



SAVDO ABDULQODIRHOJAI

SAVDO (Sawdā), **ABDULQODIRHOJAI** (ʿAbd-al-Qāder K̄āja; ابۇالدۇر ھوجاي ابۇالدۇر ھوجاي, b., Bukhara, 1823-24; d. 1873: drowned in the Vaḳšāb River and buried in [Bukhara](#)), Tajik lyric and satirical poet.

Information about Savdo's life and career is relatively sparse. What we have comes mainly from a study of the contents of his poems and from the notes of a few contemporaries who knew him. A. Vozeh and Sadri Ziyo in their anthologies provide a few interesting details, and [Şadr-al-Din 'Ayni](#) in his memoirs recalls a conversation he had with Savdo's son at the end of the 19th century, which offers precious insights into his thought and daily existence. It was 'Ayni who, after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, drew the attention of scholars and others to Savdo's poetry by including some *ġazals* and parts of his satirical verses in his own comprehensive anthology, *Namunai adabiyoti tojik*. In a sense, then, 'Ayni inaugurated the scholarly and critical study of Savdo's works. But Savdo's works were not published in a volume until the selection of poems, *Muntakhabot* edited by Galiya Galimova, appeared in 1958. Savdo seems to have enjoyed the full esteem of his contemporaries, although he was not a prolific poet; his poetical works amount to some 1,900 *meşra'is*.

Even though there are few details about Savdo's family, it is evident that he belonged to a learned and respected family in Bukhara that could trace its ancestry back to the 17th-century poet and intellectual Moḥammad-Şarif Ḥosayni. The family tradition of learning undoubtedly accounts for his own studies at the *madrasa* and his wide-ranging intellectual interests. His formal



studies encompassed the usual subjects of the time: the doctrines of Islam, Muslim law, and Arabic grammar. He also acquired a broad knowledge of the natural sciences and fine arts, including painting and music, as well as astronomy, calligraphy, and goldsmithing. At the same time he was gaining a reputation as a skilled poet, having begun to write poems while studying at the *madrasa*. He used the pen name (*taḳalloṣ*) Savdo in his lyrics and Bepul (Bipul) in his satires and other humorous verses.

Reports about his poetical talent and his erudition eventually reached the court of Amir Naṣr-Allāh Khan of Bukhara (r. 1826-60), who invited him to take a position as one of his secretaries. His successor, Amir Moḏaffar, perhaps impressed by Savdo's talent for improvising poems and ability to converse on any subject, made him an adviser and assigned him a variety of special and confidential tasks. But Savdo found life at court distressing, sometimes even unbearable. He did not receive a regular salary and thus had great difficulty supporting his family and found himself constantly in debt. He was repelled by the immorality and cruelty of the ruling groups he observed at court, and he resented the commissions the khan and his favorites imposed on him to write verse to suit their mood of the moment (Hodizoda et al., 1988, pp. 362-63). Yet, at the same time, outside the court, he joined circles of intellectuals who were, as he was, critical of the arbitrary rule of the khan and the elites around him, and who deplored the economic ruin that they had allowed to occur and did nothing to reverse. They and Savdo were admirers of [Aḥmad Maḳdum Dāneš](#) (d. 1897), the enlightened advocate of reform in Central Asia, with whom Savdo himself had several conversations (Savdo, p. 18).

Savdo began to write poetry at a time when the influence of the Indian-Persian poet 'Abd-al-Qāder Bidel (1644-1721) was strong among the poets of Bukhara and Transoxiana, and Savdo's own work could not help being affected by it. In some of his *ḡazals* he adhered to the form of Bidel's poetry, and on occasion he even revealed a tone and rhythm characteristic of the master's Sufi poems. He was, however, intent on finding his own poetic voice and avoided outright imitation. His emulation of Bidel and also [Ḥāfeḏ](#) was, then, a sharing of a general approach to literary creativity based upon the styles of classical Persian poetry. But unlike Bidel and his imitators, who composed complicated, abstract verses, he practiced a way of expressing himself that was candid and in harmony with the feelings and understanding of a wider public. Perhaps such an ambition explains his attraction to the *ḡazals* of



Ḥāfez, whose images and language he clearly admired. In order to draw closer to his readers he was innovative in his use of language. He thus introduced into his poems vernacular words and expressions while, at the same time, being intent on improvising new words. One of his favorite devices was to make verbs out of nouns (e.g., *sarvidan*, *iltijoidan*, in Savdo, p. 58), and the resulting noun-verbs heightened the sense of play in his satirical and other humorous pieces.

Savdo wrote mainly two kinds of poetry, love poems and satirical and humorous verses, and he used many forms (*qaṣida*, *moḳammas*, *maṭnawī*, *qeṭ'a*, and *robā'i*; see 'ARŪŪ'), but his favorite form was the *ḡazal*. His love poems tended to be straightforward, even at times naïve, but recounting the pain of separation from the beloved was rarely absent, even if at times it was softened by light humor. For him, love was never a metaphysical experience, but always a phenomenon grounded in the complexities of the material world. His satirical and humorous poems were the occasions for criticizing the social and economic conditions prevailing in Bukhara and for mocking those in authority. He repeatedly denounced the ignorance and greed of the ruling circles and urged compassion for the poor and unfortunate (Hodizada, 1968, pp. 167-72). Drawing upon his own experiences, he also complained about the hard life that people of talent and learning were forced to endure (e.g., Savdo, pp. 38, 39).

In numerous poems he combined his social criticism with humor. One of his regular themes was praise of food, a popular topic at the court, since the khan himself had an extraordinary appetite. Savdo satirized the ruling class as a whole as made up of people who were fat and, due to that very fact, exposed their belief that the true meaning of life was to be found at the dinner table (e.g., "*Mošobajonro bo šumo dodam*" (Savdo, p. 76). Savdo also wrote prose, but only a part of his work has come down to us in the form of five stories, which he called *Muzhikot* (*Možhekāt*). They belong to the genres of moral advice and satire and are in their own way criticisms of the social life of the time. They deal with such diverse topics as pornography, superstition, and women's role in the raising of children. In composing these pieces, he brought innovation to literary prose, as he had to poetry, by emphasizing a simple, direct style and by bringing his own language close to the spoken language of the people.



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