

THE HERALD OF SPRING. IMAGE OF ARMENIAN HERO IN THE POEM OF AHMAD SHAMLU "VARTAN"

Lilit Safrastyan

Doctor of Philology

Yerevan State University, Faculty of Oriental Studies

1 Alek Manukyan St, Yerevan

E-mail: lilit.safrastyan@gmail.com

The article has been delivered on 23.05.2021, reviewed on 15.06.2021,
accepted for publication on 28.06.2021

DOI: 10.53548/03208117-2021.2-240

Preface

Ahmad Shamlu (1925-2000) is one of the most prominent representatives of contemporary Iranian literature. His life and creative activity are connected with important historical, political, cultural and social events of both pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary Iran. In the very first period of his career, Shamlu was persecuted and imprisoned many times as a dissident. Many of his works, including translations, literary works, were censored and burned in printing houses.

Shamlu is a singer of love, rebellion, justice and life. Armenians have a special place in Shamlu's personal and literary life. The main heroine of Shamlu's inspiration was his wife Aida Sargsyan, to whom he has dedicated the most beautiful poems of modern Iranian love poetry. Armenian revolutionary, hero Vartan Salakhanyan's character has also been immortalized by the poet in the famous poem "Vartan" or "Death of Nazli".

In the current article, we present the poem "Vartan" about the struggle, scramble and cruel death of the Armenian hero in the context of the historical, political, social, literary and cultural reality of the time.

Ahmad Shamlu and the poetry of rebellion

In the 1960s new ideological perceptions came into life in Literature along with the socio-economic and political developments in Iran. It was the ideological and political orientations of the country's intellectuals, particularly those of writers that underwent changes. In the 1960s and 1970s, writers were

directly involved in the anti-monarchist struggle waged by underground organizations. In this atmosphere of revolutionary-political uprisings, the literary movement "Committed Literature" originated, replacing the ideological movement "Persianism" which was widely spread in Iran at the beginning of the century¹.

The literary movement "Committed Literature" has always been kept in the spotlight of researchers. Many modern Iranologists were trying to view it as an era of modernism. According to the well-known literary critic E. Yarshater. "Persian literary arts have established a new idiom and a new identity"². Many researchers consider them modernists, defining them as revolutionary, progressive and innovative. T. Ricks notes. "...The engage writers are referred to as "progressives", "modernists", "experimentalists", "social writers" or "revolutionaries..."³.

The literature of the 1960s and 1970s was a major force in the public consciousness. The writers adhering to the Marxist leftist movement taught their contemporaries to illustrate many socio-political issues in a systematic metaphorical literary language. According to K. Talattof. "As a result of these author's tendencies toward Marxism, a socialist realism became a distinctive feature of literature in this episode, and Committed writers deemphasized form, as opposed to content, arguing, that the letter has a larger capacity to serve the people"⁴.

Writers have had a special role in the political and cultural life of Iran in 1960-1970. They were fighters for freedom of expression. Iranian researcher M. Ghanoonparvar in his book "Prophets of Doom: Literature as Socio-Political Phenomenon in Modern Iran" points. "The role of 20th century writer in Iran becomes that of a prophet, a prophet whose mission concerns not the next, but the present world"⁵:

One of such writers-prophets was Ahmad Shamlou, an outstanding representative of modern Iranian poetry. A. Karimi-Hakkak in his article notes, that "Shamlu's long and successful career, both as a poet and as a public intel-

¹ Talattof 2000, 65-67.

² Rahimieh 1992, 39-40.

³ Ricks 1984, xvii-xxvii.

⁴ Talattof 2000, 70.

⁵ Ghanoonparvar 1984, 27, Ghanoonparvar 1992, 42.

lectual inseparably linked with the social and political conditions in modern Iran. His life is paralleled the life of his country, inspiring its future direction..."⁶. The most interesting poem in the context of Shamlu as revolutionary is "She'ri Keh Zendigi-st" (Poetry that is life) (1956), where the poet says:

Today

Poetry

Is the people's weapon⁷

The collections of poetry "Abraham dar Atash" (Abraham in the fire) (1973) were written for executed revolutionaries. In his "Deshneh dar Dis" (Daggers in the dish) (1977) he gives the image of revolutionaries as "children of the storm" who stand before the thunder, light the house and die. Shamlu's tribute to the "revolutionaries", the true movers, who shape the history, reaches a new zenith, when the rebel - poet states. "We are living without a "why"/ they are aware why they die"⁸. "Starange times my dear" (Ruzegar-e gharibi ast Nazanin) refers to Shamlu the message of difficult and heartless times in his poem "Dar in Bombast" (In this Blind Alley) from the book "Tarane'ha-ye kuchek-e Qhorbat" (Small Songs of Exile) (1980). As M. Karimi-Hakkak points in his book chapter "Of Hail and Hounds. The Image of the Iranian Revolution in Recent Persian Literature" "Shamlu's "In this Blind Alley", perhaps the most successful single poetic depiction of life in post-revolution Iran"⁹.

The Writer's Association of Iran (Kanun-e Nevisandegan-e Iran was founded in 1968 and was in many ways a unique experience in Iranian intellectual history¹⁰.

Shamlu was one of the founders of the Association. The Writers' Association became one of the strong ideological and cultural pillars of pre-revolutionary Iran. Shamlu made his rebellious voice heard during the ten poetry evenings "Dah Shab" organized by the Writers' Association of Iran and the Goethe Institute in Germany in October 1977, which became known as the Ten Evenings. 57 famous Iranian writers represented their works against the violence, censorship and difficult social conditions of the country.

⁶ Karimi-Hakkak 2019, 135.

⁷ Alishan 1985, 379.

⁸ Alishan 1985, 400.

⁹ Karimi-Hakkak 2019, 116-117.

¹⁰ Karimi-Hakkak 2014, 189.

Nazli as reincarnated Vartan. Portraying of an Armenian hero

Shamluh's "Fresh Air" (Hava-ye Tazeh) collection was published in 1957, the most famous poem of which "Death of Nazli" (Marg-e Nazli) is dedicated to the Armenian hero Vartan Salakhanyan. It is worth mentioning, that the poem was originally called "Vartan". Shamlu explains the title of the poem "Death of Nazli" by the existence of censorship, explaining in the footnotes the name of Vartan Salakhanyan, whom the poem is dedicated to.

Vartan Salakhanian is an Armenian-Iranian born in Tabriz. He was arrested during the coup in 1953 and cruelly assassinated; he did not betray his friends. In order to get rid of the tortured body he was thrown into the Jajrood river. Renowned Iranian studies scholar E. Abrahamian in his monography titled "Tortured Confessions. Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran" points, that after the 1953 coup, the secret police- first the Second Bureau and then a newly created SAVAK selectively used torture on Tudeh activists. A Tudeh book of martyrs documents eleven torture deaths in the period 1953 and 1958. The victims most of whom succumbed from brain hemorrhages - included Farhi, Lieutenant M. Monzavi (the son of the religious scholar Ayatolla Bozorg Tehrani), Galoust Zakharian, an Armenian intellectual described by Kianuri as the party's "ablest theoretician" and Vartan Salakhanian, another Armenian intellectual, whom Ahmad Shamlu, the country's preeminent poet, eulogist, as a heroic martyr, who preferred to die, rather, than betray his comrades¹¹.

Vartan

Under the window in our house, the old lilac has blossomed.

Dispel all your doubts!

Don't wrestle with the ominous Death!

Being is better than not being, especially in spring..."

Vartan didn't say a word:

Gloriously

He suppressed his anger and then went away...

– "Vartan, say something!

The bird of silence

is waiting for the offspring of a horrible death

to hatch its egg!"

¹¹ Abrahamian 1999, 89.

Vartan didn't say a word:
 Just as the sun,
 he rose in the dark,
 set in the twilight of blood,
 and then went away...
 Vartan didn't say a word.
 Vartan was a glowing star,
 momentarily glistened in the dark,
 and then vanished for good and all.
 Vartan didn't say a word.
 Vartan was a violet:
 He came into blossom
 and gave us the good news,
 "Winter has fallen apart",
 and then went away
 – "Vartan, spring has arrived and the Judas tree is in flower"¹².

Vartan Salakhanian and Morteza Kayvan, were close friend of Shamlu. The poet pays a tribute to their heroism and sacrifice. In the end of his poem "A Poetry that is Life" Shamlu wrote.

Kayvan has sung
 The song of his life in blood
 Vartan his life's bellow
 In the framework of silence,
 But even the rhyme of life
 therein
 is nothing but the protracted blow of death
 in both poems
 the meaning of each death
 is life¹³

This work dedicated to the heroic image of Vartan became a dedication of heroism, devotedness and struggle. According to E. Abrahamyan. "Leftists, including Tudeh opponents, were reciting Shamlu's ode to Vartan, even as late as the 1980s"¹⁴.

¹² Rajapour 2017.

¹³ Alavi 2019, 220.

¹⁴ Abrahamian 1999, 89-70.

Armenians have a great historical role in the liberation and revolutionary struggle of XX century Iran. Yeprem Khan (Eprem Asribekean) (as a youth, he participated in Armenian nationalist groups and partisan activities in the Ottoman empire)¹⁵ is one of the most famous revolutionary-military leaders of the Constitutional Revolution (1905-11). The role of Iranian-Armenians has become a subject of serious study during the years of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, as well as among Armenian and foreign scholars. One of them is H. Berberyan, who several times has explored the political and ideological activism of Iranian-Armenians at the end of the nineteenth century and during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905-11)¹⁶.

The heroic image of the Armenian is also reflected in the post-revolutionary literature. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran the topic of the Iran-Iraq war obtained special importance, which was based on the concept of heroism and martyrdom. To such topic is devoted the story "The Mystery of Masih" of Ibrahim Hasanbeigi¹⁷. Among the Iranian war-prisoners in the Iraqi camp at Mosul was an Armenian Masih, a green-eyed, blonde, bantamweight guy, who was highly esteemed by his friends due to his heroic, unbending and brave behavior. For his disobedient behavior the Armenian soldier was transferred to the colony of "Rashide" where he became subject to inhuman tortures after he refused to applaud in honor of Saddam Hussein¹⁸.

Symbols and hidden messages in the poem "Vartan"

The literary generation of Iran in the twentieth century entered the Iranian cultural and social life, bringing with it a new way of thinking and a new metaphorical language. The poets of this generation were influenced by Nima¹⁹ and Nima's poetic philosophy. Through metaphorical language authors expressed their social concerns. Metaphors directed writer's inspiration,

¹⁵ Arkun 1998, 513.

¹⁶ Berberian 2001.

¹⁷ Hasanbeigi 2006, 12-22.

¹⁸ Safrastyan 2018, 6-8.

¹⁹ Nima Yushij is a founder of modern Persian poetry. He is famous for his style of poetry *She'r-e Now* (New Poetry).

shaped their language, and, like ideology guided the conceptual and perceptual system, through which their readers thought, communicated and acted²⁰.

Words like "winter", "night", "tulip", "forest" (because its association with the guerrilla movement in the northern forests of Iran) and "gol-e sorkh" meaning "red rose" in Persian had to be vanished in contemporary writing, this last because it evoked the last name executed revolutionary guerilla, poet and journalist Khorsrow Golesorkhi²¹: It is important indicate the symbolic character of Persian modernist poetry. "In this engage Persian sense symbolism was born out of the "committed" poet's needs to escape the censorship. The more conscious censor became, the more the modernist Persian poem evolved in symbolic and ambiguous form²². Shamlu, who used the non de plume "Alef Sobh" (A. Morning) up to 1953 and henceforth, "Alef Bamdad" (A. Dawn) has always utilized "night" as a symbol of evil and oppression. Thus, when he states. "He writes poetry, meaning, he opens sleeping eyestoward the rising morning...", here Shamlu clearly indicating, that the poet's function is to "awaken" the people and to assure them of the inevitable "morning", the dawn of revolution and light²³.

Metaphor helped to understand the meaning of the text and hidden ideological message of "Death of Nazli". Throughout of poem Vartan represented as symbol of resistance. "Bird of silence" and "Nazli didn't say a word" are the hidden codes of resistance. "Dark, twilight of blood, and the winter" are metaphors, that symbolize the dictatorship, repression and torture. In the contrary "blossom, spring, violet, glowing star" symbolized new days, hopes and the bright future. As K. Talattof notes. "Accordingly Iranian readers tend not to take the word "night" for night, "day" for day or "spring" for spring. Instead, readers take these words as metaphors"²⁴.

The poem contains the "Tree of Judas" (arghavan), which reveals the cooperation of Vartan's friends with the opposition, and according to the other view, the purple flowers of the tree, which bloom before the opening of the masters, symbolize the body of the tortured hero.

²⁰ Talattof 2000, 12.

²¹ Karimi-Hakkak 2019, 66.

²² Alishan 1985, 407.

²³ Alishan 1985, 380.

²⁴ Talattof 2000, 12.

Shamlu is one of the few Iranian poets who has read both the Bible and the Koran as poetry. His lyrical poems remarkably influenced by Song of the Songs. Christ's character and his Passion have always held a fascination for Persian poets. His life can easily identify with the lives of thousands of nameless heroes who were betrayed and tortured because of their free spirits and their love for humanity²⁵.

Conclusions

Thus, the Iranian literature of the XX century, which was revolutionary in nature, had a decisive role in the historical, social, political and cultural life of the country. The writers acted as leaders who, in their own words, led the masses into struggle. Ahmad Shamlou, as a writer and a public figure, was standing close to the roots of that Struggle. The metaphorical language of his poetry symbolized the unbreakable spirit of the times. "Death of Nazli" was a literary work dedicated to the Armenian hero, which is the best reflection of anti-dictatorship times.

Գրականություն

- Abrahamian E. 1999, Tortured Confessions, Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran, Berkeley, University of California Press, 284 p.
- Alavi S. 2020, Ahamad Shamlu A Poetry that is Life - Global Modernists on Modernism: An Anthology, London, Bloomsbury Collection, Web 5, May, p. 215-221.
- Alishan L. 1985, The Rebel Poet in Search of an Audience, Iranian Studies, Volume XVIII/2-4, Spring - Autumn, p. 375-422.
- Arkun A. 1998, Ep'rem Khan, Encyclopaedia Iranica, vol. 8, Fasc. 5, p. 513-515.
- Berberian H. 2001, Armenians and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911: Love for Freedom Has No Fatherland, New York: Routledge, 247 p.
- Forooznafar A. 2018, Analise of Resistance Stories of "Mystery of Masih" by Ebrahim Hasanbeigi, Opcion Ano 34, Special N 14, p. 1030-1041.
- Ghanoonparvar M.K. 1984, Prophets of Doom. Literature as Socio-Political Phenomenon in Modern Iran, New York, University Press of America, 242 p.

²⁵ Karimi-Hakkak 2019, 139.

- Hasanbeigi I. 2006, The Mystery of Masih, in Collection of Post-Revolutionary Iranian Stories, Translated by V. Parsadanyan, Yerevan (in Armenian), 135 p.
- Karimi-Hakkak A. 2019, A Fire of Lilies. Perspectives on Literature and Politics on Modern Iran, Leiden Univ. Press, 233 p.
- Karimi-Hakkak A. 1985, Protest of Perish: A History of Writers Association of Iran, Iranian Studies, volume XVIII/2-4, Spring - Autumn, p. 189-229.
- Moradi L. 2016, Investigating of Shamlou's Poems on Social Perspectives, The Social Sciences, N 11(7), p. 1227-1233.
- Papan-Matin F. 2005, The Love Poems of Ahmad Shamlu, Bethesda, Maryland, IBEX Publication, 188 p.
- Rajabpour M. 2017, Vartan: A Poem by Ahmad Shamlu, Parsgon: A Persian Literature Review, December 12.
- Rahimieh N. 1992, The Enigma of Persian Modernism, New Comparison, N 13, Spring, p. 39-45.
- Ricks T. 1991, Revolutionary Posturing: Iranian Writers and the Iranian Revolution, International Journal of Middle East Studies, vol. 23/4, p. 507-531.
- Safrastyan L. 2018, Portraying Armenian in Modern Literature. National and Cultural Peculiarities, Fundamental Armenology, N 2 (8), p. 1-8.
- Shamlu A. 2003, Majmu'eh- ye Asar, Tehran, Negah, 720 p.
- Shamlu A. 2007, Hava-ye Tazeh, Tehran, Negah, 343 p.
- Shamlu A. 2002, Born Upon the Dark Spear. Selected Poems of Ahmad Shamlu, trans. By Mohaghegh J., New York, Contra Mundum Press, 172 p.
- Shamlu A. 2008, Tarm od (Fresh Air). The Best Collection of Poems, trans. by E. Hakhverdian, Yerevan, Edit Print, 349 p. (in Armenian).
- Talattof K. 2000, The Politics of Writing in Iran. A History of Modern Iranian Literature, New York, Syracuse University Press, 256 p.

ԳԱՐՆԱՆ ԱՎԵՏԱՐԵՐԸ. ՀԱՅ ՀԵՐՈՍԻ ԿԵՐՊԱՐԸ ԱՀՄԱԴ ՇԱՄԼՈՒԻ «ՎԱՐԴԱՆ» ՊՈԵՄՈՒՄ

Լիլիթ Սաֆրաստյան

Ամփոփում

Ահմադ Շամլուն XX դ. իրանական գրականության հայտնի ներկայացուցիչներից է, որն իր և՛ ստեղծագործական, և՛ հասարակական գործունեությամբ կանգնած էր հակաթոնապետական պայքարի ակունքներում:

Շամլուի հեղափոխական անկոտրում ոգին, սերը դեպի հայրենիքը և մարդը վառ արտահայտություն են ստացել նրա ստեղծագործություններում: Շամլուն իր ստեղծագործական առաջին իսկ շրջանում, որպես այլախոհ, բազմիցս հետապնդվել և բանտարկվել է: Նրա բազում ստեղծագործություններ, այդ թվում՝ թարգմանություններ և գրականագիտական աշխատանքներ, ենթարկվել են գրաքննության և այրվել հենց տպարաններում: Շամլուի և՛ անձնական, և՛ ստեղծագործական կյանքում առանձնահատուկ տեղ ունեն հայերը: Նրա ներշնչանքի գլխավոր հերոսուհին կինն էր՝ Աիդա Սարգսյանը, որին պոետը ծոնել է արդի իրանական սիրերգության ամենագեղեցիկ պոեմները: Հայազգի հեղափոխական, հերոս Վարդան Սալախանյանի կերպարը Շամլուն անմահացրել է «Վարդան» կամ «Նազլիի մահը» հայտնի պոեմում: Ահմադ Շամլուն այս պոեմում փոխաբերական լեզվով պատկերում է հայազգի հերոսի սիրանքները՝ նրան անվանելով «Գարնան ավետաբեր»:

Բանալի բռնը՝ Իրան, նոր պոեզիա, հեղափոխական, մետաֆոր, հեղափոխություն, հայազգի հերոս, ընդդիմություն:

ПРОВООЗВЕСТИК ВЕСНЫ: ОБРАЗ ГЕРОЯ-АРМЯНИНА В ПОЭМЕ АХМАДА ШАМЛУ «ВАРДАН»

Лилит Сафрасян

Резюме

Ахмад Шамлу один из самых известных представителей иранской литературы XX в., стоявший у истоков антидиктаторской борьбы. Неукротимый революционный дух Шамлу, его любовь к Родине и к человеку нашли отражение в его произведениях. В первый период своей литературной деятельности Шамлу неоднократно подвергался гонениям как диссидент и даже был заключен в тюрьму. Многие его произведения, в том числе литературные переводы, удостоивались жестокой критики цензуры, пресекавшей их издание. Армяне занимают особое место в личной и творческой жизни Шамлу. Главной музой и героиней его произведений была его супруга – Аида Саркисян, которой он посвятил самые красивые любовные стихи. Образ армянского революционера и героя Вардана Салаханяна поэт увековечил в своей известной поэме «Вардан» или «Смерть Назли». В этом

стихотворении Ахмад Шамлу метафорически описывает подвиги армянского героя, называя его «Провозвестником весны».

Ключевые слова – Иран, новая поэзия, революционер, метафора, революция, герой-армянин, оппозиция.

THE HERALD OF SPRING. IMAGE OF ARMENIAN HERO IN THE POEM OF AHMAD SHAMLU "VARTAN"

Lilit Safrastyan

Abstract

Ahmad Shamlou is one of the most prominent representatives of the Iranian literature of the 20th century, who stood at the roots of the anti-dictatorship struggle, carrying out creative and social activities. Shamlu's unbreakable revolutionary spirit, love for the homeland and a human being have found their vivid expression in his works. In the very first period of his career, Shamlu was persecuted and imprisoned many times as a dissident. Many of his works, including translations, literary works, were censored and burned in printing houses. Armenians have a special place in Shamlu's personal and creative life. The main heroine of Shamlu's inspiration was his wife Aida Sargsyan, to whom he dedicated the most beautiful poems of modern Iranian love poetry. Armenian revolutionary hero Vartan Salakhanyan's character was also immortalized by the poet in the famous poem "Vardan" or "Nazli's death". In this poem Ahmad Shamlu depicts the heroic feats of the Armenian hero in metaphorical language, calling him "The Herald of Spring".

Key words – Iran, New Poetry, revolutionist, metaphor, revolution, Armenian hero, opposition.