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MIRZA ALAKBAR SABIR

Satiric poet, 1862-1911

AZERBAIJANI LITERATURE



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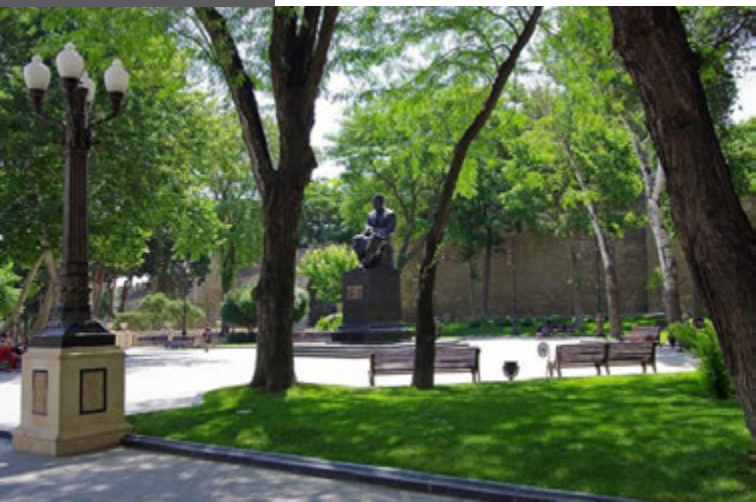


Mirza Alakbar Sabir

Mirza Alakbar Sabir, the great thinker and satiric poet is one of the eminent figures of Azerbaijani literature, social and literary mind. He was born on May 30, 1862 in Shamakhi. His devout father was the owner of a small grocery shop. He wanted Alakbar to become a clergyman in the future. So, he sent him to *mollakhana* (religious school) as soon as he was eight. Sabir studied at superstitious clergymen until he was 12, who misperceived the religion and inaccurately taught, later he changed it for a new-style school opened by the famous poet Sayyid

Azim. The school played an important role in his life, especially gave impetus to the improvement of his knowledge and satiric talent. But Alakbar couldn't study here for a long. In a year or two his father made him stop his education and work as his assistant in his shop. But being quite inquisitive in science and literature, young Sabir continues to study by himself.





*The monument of Mirza Alakbar Sabir
in the center of Baku
Sculpted by: J.Garyaghi. Architects: G.Alizadeh,
A.Ismailov*

In order to get rid of his father's rebukes, in 1885 Sabir started travelling under the pretext of pilgrimage, went to Middle East, then to Iran. He travelled over Ashgabat, Marv, Sabzivar, Nishapur, Samarkand, Bukhara, Khorasan and other cities.

The poet had to boil soap for sale to provide his family, as he had no other profession and he had to suffer much deprivation.



*The best representatives of
Azerbaijani literature, music and art.*

The terrible earthquake of 1902 destroyed Shamakhi. The fire burnt hundreds of mansions to ashes and most people became homeless. Sabir's house was also demolished.

Beginning from early 20th century, Sabir's poems appeared in the pages of press. In 1903 one of his poems was published in *Shargi-Rus* newspaper. Shortly after, the same poem was published in *Hayat* newspaper. He accepted *Molla Nasraddin*, which was launched in 1906, as the very magazine of his desire and people and soon became the most favorite poet and most active author of the magazine. Although he wrote his poems by secret signatures, the reactionary forces in Shamakhi, Baki, other regions of Azerbaijan and Iran criticized him, called "pagan" those who read his writings. Sometimes these ignorant clergymen even instigated Sabir's death, the rich sent him threatening letters and chieftains stopped and insulted him in the street.



*The monument of Mirza Alakbar Sabir, 1933.
Shamakhi. Sculpted by: Pinkhos Sabsay*

At the beginning of 1907 Sabir put an end to boiling soap and decided to start career in press and in the field of enlightenment, to continue his poetry more systematically. He came to Baku and worked as a proof-reader in *Irshad* newspaper for some time and got prepared to take an exam for teaching privilege. Meanwhile, he received cheerful letters from his teacher friends working in the Gori Pedagogical Seminary. The letters said the teacher position in the Azerbaijani division of the seminary would soon become vacant. After passing the examination on April 11, 1908 in Religious Office of Baku Governorate, the poet went to Tiflis on May 7 and obtained the diploma of native language and sharia teacher from Caucasus Office of Sheikh-ul-Islam (Supreme Religious Office).



One of the monuments in the façade of the National Literature Museum of Azerbaijan is Mirza Alakbar Sabir's.





*The caricature painted on Sabir's poem
"I am also Muslim, hey, men of Shirvan".*



*The caricature painted on Sabir's poem
"Leave me alone, I don't educate my son!".*

In September of the same year Sabir achieved to open a long-desired school by name *Umid* ("Hope"). Shortly after, he started to teach at *Nijat* ("Rescue") school in Balakhani with great enthusiasm. He worked in the editorial office of *Gunash* ("Sun") and *Hagigat* ("Truth") newspapers which had been published since spring of that year in Baku. Every Friday *Gunash* newspaper published a comic page entitled *Palanduz* and authored by Sabir.



The tomb of Mirza Alakbar Sabir in Shamakhi.



Sabir
Painted by: Gunduz Aghayev

M.A.Sabir is one of the founders of critical realism in Azerbaijani national literature and the creator of *Molla Nasraddin* satiric poetry school. He is the powerful representative of satiric poem in Turkish-Muslim world. He is the author of lyric, epic and satiric works which were written only in Arud poetic metre, both in verse and prose. Sabir is also considered the founder of satiric poem with single plot in Azerbaijani literature. He is the creator of a number of satiric poem genres such as: *taziyana*, *girmanj*, *satiric march*, *bahri-tavil*, and *quiz*. The Motherland, people, freedom, independence are the major themes of poet's creative activity. During his literary activity he wrote religious elegy, lyric poems, satiric writings, feuilletons, articles and was engaged in translation.



*Sabir's home-museum
in Shamakhi*



*150th anniversary of Sabir was solemnly
celebrated in Baku.*



The satire and lyrics in Sabir's literary activity developed simultaneously. His lyric poems can be classified into three groups: *ghazals* written in classical style, socio-political poems and nursery rhymes.

At the beginning of 20th century Sabir enriched the panegyric genre with new motives. His poem *Fakhriyya* ("Panegyric poem") published in *Molla Nasraddin* magazine was dedicated to the destiny of people and motherland. He summoned the people to national solidarity and to cease intra-religious discrimination.



The monument of Sabir in Sabirabad

Sabir translated a piece from *Shahname* by Firdowsy into Azerbaijani, wrote the fable "The Crow and the Fox" on the motives I.A.Krilov's cognominal fable. The major themes of his satirical writings are socio-political problems, cultural and social ignorance of people, superstition, illiteracy and woman freedom. The satiric poems "Don't Wake Up", "How Deeply Slept the Guy, as if He is Dead", "We Don't Care", "No One Can Reproach Our Honor", "Stay Away", "You are Nothing without Money" embody the miserable results of ignorance and illiteracy of the society, class discrimination. In such type of poems the poet summons the readers to salvation from captivity, to self-conscience and to be aware of their rights. The primal goal of the poet is to destroy the major reason of the situation – the ruling system and regime and to awake the people from dream of ignorance and explain their rights.



Sabir's grave in Shamakhi



Several issues of satiric and popular Molla Nasraddin magazine which published Mirza Alakbar Sabir's poems in Azerbaijani. The first issue was published on April 7, 1906.



The great poet caught hepatic disease in 1910 as a result of poverty lasting for months and sufferings. He returned to Shamakhi, the doctors suggested him surgical operation, but he refused. In 1911, the 14th issue of *Molla Nasraddin* magazine published an announcement with initiative of financial aid for sick poet. After the announcement, donations from Russia and a number of cities from East were sent to the address of *Molla Nasraddin* as a token of love and respect to the great poet. As the disease sharpened and there was no other option, the poet agreed to operation and came to Baku on July 8. But the doctors found out the operation to be of no use any more and advised him to return to Shamakhi. Sabir died on July 12, 1911 during the flourishing period of his life and creativity.



Mirza Alakbar Sabir's grave

The poet was buried in the “Cemetery of Seven Vaults” in Shamakhi. As a token of respect to his memory, his poems were collected and published under the title of *Hophopname* in 1912, a year after his death .

One of the settlements in Shamakhi was named after Sabir. A region and a city were named Sabirabad in honor of him. His monuments were built up in Baku, Shamakhi and Sabirabad. The central library of Baku was named after him.

Appreciative statements about Sabir:

“The personalities of whom we feel pride in the 20th century literature are Sabir and J.Mammadguluzadeh.”

*Heydar Aliyev,
Nationwide leader of Azerbaijani people*

“Mirza Alakbar Sabir acquired great fame as a master of art raising our literature to a new level by enriching it in terms of public ideology along with preserving the brilliant traditions of centuries-old poetry by Mirza Alakbar Sabir.”

*Ilham Aliyev,
The President of Azerbaijan Republic*



Ilham Aliyev, the president of Azerbaijan Republic participated in the opening ceremony of great poet's monument in Sabir settlement, Shamakhi

"Sabir opened such a century-old gap between old and new poems that no one ever dared to turn back and jump over it."

Abbas Sahhat

"'Hophopname' knocked all doors and all houses, it was loved by readers and those who made read it."

A.Shaig

"The satirical technique of Sabir is Sabir's critical laughing technique."

A.Damirchizadeh

"Sabir depicted his epoch, the situation, psychological and moral qualities of people in the form of fighting between old and new, revolutionary thought and reactionary conscience, progress and forces of reaction, inertia and active public movement".

M. Ibrahimov



Central City Library named after M.A.Sabir.



"Sabir approached the national liberty movement of Eastern people with sagacity. He didn't permit himself naivety and illusions in these issues."

M. Arif

"Only Sabir could write a pamphlet relieving people's life and serving for propriety, the new epoch of critical laugh begins with Sabir."

M. S. Ordubadi

"Sabir is a philosopher, an educator, a revolutionist ... in each of them he is sincere".

Yusif Vazir Chamanzaminli

"No matter which poem by Sabir you buy, it is a historical document for you. It is such a document that you'll imagine our people's mood, public life and mind."

Sayyid Huseyn



Sabir with his friends

"...Sabir saw and watched everything, his heart ached. Everything that Sabir saw and watched were so strange that Sabir laughed at them... But Sabir laughed with bloody tears. The eyes discerning the truth, no doubt, could see the tears in Sabir's poems."

Taghi Shahbazi

"The legacy of this genius took Azerbaijani literature and culture forward for an entire century."

Ruhulla Akhundov

"I was inspired by Sabir. It is a truth. I have become versed in Sabir's writings since childhood and it incited me to learn Azerbaijani language."

*M. A. Afrashta
The prominent satiric poet
of Iran*

"I saw Sabir when he went from Tiflis to Shamakhi i.d. to his grave. Still I imagine that tender and proper countenance. Caucasus can hardly ever have such a rare personality."

*Huseyn Javid
Writer and playwright*

"There are such pieces among Sabir's writings that penetrate into our conscience."

*Sayyid Jafar Pishvari,
Public figure*

☞ Ploughman ☞

Don't wail, don't cry, don't pretend you're
unhappy, ploughman!

You old, sly fox, you won't catch us napping,
ploughman!

Under some pretext or other, daily you stand at
my door;

Don't beg, don't ask me, don't stretch out your
hand at my door!

I'm sick of seeing the whole of your clan at my
door!

Don't get ideas, don't wear out my patience,
ploughman!

Be dumb and obey me while I am gracious,
ploughman!

If the year brought you peasants no gain, what do
I care?

If there was no rain and no crop of grain, what do
I care?

If drought spoiled the rice and barley again, what
do I care?

If last year your debt with your blanket you paid,
what do I care?

Now carry your rug to the market to sell,
ploughman!

Be dumb and obey, for assistance don't yell,
ploughman!

Don't try to explain that from hunger you're
dying, wretch!

You'll never persuade me, so no use trying,
wretch!

Pay what you're due don't tell me you can't lying
wretch!

Bring me barley and wheat, and rice, ploughman,
Or I'll take off your skin in a trice, ploughman!

Swear as much as you like that you can't I'll have it!

By Allah almighty, I'll get what I'm due I'll have it!

You'll be whipped and flogged black and blue I'll
have it!

Don't forget yourself, pay your arrears,
 ploughman,
 Don't overreach yourself, don't spill vain tears,
 ploughman!
 Your job is to plough; eat millet yourself; give me
 wheat, ploughman!
 As long as it's softer than stone any stuff you can
 eat, ploughman.
 If you don't have water, their's plenty of snow to
 heat, ploughman!
 You have never seen butter or cream or meat,
 ploughman,
 You're used to a simple life, like a beast,
 ploughman!
 Haven't I always declared that I want good
 relations?
 All an aristocrat wants is leisure and relaxation,
 Idling-, gambling, drinking and eating-without
 cessation.
 Such is a gentleman's life by tradition, ploughman;
 It was Allah appointed to us such an earthly
 mission, ploughman!



The caricature painted on Sabir's poem "Ploughman".

☞ To the Workers of Baku ☞

The wheel of fortune's turning in a new way
nowadays:

The working men begin to think they're human
nowadays.

They poke their noses everywhere and always
nowadays.

What are we coming to when working men
breathe freer nowadays?

■ They fight for rights and disobey the overseer
nowadays!

The wheel of fortune's turning in a new way
nowadays;

The working men begin to think they're human
nowadays.

Now tell me, why do you demand respect, a
simple worker?

Why raise your voice, and what can you expect, a
simple worker?

■ All you should do is serve the rich, though they
neglect a simple worker.

Well-paid or not, you must be gratefully
subdued, you simple worker.

But the wheel of fortune's turning in a new way
nowadays;

The working men begin to think they're human
nowadays.

Don't plunge yourself into distress, take care,
beware, rich man;

If any worker speaks the truth, don't give him
ear, rich man!

Don't let the poor breathe freely - lon' you dare,
rich man!

Don't yield, don't budge an inch, don't give in
anywhere, rich man!

For the wheel of fortune's turning in a new way
nowadays;

The working men begin to think they're human
nowadays!
Don't pay attention, even though they may
complain, the poor.

They've no expensive clothes nor homes - they've
got no brain, the poor.

No property, no riches d they ever gain, the poor.

All they possess are ragged coats, shoes torn,
clothes plain, the poor.
But the wheel of fortune's turning in a new way
nowadays;

The working men begin to think they're human
nowadays.
If you intend to be both free and merry in this
world,

Just think about yourself, don't have a worry in
this world.

If you would have no load of woe to carry in this
world,

Forget that other people's lots are sorry in this
world.
Yet the wheel of fortune's turning in a new way
nowadays;

The working men begin to think they're human
nowadays.
To think about the plight of your poor nation? By
no means!

To sooth poor orphans and to stop their
lamentation?
By no means!

To help the poor, to give them consolation?

By no means!

Yet the wheel of fortune's turning in a new way
nowadays;

The working men begin to think they're human
nowadays.



The monument of Sabir in Baku



The bust of Sabir in front of his home-museum in Shamakhi

🌀 For sale 🌀

People won't be silent, uncle, when they hear the tale;
Bah! It doesn't matter, does it, what sneers it may entail.

Write it down on paper on a wall to nail:

I've opened here in Reh a new tremendous sale!

Dirt cheap, the wares my shop displays for sale;

■ Come buy! The whole of Reh today's for sale!

And what is more, I do not sell that article alone,

But with the Jami-Jam, Reh's subjects, Kubbad's throne,

Although I'm somewhat hindered, I must own,

By certain Young Iranians well-known.

But never mind them – wholesale and retails,

Come, buy, the whole of Reh today's for sale!

■ What shall I do with all that bric-a-brac?

So many cares it brings, it sure will break my back.

That "Salty Water" – not much use, alack!

I'll better sell it all before the sky looks black!

The palace of Shiraz, the heritage of Reh today's for sale!

Come, buy! The whole of Reh today's for sale!

I hate the light – I offer gloom for sale,

I love to see Iran under its veil.

I want to leave the city – deserts, hail!

I'd be a khan – being a shah seems stale.

Sabsivarah and Meyameh's for sale!

Come, buy! The whole of Reh today's for sale!

My will mine, my words, my home as well,
My honour, self-respect, the shame into which I fell.
My wealth – who else but me its fate may spell?
My Kajar crown and state today I sell.

■ Whose business what goods I displays for sale?

Come, buy, the whole of Reh today's for sale!

Instead of being constitutional shah,

A publicly elected guiding star,

The army's puppet – not a sovereign by far,

Instead of always saying Oh! And Ah!

I'd drink wine as a khan – my crown today's for sale!

■ Come, buy, today the whole of Reh's for sale!



The caricature painted on Sabir's poem "I don't care how the people are squandered".

decreed..
 For children to be taught at school there surely is
 no need.
 Of independent thought and arrogance we must
 stamp out the seed,
 While there is still the slightest chance, let's act,
 by god, today,
 For the missionaries are our friends, so aren't we
 glad today!
 You curbed the Moslems, missionaries, Allah
 bless your souls!
 And bring- you to the true faith, missionaries.
 Allah bless your souls!
 Let Allah put the schools in ruins, missionaries.
 Bless your souls!
 Let Allah's holy will be done, O missionaries!
 Bless your souls!
 Let all of those who ever tried to open up new
 schools
 Cry, rave, go mad, go wild with fury, idiots, poor
 fools!
 Let teachers be thrown out of work throughout
 the land today,
 The missionaries are our friends, and aren't we
 glad today!

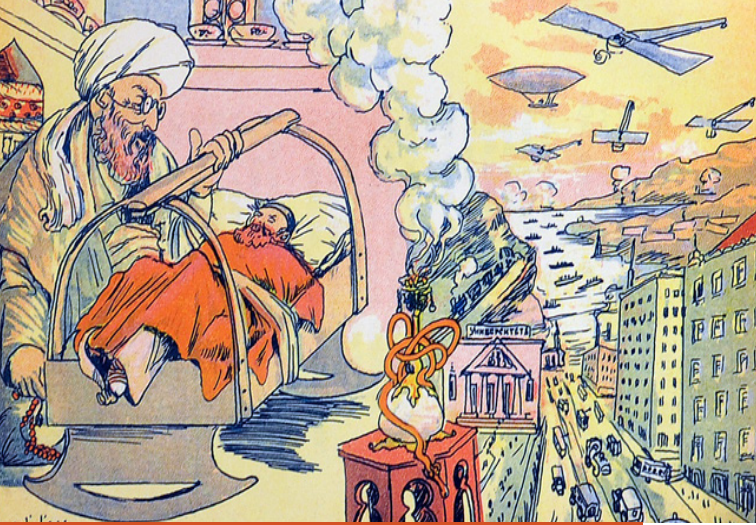


The caricature painted on Sabir's poem "Ardabil".

🌀 The Odd Sneeze 🌀

As soon as we start to realise things
It sounds among wise men that mighty odd sneeze.
When we say we have got to normalise things,
It sounds among nobles, that mighty odd sneeze.
Or else we decide on some fine enterprise
For years keep discussing it, buzzing like bees.
It's time to get money and start, say the wise,
But then all through the country it sounds, that
odd sneeze.

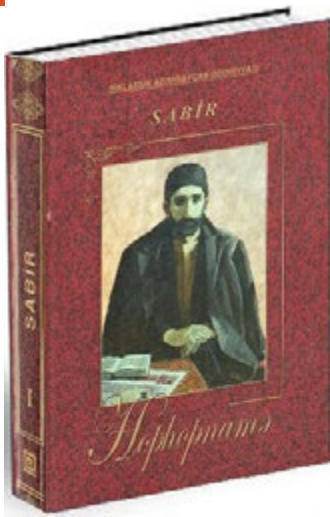
This misfortune happens not only with us
It sweeps all the Caucasus like a foul breeze.
If Gakh, Kazakh or Sheki start to fuss
In Shusha and Shirvan it sounds, that odd sneeze.
It never stays in one place, but goes on,
It changes its residence with the utmost ease.
They say it was heard in Ganje, but it's gone
Away to Salyani, that mighty odd sneeze.
That unlucky odd sneeze be it ever accursed
It won't let us speak, it resounds without cease,
As if thunder has sounded and lightning must burst,
All over our squares sounds that mighty odd sneeze.
It won't think of decency never a bit;
At meetings, assemblies wherever you please,
There's nothing like shame or fear for it:
In mosque cells, in shops sounds that mighty odd
sneeze.



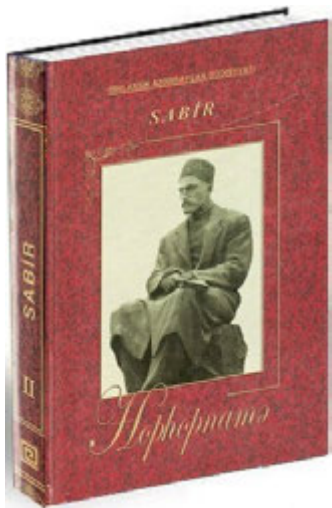
The caricature painted on Sabir's poem "Lay-lay".



The caricature painted on Sabir's poem "Worker".



Mirza Alakbar Sabir – Hophopnameh in two volumes. I and II volume.





The photo from the event on the occasion of 95th anniversary of Central City Library named after Mirza Alakbar Sabir.



The photo from recitation competition dedicated to Mirza Alakbar Sabir's literary creativity.





The post stamp of Azerbaijan dedicated to the 150th anniversary of Sabir. 2012



The caricature painted on Sabir's poem "Very little".

