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## **MASHADI MUHAMMAD BULBUL'S EPOCH, LIFE AND ART**

### **ЕПОХА, ЖИТТЯ ТА МИСТЕЦТВО МЕШЕДІ МУХАММЕДА БЮЛЬБЮЛЯ**

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The aim of this article is to acquaint the reader with one of the prominent poets of Karabakh of the XIX century – Mashadi Muhammad Bulbul. Keeping this in mind, the current paper discusses the socio-economic background and literary tendencies of the XIX century which was the arduous period in terms of both literature and history. Further, it describes the well-renowned literary figures that played a crucial role in shaping of Bulbul's literary destiny. The paper proceeds to illustrate the peculiarities of the poet's creative work, his language and literary genres he preferred. Mashadi Muhammad Bulbul is one of the talented representatives of local literary circles of Karabakh of the XIX century. Prior to launching discussion on his biography and power of his art, it is noteworthy to make a short review of the peculiarities of historical background which influenced the poet as well as the socio-economic processes occurring at that specific time interval. Each thinker, poet, writer is a reflection of the demands and desires of a period he lives in; therefore there is a strong necessity to shed the light on the time when he lived and created. The XIX century is considered to mark a significant period in the development of Azerbaijan be it either in terms of political thought or cultural history. Following the signing of the Treaty of Gulustan (1813) and the Treaty of Turkmenchay (1828), which was a severe consequence of two annexation wars and which divided the country into two parts, Azerbaijan witnessed certain alterations in the socio-political sphere. Awakening of national consciousness, nationalism, enlightenment ideas commenced to disseminate progressively. In this vein, it is crucial to draw an attention on several events. The first and the second halves of the XIX century are acknowledged to be challenging and burdensome for history of Azerbaijan. Several

reforms introduced by the Russian Empire in Azerbaijan at that time exerted a huge impact on the populace together with economic and cultural relations.

**Key words:** Mashadi Muhammad Bulbul, poetry of XIX century, Karabakh, literary assemblies, genres of poetry.

Мета статті – ознайомити читача з одним із видатних поетів Карабаху XIX століття – Мешеді Мухаммедом Бюльбюлем. У статті обговорюються соціально-економічні передумови та літературні тенденції XIX століття, яке було важким періодом як у літературі, так і в історії. Також описуються відомі літературні діячі, які відіграли вирішальну роль у формуванні літературної долі Мешеді Мухаммеда Бюльбюля. У статті йдеться про особливості творчості поета, його мову та літературні жанри, яким він віддавав перевагу. Мешеді Мухаммед Бюльбюль – один із талановитих представників місцевих літературних кіл Карабаху XIX століття. Перш ніж розпочати дискусію про його біографію та силу його мистецтва, варто зробити короткий огляд особливостей передісторії, яка вплинула на поета, а також соціально-економічних процесів, що відбуваються в цей конкретний часовий проміжок. Кожен мислитель, поет, письменник – це відображення запитів і бажань часу, у який він живе, тому є гостра необхідність пролити світло на період, коли жив і творив зазначений Мешеді Мухаммед Бюльбюль. XIX століття вважається вагомим періодом у розвитку Азербайджану з позиції політичної думки або культурної історії. Після підписання Гюлістанського договору (1813 року) та Туркменчайського договору (1828 року), що було серйозним наслідком двох анексійних воєн, які розділили країну на дві частини, Азербайджан зазнав певних змін у соціально-політичній сфері. Розпочалося поступове пробудження національної свідомості, націоналізму, просвітницьких ідей. У цьому напрямі важливо звернути увагу на декілька подій. Перша та друга половини XIX століття визнані складними й обтяжливими для історії Азербайджану. Декілька реформ, запроваджених Російською імперією в Азербайджані в той час, справили величезний вплив на населення разом з економічними й культурними відносинами.

**Ключові слова:** Мешеді Мухаммед Бюльбюль, поезія XIX століття, Карабах, літературні збірки, жанри поезії.

With the purpose of reinforcing its position here, the Russian Empire undertook series of policies. Hence, “in order to consolidate its position the absolutism gradually substituted the mode of ruling – khanates – by military units called “commandants” [2, p. 7]. Notwithstanding the fact that this kind of policy was conducive to positive repercussions on the whole, it did not unfortunately brought an enduring effect. The economic arrangements ushered in by the Tsarist Russia during 30s – 40s abolished the khanates and unleashed the isolation of feudal patriarchy.

Much to the credit of Russia, Azerbaijan stepped up to the world market [2, p. 10]. This stimulated crafts and trade to flourish. Urban life began thriving as well. Nevertheless, these political innovations did not fulfil the expectations either; on the contrary, the political temperature rose and it led to several upheavals. As a result, in 1840 the Tsarist government passed the law on the administrative reforms in Transcaucasia. It decommissioned commandant method of governing; qazis were established instead of governorates and mahals [5, p. 216]. The laws which came into force afterwards, recovered property rights of feudals and aghalars (lords) over the lands.

Thereby, the XIX century is indeed a contradictory period in the economic and cultural evolution of the Azerbaijanian people. Whereas a feudalistic reminiscence still existed and influenced the cultural segments and enlightenment movement, on the other hand, however, the progressive Russian and European cultural values, democratic tendencies, ideas of freedom commenced widely scattering [7, p. 5]. One of the significant events of this century was establishment of Muslim ecclesiastical schools. The first such school was opened in Tiflis and later on

more schools began their activities in Ganja, Baku, Shamakhi and Shusha. Being first and the only one at the time, the female school was established in 1848 in Shamakhi however, after the earthquake it was relocated to Baku.

It is also worth mentioning the productive activity of the first soldiers of the army of enlighteners. In this aspect, Abbaskulu Aga Bakikhanov, Gasim Bey Zakir, Mirza Shafi Vazeh, Mirza Jafar Topchubashov, Mirza Muhammadali Kazimbey made a huge contribution to the development of the science and culture of this period. In the first half of the century under the positive influence of the advanced Russian science the Azerbaijanian scientists gradually moved away from scholastic tendencies and produced a number of precious works in the field of history, geography, astronomy, natural sciences [2, p. 28]. As the clear-cut examples, one can remember “Kharabakhname” by Mirza Adigozalbey, “History of Karabakh” by Mirza Jamal Javanshir, the works of Karim Aga Fateh and others.

Another phenomenal occurrence of that period was the establishment of the first press in Transcaucasia. In 1832 the newspaper “Tatar news” began to be published in Tiflis. Being an appendix of another newspaper named “Tiflisskiye Vedomosti”, it published predominantly official documents and decrees. However, national press was founded by Hasan bey Zardabi when he established “Ekinchi” (“The Cultivator”) newspaper in 1875. Despite the fact that it existed only two years, it played an irreplaceable role not only in awakening of national consciousness but also it propagated the soil for novel newspapers to grow and, by doing so, prevented the eradication of press traditions of the period. Owing to these tendencies,

a press boom started and the amount of newspapers considerably increased: “Ziya” began its activities in 1879, “Ziyayi-Qafqaziyyə” – in 1880; afterwards, “Keshkul”, then the Russian-language newspapers such “Kaspi” and “Bakinskiye izvestiya”. All of these aforementioned newspapers can be recognised as a true milestone in socio-cultural life.

Along with the literature of the first half of the XIX century which was dominated by the classic traditions, ashik<sup>1</sup> art also began flourishing. One can distinguish performance of Ashiq Ali, Ashiq Alasgar, Ashiq Najafi, and Ashiq Pari as remarkable representatives of “ashik” music art.

Two literary currents manifested themselves in the first half of the XIX century: reactionary romanticism and critical realism. The emergence of critical realism is directly associated with the name of Abbasgulu Aga Bakikhanov. The books such as “Mishkatul-anvar” together with “Kitabi-Asgariyya” are acknowledged to be one of the precious oeuvres of his. One of the eminent figures of this period was Mirza Fatali Akhundov remarkable part of creative life of whose coincides with the second half of XIX century. Taking into the consideration that Mashadi Muhammad Bulbul was born in that period – if being precise, in 1858 – one might need to contemplate this time interval as well.

Second half of XIX century is also commemorated in history with the numerous important events. As shrewdly observed by Mahmud Ismailov, “50s – 60s of the XIX century can be characterized with the collapse of feudalistic socio-economic relations and with the nascent capitalism” [5, p. 225]. After the abolishment of arbitrary law villagers became freer and relatively recovered their rights. These reforms were conducive to the development of capitalism. Majority of cities started reviving. Craftsmanship and trade were widespread. The main trade cities were Baku, Shusha, Nukha and Shamakhi. The size of population in the mentioned cities surpassed the population of others’ several times.

Furthermore, the ranks of the “enlightenment army”, established in the first half of the XIX century carried on expanding. The capitalist efflorescence created an auspicious condition for formation of bourgeoisie nation. For the first time ever, “Azerbaijani nation” was utilized as a notion in “Keshkul” newspaper. The concepts as national consciousness, national identity acquired an enormous importance. There were so called “enlightenment soldiers” concerned about the destiny of the nation, public figures who were attempting to educate the ignorant populace.

Most importantly, one can underline the endeavours of Mirza Fatali Akhundov, Nariman Narimanov, Ahmed bey Agayev, Alimardan Topchubashov and Alibey Huseynzada. However, these enlighteners were not working in a systematic way: one of the main tools of theirs was to excoriate the existing regime. In this period one can contemplate the intensification of progressive-democratic movement in Azerbaijan. The representatives of this movement, including N. Narimanov, J. Mammadquluzadeh, A. Hagverdiyev, N. Vazirov in their essays criticized the obstacles in the way of socio-economic and political life of Azerbaijan [5, p. 246].

One of the turning-point moments the Azerbaijanian cultural life was the establishment of the first mass library by Nariman Narimanov in 1894. In this period a lot of works were dedicated to history especially by Mirza Yusif Karabakhi, Mir Mehdi Khazani and Ahmed bey Javanshir.

The XIX century literature can be considered to be the most contradictory in the vein of its development. Thus, the enlighteners who were not able to liberate themselves from religious worldview did not achieve to become the real representatives of the realistic stream. Feyzulla Gasımszade depicts this period in a following way: “Scholasticism ruled over the science. The certain part of intellectuals who graduated from madrasas<sup>2</sup> dedicated their works to the topic of religion” [7, p. 16]. Therefore, marsiya<sup>3</sup> and religious literature particularly developed in this period. It is not therefore coincidence that it is possible to encounter marsiya genre in Bulbul’s works as well. This period raised the following representatives of marsiya genre such as Raji, Gumri, Shuai, Supehri, Ahi and Mirza Hasib Khudsi.

Based on Firuza Hasanova’s investigations, one can state that Mashadi Muhammad Bulbul was born in Shusha in 1858. He obtained his education at the school of Molla Ibrahim and studied Arab and Farsi as well as recitation of Koran and calligraphy. During the school years he profoundly acquainted himself with the Eastern literature. He expressed a sincere interest to ashik poetry and local literature; he was inspired by folk songs and, by doing so, he cultivated eventually a good artistic taste. Possessing a beautiful voice, he participated in local events, during which he even voluntarily read some of his qoshmas<sup>4</sup> [4, p. 7]. Nevertheless, due to certain reasons Mashadi Muhammad Bulbul had to cease

<sup>1</sup> Folk music performed by Azerbaijanian bards.

<sup>2</sup> A Muslim ecclesiastical school.

<sup>3</sup> An elegy to commemorate the massacre of Imam Hussein.

<sup>4</sup> A type of local poetry performed by ashiks.

pursuing the career of *khananda*<sup>5</sup> and commenced a literary career and became one of the committed cogues of the literary milieu.

Thus, the contemporary of Mashadi Muhammad Bulbul Salman Mumtaz describes the grounds why he deprived himself of the career of *khananda* in the following way. I personally met Bulbul and was astounded by his talent. He was not a superstitious person at all. To the question why he left singing he replied that he could not tolerate mocking of ignorant masses [4, p. 8]. There are, unfortunately, no convincing academic sources elaborating on the reasons behind Mashadi Muhammad's decision to adopt "Bulbul" penname. There is also evidence that in the second half of the XIX century there were several poets who wrote under the name of "Bulbul". Firuza Hasanova – a talented researcher who conducted an earnest investigation on the legacy of Mashadi Muhammad – concludes that there were five poets who wrote under the name of "Bulbul" in the XIX century. One of them was Molla Turab, the second – Mirza Muhammadtagi Tabrizi, the third – Mirza Hasan, the fourth – Molla Saleh Zangilani, the fifth – Mashadi Muhammad [4, p. 7]. It is doubtless that Mashadi Muhammad appeared to have become more famous rather than all his pen-namesakes.

One of the prime mentioning of Mashadi Muhammad Bulbul's name relates to the book of Mir Mohsun Navvab "Tazkireyi-Navvab". Navvab introduces Bulbul briefly and indicates that he comprised his seven poems to his memoirs. Mashadi Muhammad was twenty eight years old when these memoirs were written. The below mentioned poems belong to him and were written by him personally [6, p. 205]. Nasraddin Garayev indicates that Mashadi Bulbul was a member of "Majlisi-Faramushan" – a literary assembly led by Mir Mohsun Navvab. In the XIX century there were three persons famous for Bulbul<sup>6</sup> and they were granted with this pseudonym due to the fact they wielded a very pleasant voice. Therefore Mashadi Muhammad Bulbul used to be *khananda* in the past. Several of his *ghazals*<sup>7</sup> were even personally written by Bulbul in the memoirs as an autograph.

In his small *divan*<sup>8</sup> as well as in the collections of manuscripts and fragments of his *ghazals*, it is conspicuous that he was deeply acquainted with classic literature. His poetry style is very smooth,

plain and descriptive [6, p. 205]. Previously mentioned literary assemblies of the second half of the XIX century were equivalent to literary competitions. The poets rivalled not only amidst one another but also with the members of other societies. Whilst such relations, on the one hand, instigated a group of poets to remain just imitators or resort to a fashionable epigonism, on the other hand, by dint of investigating the classic Azerbaijani literature it laid a socio-literary foundation for appearance of new original scenarios and was a channel for the poets to better acquaint with one another.

A membership in those literary assemblies played a vital role in Bulbul's literary destiny alike and immensely influenced his outlook. Thus, during these meetings Navvab informed his contemporaries about different events befalling in social life, provided them miscellaneous topics which might kindle their literary imagination and, by doing so, earnestly impacted the further development of the word artists. In her solid investigation Aytan Hajiyeva stresses Navvab's great influence on Bulbul's worldview. She underlines that general ambiance and topics of those literary evenings exerted a huge impact on the formulation of leading tendencies in poets' art. It is additionally worth indicating that Navvab's reputation paved the soil to cultivate some of poets' literary taste: if one may name such young members of those societies as Mashadi Eyyub Baki, Sadi Sani Karabakhi, Muhammad Bulbul Garyagdi [3, p. 75].

Only a small share of the poet's literary legacy reached modern times. One can observe in the manuscript that his heritage embraces substantially the poems written in the Azerbaijani and Farsi languages. Mashadi Muhammad's work is distinguished by genre diversity. Since *ghazal* is considered to be a crown of poetry, Bulbul gave a preference to this genre. This preference was derived from his engagement with *khananda* art in the past. Though in spite of this, he challenged himself in genres such as *qasidah*<sup>9</sup>, letter in verses, *rubai*<sup>10</sup> and *novkhe*<sup>11</sup>.

Bulbul's devotion to the traditions of the classic Eastern literature is palpable; particularly, one can accentuate that in his work he was inspired by Fuzuli, which was the characteristic distinctiveness of the poets of his time. However, it is not a mere emulating of Fuzuli's manner: he conveys precisely the same lover's emotions but this time by means of his peerless style of poetry.

<sup>5</sup> A singer of *mugham* which is a type of folk songs.

<sup>6</sup> A nightingale.

<sup>7</sup> A form of amatory poem or ode.

<sup>8</sup> An almanac.

<sup>9</sup> A form of writing poetry, which is similar to ode.

<sup>10</sup> A poem consisting of four lines.

<sup>11</sup> A genre of mourning song.

As noted above, Bulbul's legacy is distinguished with its genre diversity; albeit what also compels an attention is its linguistic opulence and style. Whereas some of his poems contain plain, well-comprehensible Azerbaijani vernacular, in other parts of his poems one can constantly encounter an overwhelming amount of Arabic and Farsi words which led to the intricacy of his brand of poetry. For example:

*Gözlərin aldı qərarım, bəs baxar ahı kimi,  
Dərdi – hicranun əritdi canım, oldu mu kimi*  
[1, p. 21].

Translation:

Your eyes bewitched me, you remind me a gazelle  
Separation tormented my soul and it became thinner than hair.

In the above mentioned piece of poetry Bulbul illustrates his feelings in a very facile and understandable manner. Although there were some social motifs in his poetry one cannot state explicitly that it was a target of his art. Bulbul is a verily romantic poet: both at his heart and his pen. Nevertheless, he did not eschew himself from relating to social disturbances as well:

*Dövrən və zamanə mənimlə düz gəlmədi,  
Bu aləmdə üzüm bir gün belə gülmədi.  
Biçin vaxtı çatdı, toxum biçə bilmədim,  
Ömrümü dən kimi əcəl quşu dənlədi* [1, p. 198].

Translation:

I cannot reconcile with time and space,  
I did not smile even for a day in this world  
It is time for harvest but I cannot plant a grain,  
My life was pecked by the bird of death.

Thus, the turbulences and injustice he faced in life profoundly touched his heart and moulded his poetry. In his poems where he condemns inequity Bulbul did not address to specific people or events, he attempted to seek for self-consolation and remedy in complaining about temporal and spatial rigids. In works of the poets and other figures that belong to the world of art, religious moods occupy a prominent place, thus this propensity can be traced in Bulbul's creative work alike. He poetically demonstrates his admiration by Allah in minajāt<sup>12</sup> written in Farsi:

*Pənah aparənlərin sığınacağı sənsən, ey Xudaya.  
Sənin lütfünün sayı-hesabı yoxdur* [1, p. 237].

Translation:

You are the shelter for refugees, oh Lord!  
The measure of your mercy cannot be found.

The tragedy of Karabala<sup>13</sup> traversed the work of poets of the XIX century and the classic Azerbaijani

literature on the whole. Bulbul did not remain apathetic to this theme either and expressed his affection to Imam Hussein and exhibited his sincere lament for the catastrophe in his ghazals.

*Aç, ya Hüseyn gözün, eylə övladıvə nəzər,  
Kəm etmə iltifat bu bəxtisiyahidən* [1, p. 150].

Translation:

Open up your eyes, Hussein, take care of your child,

Do not deprive this unfortunate of your support.

Nevertheless the pious and social topics are sporadic to Bulbul's poems. Since he was chiefly imbued from affection, love theme is embedded in his poetry. Bulbul is genuinely a lyric poet from the bottom of his heart and he himself is a main hero of all his poems. He portrays his lyric hero as the one who is deeply in love, totally absorbed by feelings, burning as a candle from his love and tolerating all the miseries. An image of a sad, woeful and mournful enamoured which is common to the classic literature is also detected in Bulbul's lyric hero.

*Nə müddətdi kəsüb mehrin nigari-simbər məndən,  
Belə keçsə əgər dövrən, dəxi qalmaz əsər məndən*  
[1, p. 38].

Translation:

It has been a while that my betrothed deprived me of her love,

If it carries on like this, I will vanish into the thin air.

While examining the poetic peculiarities of Bulbul's creations, one can notice that a special place was allocated for artistic description. Bulbul's jargon is very affluent and his expressions are compelling. He succeeded in the employment of method of artistic depiction. Similar to all the poets who were loyal to Fuzuli's traditions Bulbul interpolates onims<sup>14</sup> into his ghazals. The image of Majnun from Arabic legends which holds a notable place in the classic Azerbaijani literature as an outcast lover was not neglected in Bulbul's creative work either.

Ragub Karimov was the first explorer who not only conducted a research on Bulbul's legacy but also translated and published the compilation of his poems written in Farsi. Although he suggests that Bulbul occasionally manifests the inclination to epigonism, Karimov acknowledges him as a poet with an individualistic approach and innovative soul.

Against the backdrop of a frequent drought and famine in Karabakh at that time Mashadi Muhammad Bulbul in order to maintain his family had to become a merchant. With this in mind, he travelled

<sup>12</sup> Praise to Allah.

<sup>13</sup> Battle of Karabala is a military incident betwixt the adheres of Imam Hussein -Prophet Muhammad's grandson- and the army of caliph Yazidi I; Imam Hussein was slaughtered together with his supporters.

<sup>14</sup> A word which serves to single out an object from a number of similar ones.

to coarse industrial cities and described everything he witnessed there. Years later, he would return to Shusha however a relentless illness would untimely age him. He passed away in the year of 1918. A gifted

wordsmith descending from Garyagdi generation and a foster-child of the Karabakh literary circles, Mashadi Bulbul left an indelible trace for the history of Azerbaijanian literature.

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