

SOCIAL ISSUES IN 19TH CENTURY AZERBAIJANI SATIRICAL POETRY

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In 19th-century Azerbaijani literature, satirical poetry emerged as a powerful medium that reflected the moral and cultural life of the people and exposed the flaws of society. The satirical poets of this period-Mirza Alakbar Sabir, Seyid Azim Shirvani, Ashig Alasgar, Baba bey Shakir, and others-opposed social injustice, ignorance, and moral degradation through criticism and irony. Their satirical verses mirrored the realities of the time and played an important role in disseminating ideas of enlightenment.

The 19th-century Azerbaijani literary period is characterized as a time of both national awakening and socio-political change. During this period, the genre

of satire held a special place in poetry. Satirical poetry sharply criticized social flaws, injustice, bureaucratic despotism, bribery, and the situation of women and the poor, while also fulfilling a public enlightenment function. This article presents a general overview of social problems in 19th-century Azerbaijani satirical poetry, analyzing the poets' perspectives on the socio-political situation and the social themes reflected in their works. At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, Azerbaijani society was undergoing a transition from a feudal system to capitalist relations. The major social problems of this period-oppression, bribery, low educational levels, the status of women in society, authoritarianism, and injustice-were widely addressed in poetry. Satire emerged as one of the most powerful literary tools used to oppose these problems.

Among the key themes of 19th-century Azerbaijani satirical poetry are oppression and injustice, governmental tyranny and corruption, the social position of women, and the issue of education. Through this genre, poets brought society's problems to the attention of readers and contributed to the elevation of social consciousness.

Some of A. Bakikhanov's narrative poems consist of verse stories and fables. These works, drawing on the themes of classical Near Eastern literature and folk tales, promote high human values and humanistic ideas. The poet, opposing the

arbitrariness of feudal rulers, defends principles such as populism, civil freedom, justice, equality, and democracy in his narrative poems. In this respect, verse stories such as *"The Virtue of Wisdom"*, *"The Word of Truth, The Disappointment of Hope"*, and *"The old Woman and Harun"* are noteworthy". Concluding the narratives, the poet emphasizes the necessity for wise people to govern countries, implicitly commenting on the events of his own time.

In works like *"The King's Abdication"*, *"The Punishment of Action"*, *"The Virtue of Wisdom"*, and *"The Old Woman and Harun"*, A. Bakikhanov criticizes the rulers for turning the fate of the people and state affairs into entertainment. Although the time of the events is not specified and hints are given that they occurred in the past, the author's intention is to present current problems against the backdrop of history. The idea of awakening kings from ignorance and advocating for a just ruler forms the core of *"The Word of Truth"*. The story also criticizes ignorance, arrogance, and self-satisfaction, while praising moral values such as spiritual freedom and devotion to the people. The need to study secular sciences in addition to religious ones is emphasized.

A. Bakikhanov's poems *"The King Beats a Man"*, *"The Arrogant Emir and the Critic"*, and *"The Peasant's Complaint to the King"* reflect the lawlessness and protests of the common people. In *"The Peasant's Complaint to the King"*, the peasant reports that his neighbour's buffalo has destroyed his garden, and the king responds with the "wise" advice: *"Build a fence, so the buffalo doesn't enter your garden"* [1, p. 230], dismissing the complaint. This also illustrates the exposure of negligence. Z. Asgarli comments: *"Through the image of the king, the poet demonstrates the ruling class's indifference to the people; the buffalo symbolizes brute force and destructive violence; the peasant represents the powerless victim. If the aggressor is strong, what use is a fence?"* [2, p. 69].

The poet creates the image of ignorant and impulsive individuals through the metaphor of the buffalo. They destroy everything in their path, cross boundaries, demolish homes, and ravage gardens—breaking public order and creating chaos. The poet boldly describes these people:

*"It charges at a house or garden in its path,
Tramples and destroys all beneath.
Question it, and it replies: I am not afraid—
I am a buffalo, not a man."* [1, p. 229]

Qasim bey Zakir continued the realist tradition in his narrative poems. He used metaphorical language to highlight moral failings in society, distorted family relationships, and the suppression of women's rights. For example, in the story *"On Shameless Dervishes"*, hypocritical individuals who exploit religion and deceive the masses are harshly criticized. The poet sympathetically portrays women and girls, exposing those who degrade them. A similar motif appears in *"The Shameless Dervish and the Virtuous Girl"*.

According to K. Mammadov: “*The poet tells the story first and then summarizes the lesson. Nizami, in contrast, would express his ideas first, then support them with narrative. Zakir does the opposite*” [3, p. 76]. While agreeing with this, it should be noted that Nizami’s narrative poems lack a satirical tone. In contrast, Zakir’s works are deeply satirical in essence. “*Baba bey Shakir (1772–1844) is another poet known for his satirical poems during this era. Unfortunately, scholarly work on him is limited. Neither Mirza Yusif nor Adolf Berge included his work in their collections; Navvab also omitted him. Only Muhammad Agha Muftahidzade mentioned him in Riyaz al-Ashiqin*”. F.Köçərli criticized him but cited only a five-line stanza [4, p. 161]. The limited research may be due to the greater number of existing works by poets like G.Zakir and the broader thematic scope of their writings. Only seven satirical poems, two lyrical *goshma*, one *gerayli*, and a few incomplete couplets of Shakir have survived. He understood the need for a new, rebellious literary form to reflect economic and moral struggles.

In his satire “*Turned Into*”, B.Shakir targets administration and imperial domination. He sorrowfully describes the collaboration between local and foreign oppressors and highlights the painful realities of the era. Some analysts suggest he avoided direct criticism of the Tsar and remained loyal to the Caucasus governor. F.Gasimzade writes: “*Shakir assumed that the injustices were committed by district governors and local beys. He believed the Tsar and his governor were unaware*” [5, p. 216].

This belief is also reflected in G. Zakir’s work. Both poets misjudged the root causes of governance issues, interpreting events as they wished to see them.

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