized as that of a public intellectual, who came to believe that his poetic talent could best be used in serving the cause of social progress. Because of age, he withdrew from his posts in journalism (in 1930 he had joined the editorial board of *Toçikistoni surx* (Tājikestān-e sork; the chief organ of the Communist Party of Tajikistan) and at



the state publishing house. He died two years later.

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