

# **Raffi**

**The Prophet from Payajuk**



**Murad A. Meneshian**

No other writer in Armenian literature is as prominent as Raffi—Hakob Melik-Hakobian. He is considered the founder of the Eastern Armenian modern language. He set the foundation for Armenian prose and developed the primitive, rough, and disorganized language into the rich, gentle, and organized language of the nascent modern Armenian novel. He wrote in simple, clear, flexible, and vigorous ashkharhabar. His style was elegant and lyrical; his works were beautiful, encouraging, and enchanting

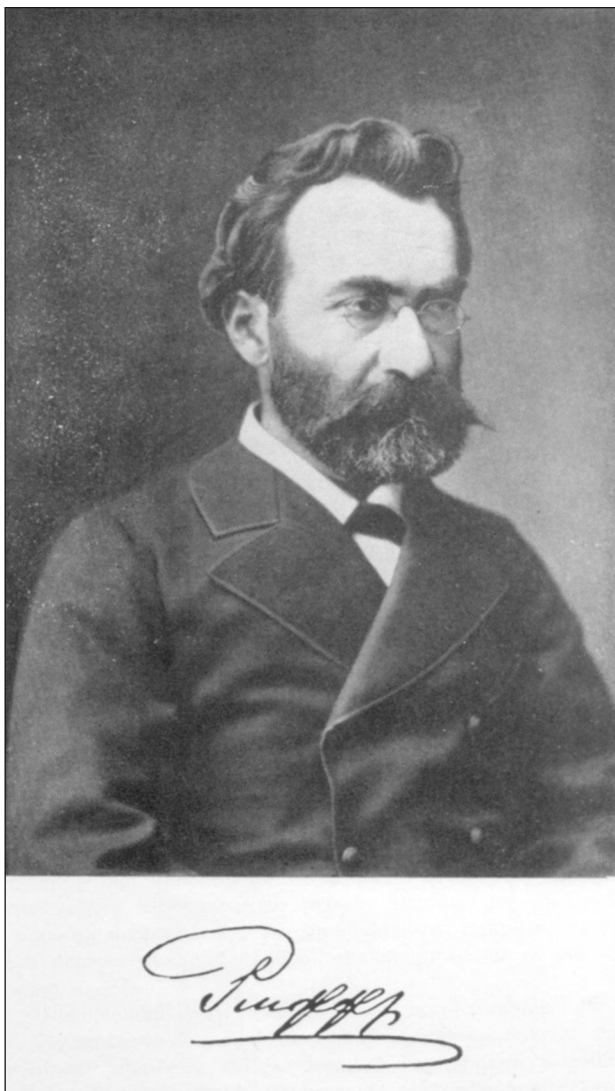
Raffi was born in the village of Payajuk, in a remote corner of Persia, into a wealthy merchant family. He grew up among the common people and saw their wretchedness. After studying in Tiflis for several years, he returned home without receiving a higher education. He assumed the responsibilities of his family business. More than his business, however, he worked to become a writer and awaken his people's spirit. He met adversaries who ruined his business, and he became indigent. But he persevered to deliver his message of enlightenment and freedom.

He wrote enthralling novels and became the most ardent and zealous interpreter of Armenians' bitter and anguished experiences and the most skillful interpreter of the nation's thoughts and emotions. He instilled patriotic ideas in his readers and aroused their national pride and bravery and inspired new hopes for a rebirth. He motivated and galvanized a generation and gave the Armenian people personality and character.

He was the greatest force behind Armenia's emancipation and liberation from servitude and domination. He was the apostle of freedom by revolution. He was a tireless advocate of his people's freedom of thought and conscience. Raffi is the nation's novelist.



Raffi



Murad A. Meneshian

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## The Prophet from Payajuk

Glenview, IL  
2010

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Murad A. Meneshian

***Raffi: The Prophet from Payajuk***

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To my Father  
**Aristakes Hovnan (Tngrian) Meneshian**  
who followed the path set by Raffi

and

To my Mother  
**Anush Gezurian Meneshian**  
who dared to survive the Genocide



Արդեօք, գալու է մի օր, ժամանակ՝  
Տեսնել Մասիսի գլխին մի դրօշակ...  
Եւ ամէն կողմից Պանդուխտ հայազգիք  
Դիմեն դէպ իւրեանց սիրուն հայրենիք:

ՐԱՖՖԻ

Will a day come, or a time,  
To see a flag atop Masis,  
And émigré Armenians from everywhere  
Head toward their beautiful fatherland?

RAFFI



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## Preface

Interest in Raffi's novels resurfaced in the 1930s and 1940s and captured the imagination of yet another generation. The popularity of the novels prompted some parents to name male children after Armenia's most beloved writer. That was then. Now, a casual survey shows the name may have fallen out of favor. Has Raffi himself fallen out of favor? I wondered whether the lack of Raffi's works in other languages might have caused the disinterest in his name.

In 2000 the Gomidas Institute published a new English translation of *Khente*. Thus, one of Raffi's best novels is available to English speakers. Since then, the Gomidas Institute has published other works by Raffi in English, and more can be expected. This is welcome news. The new activity indicates that Raffi and his novels are ageless.

I remember reading, during my preteen years, *Khachagoghi hishatagarane* and *Kaytser* with fascination, imagining the events and the characters as real. I did not, however, comprehend the messages or appreciate the beauty of the language within the covers.

In early 1970s, I had the opportunity to order several of Raffi's novels from the Vienna Mkhitarists. I read the novels once more, and again I was fascinated by them. This time I was captivated by the beautiful language, the intriguing plots, the richness of historical information, the abundance of popular and social customs, and the educational instructions.

Raffi's works occupy the highest rank ever among Armenian literary works. They also stand out as significant works among international literature because of the pivotal role they played in the life of a nation. Raffi scholars in Armenia have conducted extensive research and produced a large number of analytical and critical books and articles. From the 1950s to 2000, they have published three sets of Raffi's complete works, comprising his novels, stories, poems, articles, commentaries, letters, and extensive explanatory notes by the editors. Such scholarly interest in Raffi's literary works and life is an ultimate testimonial to a great man and a great writer.

Who was this man that "shook a dying people into consciousness" and spurred the nation toward liberty?

Documented details of Raffi's life during his lifetime do not exist, and whatever exists are mostly recollections. Vardges Aharonian wrote the first

extensive biography in 1936. It appeared serially in *Hairenik Amsagir* and then in book form. Raffiologists in Armenia have constructed Raffi's life story from his works. However, a comprehensive biography in English does not exist. With this in mind, I undertook the present work.

During the year I lived in Armenia, I often visited the *Vernisage* (open market) searching for Raffi books. One fortunate day, I found Raffi's original *Punj* volume two. I was ecstatic to see a book that Raffi had touched. I immediately purchased it at the asking price. At the National Library and the National Academy's library, helpful librarians showed me several Raffi books and provided me with photocopies. I was happy to learn that among the authors was Raffiologist Khachik Samvelyan, who lived in Yerevan. I spoke with him on the phone and asked for a copy of his book *Raffi: Kyanki steghsagortsakan ughin*. Unfortunately, he had no extra copies other than his marked-up one, and none was available in bookstores. He informed me that he was looking for a sponsor to republish the book because the current one contained many errors. I asked his permission to duplicate the pictures from his book, and he graciously consented.

I have researched several books published in Armenia and the Diaspora, particularly a number of articles published in the 1920s and 1930s in *Hairenik Amsagir*. I have included in this biography a chapter on Armenian cultural and liberation movements because Raffi grew up in that active and illuminating environment. I have also included in the last chapter segments from articles about Raffi by several renowned writers, friends, and acquaintances. Included is also an appendix listing Raffi's works, both in Armenian and several foreign languages.

My hope is that this book will rekindle and enhance the Armenians' interest in our nation's foremost novelist. The year 2008 marked the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Raffi's death; 2010 will mark the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth. To keep Raffi's memory alive, the Armenian nation needs to observe these two anniversaries. To celebrate Raffi would uplift the nation spiritually. Raffi is the father of the Armenian novel and "the greatest literary giant in all of Armenian history." As Komitas is to Armenian music, so is Raffi to Armenian literature. Their lives and works illuminated our cultural and intellectual history, like the "candle's dim light" that did not fade away but burst into a bright star to spread its light toward centuries to come. I believe that our debt to these two giants is well overdue. It is time that our Church take steps to canonize these two miracle workers.

All dates prior to 1923 referred to by Armenian writers are based on the Julian calendar, which in the nineteenth century was twelve days behind the Gregorian calendar.

Transliterations are based on phonetic values of Classical and Eastern Armenian. Exceptions are made for familiar Western Armenian forms, such as Berberian instead of Perperian and Mgrdich rather than Mkrtich. Occasionally, Eastern Armenian forms are parenthetically included in Western Armenian transliteration, such as chanaparh (janabarh). The transliterated character *e* represents three different Armenian letters. Certain Armenian letters are transliterated as ligatures: *gh* as in the French letter *r*; *kh* as *ch* in *Bach*; *ts* and *dz* as in *lets* with slight emphasis on the letters *t* and *d*; *zh* as the letter *s* in *pleasure*. Many Caucasus Armenian family names end with *ts*, as in Nazarian*ts*. In this book, the same name is occasionally spelled without this suffix, depending on the referenced sources. Poems are translated literally, without poetic format. Dates are rendered in American notation.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Mrs. Aghavni Abgaryan at the National Library in Yerevan, who graciously provided me with photocopies of many books dealing with Raffi's life and literature; to Dr. and Mrs. Garen Koloyan of Yerevan, who tirelessly and expeditiously delivered, at times personally, the photocopies that made this book possible. I am grateful to the editors of *Alik* newspaper in Iran for providing me with copies of valuable information about Raffi's family; and to Father Krikor Chiftjian at the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia for sending me the names and dates in office of the Atrpatakan primates. I would like to thank Mr. Aram Gukasyan, of Burbank, CA, the great grandson of Raffi's sister Almast for sending me several volumes of his father's, Hovhannes Ghukasyan, works; Professor Richard G. Hovannisian for his helpful suggestions; Mr. Gerald E. Ottenbreit, Jr., of the Armenian Research Center at the University of Michigan-Dearborn for providing me with photocopy pages about Raffi from *Shirvanzade: Collected Works* and Shirvanzade's letters, containing passages about Raffi, published in *Banber Hayastani arkhivneri* (Herald of Armenian Archives); Professor Ronald G. Suny for providing me help with several Georgian words; and my daughter, Hasmik Dombalagian, and my son Sevan Meneshian for proofreading the manuscript. My heartfelt appreciation and gratitude go to my wife, Knarik Meneshian, who provided valuable suggestions for the book's composition, for translating the poems into English, and for editing the manuscript.

Glenview, IL  
2010





## Introduction

The beginning of the nineteenth century was a significant period of Armenian cultural and liberation movements, starting in Venice and India and spreading to Armenian communities in Turkey and Russia. The movements advocated nationalism and secular education that accelerated during the second half of the century with extraordinary results. Raffi grew up aware of the unprecedented events and became an ardent advocate and an influential leader of the movements.

Raffi came from a remote and stagnant village in Persia. He was forced to abandon the village for educational, economic, and literary reasons. He moved to Tiflis to pursue his dream of educating the Armenian people and to increase their national awareness through his writings. Raffi died in abject poverty after a difficult and sorrowful life; but he achieved great deeds through his pen. He pointed out the destructive effects of national disunity, the ability to succeed when united, and the road to liberation. He demonstrated all these in his novels, especially the theme to liberate his people from the shackles of political, social, educational, and religious oppression of the times to a life of freedom.

Foremost, Raffi was a novelist; and at once he was a prolific commentator on national, political, and social issues; a literary critic; an indefatigable advocate for elevating the Armenian woman's educational and social status; and a progressive educator. He saw the wretchedness, the servility, the cowardice, and the ignorance of his people, and he cried. He saw the exploitative and abusive behavior of the clergy, and he revolted. To fight against the injustices, he advanced his ideology through editorials and articles in Grigor Artsruni's *Mshak* periodical.

Many of Raffi's concerns about the social and communal life of the Armenians still hold true today, well after a century later. For example, his comments about the family and the Armenian language, in the article *Inknakhabeutiun* (Self-deception), are yet concerns for Armenians today. Despite his scathing criticism of issues and events, Raffi was an optimist. He exposed his people's ills that had driven them into abysmal darkness, with the confidence that they would triumph and enjoy a bright future. Raffi knew that the past was full of tears and blood, and the present was still painful; but

he believed that the future would be bright and promising. He pointed out that despite its bitter existence, “the Armenian nation, triumphed by surviving the innumerable destructive attacks by barbarians. The nation rescued four and a half million Armenians from the enemy’s sword and brought them to the end of the nineteenth century, a golden period, henceforth there would not be death to any nation, and the total freedom of nations would be secure.” He believed that better times were near, when just laws and human rights would prevail, captive nations would be free to recover their losses, and no nation would dare to violate another’s borders. Raffi stressed, however, that two things would impede Armenians’ progress—their dispersion and their religious separation, and he agonized over these issues.

Many have criticized and attacked Raffi for his alleged position against the Armenian Church; others have even accused him of being an atheist. A godless man he was not. Raffi was a devout religious man, who loved the Church; but he could not tolerate its dismal condition. He fought vigorously and wrote constructively against the ignorance of the clergy and their behavior. His unrelenting suggestions for the improvement of the Church led to its betterment. We see the impact of social and political forces, important to Armenians, through Raffi’s pen because these forces had converged in him.

Raffi’s prophecy of a bright future for the Armenians was not far from today’s reality, with the exception of the Genocide. Raffi’s depiction in *Khente* of a utopian Armenia as portrayed in Vardan’s dream was written during the formulation of Article 61 at the Berlin Congress; but for his skepticism about the article’s content and its implementation, he placed the dream’s realization a few hundred years into the future. In less than a half century, the first phase of Vardan’s dream—the 1918 Republic of Armenia—became a reality. With a few setbacks, the second phase—the present republic—is already a reality after less than a century since the downfall of the first republic. The third and final phase will one day be realized as Raffi had envisioned—a vibrant, productive, and just society.

Raffi will live in the minds and hearts of the Armenian people because his “achievements left true memories in every Armenian’s gentle heart.” Such was the sentiment at his funeral when the mourning crowd cried out, “**He lives! He lives!**”

## Vin Aris

“Vin Aris (Who is he)?” asked the bewildered Georgian to one of the rain-drenched Armenians in the funeral procession.

“He is our beloved Raffi, who breathed new life into our people,” the grieving Armenian answered.

Indeed, who was this man leading the endless procession through the streets of Tiflis (Tbilisi), Georgia?

Hakob Melik-Hakobian, (Hagop Melik-Hagopian)<sup>1</sup>—Raffi, was Armenia’s foremost novelist, a writer, a poet, a weaver of tales, the voice of emancipation, the conscience of his nation—a prophet.

Hakob was born in the village of Payajuk in the Salmast (Salmas) region of Persia. Salmast is the old Atrpatakan Province, encompassing the historic Armenian Zarehavan or Zarevand region that spread from Lake Urmia to the planes of Lake Van. Payajuk was a large, thriving, and predominantly Armenian village in the fertile planes nourished by the Zola River. The village was prosperous partially because of trade, which extended westward to Constantinople and Smyrna, north to Russia, and eventually to Europe. Located close to the Turkish border, the area became a major battleground during WWI. The destruction brought about by the war and later by a devastating earthquake subjected Payajuk’s 180 families of one thousand people to a disaster from which they never recovered.

Hakob’s father, Melik<sup>2</sup> Mirzabek, a scion of the Ordu Dynasty,<sup>3</sup> was a modest merchant. Ordu, Hakob’s paternal great, great grandfather lived in the late seventeenth century. Ordu had seven boys and most likely daughters. One of the sons was *Mahdesi*<sup>4</sup> Nazar, who had two sons, Melik Hakob and Hovhannes, and probably daughters. Hovhannes had three sons, Khachatur, Nazar, and Aleksan. Melik Hakob had two sons, Mirza and Sargis. Mirza or Melik Mirzabek (Mirzaian) had five sons: Hakob, Avetik, Arshak, Karapet, Tigran; and nine daughters: Gayane, Hanum, Achi, Gyulinar, Maryam, Almast, Hripsime, Katarina, and Javahir. (In the late 1880s, Javahir Melik-Hakobian worked with *Hnchakian* political party members to transfer arms from Persia into Western Armenia.)<sup>5</sup> Hakob was the second child and the first son. According to M. Veratsin,<sup>6</sup> the Ordu family migrated from the Aghbak

region<sup>7</sup> to Salmast, based on hearsay from people of Urmia and Salmast. Raffi's nephew Soghomon Melik-Hakobian showed that as far back as three hundred years the Ordu family lived in Payajuk, as attested by the gravestones in the Payajuk cemetery.<sup>8</sup>

Mirzabek's wife was a kind-hearted, generous, and devoted woman endowed with all the virtues of Armenian motherhood. While Melik Mirza ran his extensive and multifaceted business, his wife, Jeyran Khanum (a female term of respect), managed the extended family's responsibilities and the needs of frequent guests. She was from the renowned Ghondagsaz (gunsmith) Family of Kohna-Shahar (Old City).

Melik Mirzabek exported large quantities of *shila*—a woven cotton fabric dyed bright red with *doron* (madder). He had arrangements with several weavers in the village to produce *shila* for his business only, and he had established several dying facilities in the village. Mirzabek was a landowner and, alternating with his brother Sargis, the hereditary village head, a position granted by the Shah of Iran, passed on to him from his father. He was the village mediator, who resolved the villagers' disputes. Until the early twentieth century, the privilege of village head belonged to Melik Mirzabek's family, who enjoyed the respect of all the Armenian and Kurdish populations in the entire Salmast region. His house was lively, his door open to everyone, and his table always bountiful for guests and indigent people.

Hakob's birth date was controversial in the mid-1930s when various communities planned to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of Raffi's birth. Enough evidence, however, became available later to establish with certainty the date 1935 as the correct date. Immediately after Raffi's death, many Tiflis Armenian periodicals and newspapers copied from *Mshak* 1835 as Raffi's birth date; even later, other publications outside of the Caucasus repeated the same date. In 1913 Raffi's wife, Anna Raffi, published *Tachkahayk* and captioned his picture with the dates 1837–1888. The author of Raffi's biography,<sup>9</sup> Avak Khan Aftandilian,<sup>10</sup> was Hakob's closest friend, who often visited Hakob in Payajuk, and together they spent many days visiting the nearby villages and their surroundings, concluded that 1835 was the correct date. Inconsistencies exist in Aftandilian's many dates noted in his book. He had stated that in 1847 Hakob was sixteen-years old, and that when Hakob returned from Tiflis in 1856 he was twenty-one-years old. His two statements are incongruent. Based on the 1847 date, Hakob would have been born in 1831; but no one had claimed such an early birth date. Furthermore, the idea that Hakob started elementary school at sixteen is inconceivable, and that after five years at the Belakhian School and four years at the *gymnasium* (secondary school), he was still twenty-one-years old. Aftandilian's recollection that Hakob was sixteen

*Jeyran Khanum*

in 1847 seems to be a memory lapse or a typographical error. Aftandilian had not known or seen Hakob when he went to school in Tiflis. The two met for the first time in 1856 when Hakob left the gymnasium to return to Payajuk and stayed at the Aftandilian family home in Tavrız for a few days. Aftandilian stated that Hakob traveled to Western Armenia in 1857 when he was twenty-one-years old,<sup>11</sup> and that in 1856 Hakob was twenty-one-years old.<sup>12</sup> Depending on the birth month, he would have been twenty-one in either of the two years. The Committee for the Arrangement of Raffi's Hundredth Anniversary of his Birth celebrated the event by publishing a collection of articles titled *Raffi: Kyanke, grakanutiune, hishoghutiunner*. Without any recorded documents, the Committee selected 1837 as Raffi's birth date based on the assurances of Mrs. Anna Raffi and her sons. Simon Vratsian wrote an

article<sup>13</sup> criticizing Armenian scholars for neglecting to research the correct date and establish the definitive birth date. Ruben Berberian, a member of the Committee, responded with an article in *Hairenik Amsagir*<sup>14</sup> and stated that the recollections of Raffi's acquaintances, such as Shirvanzade, Grigor Artsruni, Smbat Shahaziz, and Dr. Anania Sultan-Shah,<sup>15</sup> had produced a series of confusing dates varying from 1832 to 1838. In addition, Berberian pointed to a passage in Veratsin's article stating, "Mrs. Anna Raffi and her sons, Aram and Arshak, would not have allowed any changes to Raffi's birth date had they not come to the correct conclusion of 1837." Berberian concluded that based on Veratsin's statement the correct date should be 1837. Soghomon Melik-Hakobian,<sup>16</sup> who wrote under the pen name Menavor, convincingly demonstrated that his uncle was born in 1835.<sup>17</sup> *Nor Dar*, No. 67, 1888, published the following information sent to the paper by Karapet Belakhian (Hakob's teacher in Tiflis), "We have received some information about Raffi from elderly Belakhian, who has written that Raffi was brought to Tiflis in 1847. At that time, he was approximately twelve-years old. Based on this date, we consider Raffi's birth date to be 1835."<sup>18</sup> Hayk Ajemian,<sup>19</sup> the publisher of *Masis Calendar*, reproduced in the 1942 issue the results of a census undertaken in 1875 by the Atrpatakan Prelate Archbishop Andreas Hovhannisian. Number 125 on the census list was Melik Mirzabek's family. The document showed Hakob Mirzaian's age as forty; his wife's, thirty-seven; and his mother's, fifty-six. Thus, Ajemian concluded that Raffi's birth date definitely was 1835. When Raffi died in 1888, his obituary in *Mshak* stated his age as fifty-three. Considering the various dates, the most reliable date would be the most plausible, particularly the one documented—1835.

Hakob enjoyed a happy childhood; but as any child, at times he was mischievous whether at home or in the fields. Sometimes he pretended to be riding a horse on a long piece of wood and disturbed everything in the large courtyard. He learned to ride horses at an early age and loved to ride bareback. He enjoyed accompanying the cattle when they returned home. The shepherds were frightened when they saw him riding bareback, and they often brought him home injured. His mother cried and complained that someday he was going to die accidentally by drowning in the river or falling off a cliff. Years later, he reminisced that their calves had no rest from him. Even the family dog at times became the object of his mischievous play. He would grab its long ears and jump on his back, and the poor dog had to obey his master's wishes. He loved guns and often asked his uncles for one. Visitors who carried weapons immediately attracted his attention.

Mirzabek's home was an exciting place for Hakob. He came to meet and observe the countless guests and visitors from all segments of society, such as



### Raffi's birth date according to *Masis Calendar*, 1942, Tavriz

ՄԱՍԻՍ ՕՐԱՑՈՑԸ 1942 թուականի Ի. րդ Տարի Կապնց և Լրատարակող ՀԱՅԿ ԱՃԻՄԵԱՆ-ՓԵՆ

#### ՐԱՖԳԻԻ ԾՆՆԴԵԱՆ ԹՈՒԱԿԱՆԸ

Ատրպատականի Հայոց Առաջնորդ Անդրեաս Արքեպոսի կարգադրութեամբ 1875 թուին կազմուած է այս հանգի հայութեան բնդհանուր վիճակագրութիւնը, որի Ստամբուլ պատի Փայաջուկ գիւղի 125-րդ թիւը ներկայացուած է Յակոբ Մելիք Յակոբեանի՝ Րաֆֆիի բնատանիքի և հարազատների անունները տարիքները: Այս փաստաթուղթը յայտնում ընծայում վերջ տալու համար Րաֆֆի ծննդեան թուականի շուրջ տիրող թերմացութեան, ըստ որի Րաֆֆին ծնունդ առել է 1837 թուին: Մինչդեռ այս փաստաթուղթը (որի կազմութեան տարին՝ 1875ին Րաֆֆին Ստամբուլում և Թաւրիզում ներկայ էր և տեղեակ) հաստատում է որ Րաֆֆին 1875ին 40 տարեկան էր, ուրեմն և ծնունդ է 1835 թուին:

Ահա այդ պատմարձէք փաստաթուղթը

ՐԱԿՈԲ ՄԻՐՋԱՆԵԱՆ 40 տարեկան

Կից Եղա՝ ԱՆՆԱ 37 և

Դուստր Եղա՝ Նարե 10 և

Նորաբ Կարապետ 20 և

և Բոյր Բիգրան 18 և

Եղա Կատարին 16 և

Ջաւահիր 10 և

Մայր Եղա՝ ԶԷՅՐԱՆ 56 և

Ուրեմն, ըստ այս փաստաթուղթի Րաֆֆիի ծննդեան թուականը 1835ն է

ՀԱՅԿ ԱՃԻՄԵԱՆ

The 1875 census of the Armenians of Atrpatakan Province was organized by the Atrpatakan Prelate Archbishop Andreas. The 125<sup>th</sup> family on the list for the village of Payajuk is that of Hakob Melik Hakobian. This document puts an end to the misconception that Raffi was born in 1937, and it confirms that he was born in 1835. (In 1875 Raffi was in Tavriz and aware of the census.) In that year he was 40-years old.

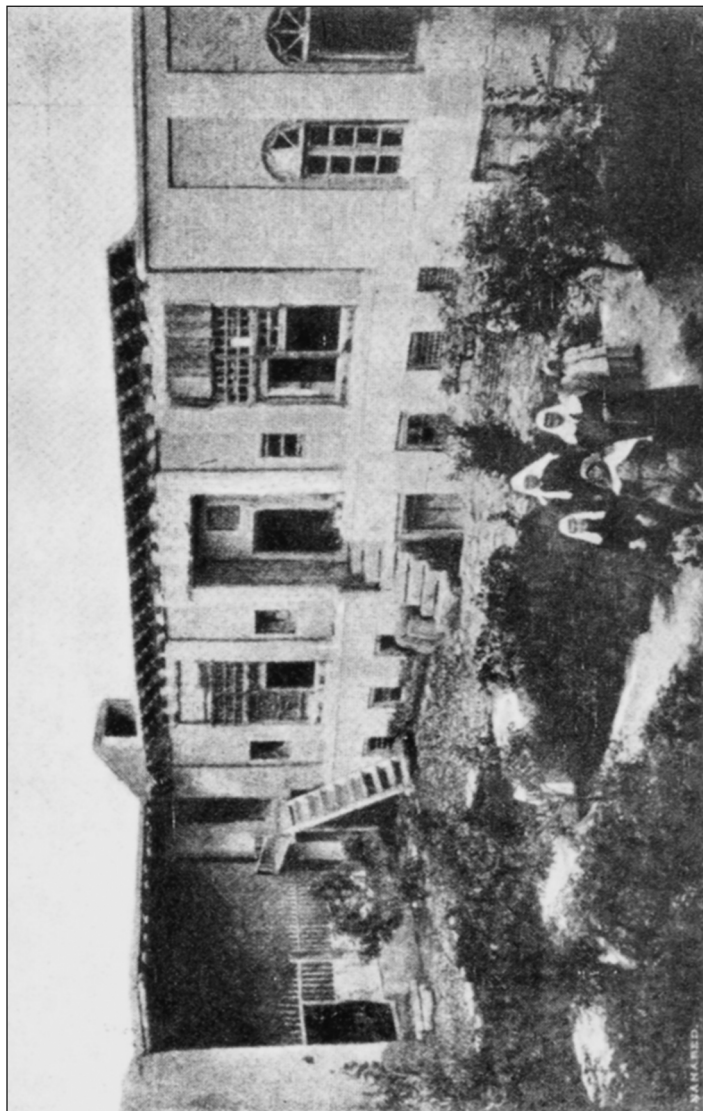
HAKOB MIRZAIAN	40
His wife, Anna	37
His daughter, Yester	10
His brothers	
Karapet	20
Tigran	18
His sisters	
Katarine	16
Javahir	10
His mother, Jeyran	56

HAYK AJEMIAN

merchants from far away lands, Armenian refugees from Turkey, high-ranking clergymen, modest village priests, and Armenian and Persian villagers. As a curious child, he listened with interest to the stories told by the visitors, particularly the stories of bitter lives told by the refugees, who crossed the border from Vaspurakan in Turkey into the Salmast region. Hakob was an intelligent and talented boy, who liked to draw pictures of flowers and maps, and sometimes caricature portraits of guests. Besides the numerous visitors, there were other sources of information and knowledge within the home to satisfy his curiosity. One was Hakob's grandmother Sona who knew countless stories, fables, traditions, and legends. Especially during the winter months, young Hakob listened tirelessly to his mother and grandmother, whose stories became subjects of his novels, full of popular and traditional topics.

Hakob enjoyed asking the visitors questions. His father often reprimanded him for getting into the conversations; meanwhile, he was delighted by his son's intelligence, sagacity, and keen judgment. During his free time, Hakob visited nearby ruins and open fields and sought solitude in cemeteries; he would sit on tombstones and immerse himself in deep thought. While helping his father and uncle in the vineyards and the fields, Hakob complemented his inadequate education with information from his surroundings—stories, conversations, nature, and cruel scenes. He listened to the songs and stories of the troubadours; he talked to the villagers and workers in the fields; he traveled to the surrounding beautiful mountains; he swam in the Zola River and the many streams flowing from the nearby Derik and Aravul mountains; and he witnessed the tax collectors' forceful entry into the villagers' homes.

When Hakob was ten-years old,<sup>20</sup> he attended the village school run by Father Mser, who had come from Van. He taught the children of the wealthy the Psalms and the *Narek* (*Matian voghbergutian*/Book of Lamentation, a prayer book written by Grigor Narekatsi<sup>21</sup>). The village school was somewhat better than traditional village schools where Ter Todik<sup>22</sup> (Father Todik) beat the children to “enhance” their learning. The school Hakob attended was considered a heaven in comparison. The narrow-minded Father Mser used one of his rooms as a classroom to teach children of different ages. The room was adjacent to the barn, where the students breathed the same air as the animals. In the winters, the warm and damp air diffused, like a fog, into the classroom turning it into a warm bathhouse. The teacher believed that a student could not learn well on a full stomach. He would say, “When someone eats something, the mind loses its ability to learn.” For that reason, “we studied with empty stomachs until midday.” As if the poor learning conditions were not enough, the teacher often beat the students with thin branches. A common punishment was the beating of the soles with a stick. The practice was called



*Raffi's Home in Payajuk (Photo by Nahabed)*

*falakhga* (bastinado). Sometimes, the teacher punished all the students. When Hakob came home and told his mother about the beatings, she told him, "Son, until a child is punished and experiences hardship, that child will not learn anything." Hakob would ask himself, "Why is it that after receiving so many beatings from the teacher I still did not learn anything?" They learned the psalms from morning until noon. Although they knew many of the psalms by heart, they did not understand what they were reciting. He described himself as a smart boy because when his grandmother told him a story, he remembered it completely; when a minstrel sang a song and told a story, he learned them right away. Years later he wrote that because he understood his grandmother's stories and the minstrel's songs, he learned them fast; he could not understand his teacher's lessons because they did not sound Armenian.<sup>23</sup> The priest always gave Hakob the large prayer book to take to church. Raffi pleaded to God to empty the contents of the book into his head, and then he would laugh and wonder how such a large book was going to enter his head. Hakob was audacious and defiant at a young age. Once when the teacher was mercilessly slapping a fellow student, Hakob shouted at the teacher and tried to stop him. The surprised teacher asked Hakob, "Why do you interfere when I am not beating you?" Hakob answered, "One day you will treat me similarly." He attended the village school until he was twelve-years old.

Although Melik Mirzabek was barely literate, he valued education. During his trips to the Caucasus, he learned about the reformed and standard schools in Tiflis. He had noticed his son's love for education, and he wanted to further it in a modern advanced school. When Hakob finished the village school, Melik Mirzabek told his son, "Hakob, you cannot benefit more from this school, let me take you to Tiflis and place you in a good school. You will learn Armenian, Russian, and even business methods, which are very important for us."<sup>24</sup>



## Student Days in Tiflis

Not long after that conversation, Melik Mirzabek took his son to Tiflis in 1847 to place him at the Nersisian Jemaran (Academy) boarding school. The school, however, was closed because of a cholera epidemic. The Russian schools were out of the question because Hakob did not know Russian. Many Armenian students attended the Russian reform schools known as *Realism Schools*,<sup>25</sup> even though the Armenian schools had the same academic level. The reason was that the Russian universities did not accept students graduating from Armenian schools without passing additional exams. Even then, the Russian government created obstacles for Armenian students to force them to attend Russian schools. For this reason, the Armenian government officials, the Armenian assimilated merchant families, and the Armenian national leaders were constrained to send their children to Russian schools. Melik Mirzabek was well aware that his son was not going to learn Armenian in a Russian school. Because Nersisian Academy was closed, Mirzabek placed Hakob at the renowned Armenian boarding school run by Karapet Belakhian, who taught Hakob advanced classical Armenian and Russian. Years later, Belakhian would describe Hakob as a scrawny and weak boy with ill-looking eyes.

The Nersisian Academy was established in 1824 by Nerses Ashtaraketsi (appointed prelate of Tiflis in 1814), who was born in the village of Ashtarak, north of Yerevan. His baptismal name was Nerses Shahazizian–Kamsarakan. Initially the academy's name was Tiflis Armenian Learning Center, then from 1827–1837, Tiflis Nersisian Armenian School. It closed in 1836 and reopened in 1837 as a religious seminary. In 1848 it again became a secular school with a board of trustees, then in 1850 a boarding school. From 1869–1871 Stepan Nazariants was the director, who emphasized the learning of *ashkharhabar* (ash-khar-ha-bar, modern vernacular).

Karapet Belakhian was born in Gandzak (Elizabetpol, Kirovabad). He received his education in Constantinople, and later he taught in Egypt. He arrived in Tiflis in 1840 and taught at the Enfiachian School until 1846, when the school closed. That same year, with the permission of Catholicos Nerses Ashtaraketsi (Nerses V, 1843–1857), he established his boarding school.

Hambardzum Enfiachian (Karin 1824–Tiflis 1896) was a publisher and a bookseller, who had graduated from the Nersisian Academy, where he later taught. In 1859 he founded a printing press and a foundry for letter casting. He published the *Krunk Hayots Ashkharhi* monthly during 1860–1863 and the *Meghu Hayastani* weekly during 1863–1886. Within a short time, Hakob's gentle manner, intelligence, and love for learning attracted his teachers' attention. He mastered *grabar* (classical Armenian) and loved to read the works of the Armenian classical writers Khorenatsi, Buzand, and Yeghishe. He was captivated by Greek and Roman literature, translated by the Armenian Mkhitarists of Venice. The ancient literature further aroused Hakob's patriotism, and the desire to benefit the Armenian people became his life's purpose. Karapet Belakhian introduced Hakob to Father Gabriyel *kahana* (priest) Patkanian, who was the Nersisian Academy director and the editor of *Kovkas* (1846–1848) and *Ararat* (1850–1851) periodicals, and to Hovhannes Ter Hovsepiyan, who was the director of the preparatory class at the Russian gymnasium. Patkanian introduced Hakob to fresh ideas about the prevailing literature, the press, the schools, and the role ashkharhabar was to play in the future.

In 1852 Hakob entered the Russian gymnasium at the preparatory level to audit the classes for a year. The following year, he began the fourth year of the gymnasium. Hakob had stayed at Belakhian's school for five years, a year longer to improve his knowledge of the Russian language. While at the gymnasium, he visited the city library and read Mkrtich Khrimian's writings, which captivated Hakob. He read translated works of Goethe, Schiller, Hugo, Shakespeare, Jules Verne, and others. He liked and marveled at the famous Russian and European writers, but the patriotic ideas of Karapet Belakhian, Gabriyel Patkanian, and Mkrtich Khrimian gave Hakob direction and impetus for his developing mind.

Liberation ideas and movements had reached the Caucasus from Europe, influenced by the French Revolution of 1848 and, particularly, the Russian victory in the Russo-Turkish War of 1853 (the Crimean War), which the gymnasium students celebrated on December 6. The progressive ideas among the Armenian students drove some of them to organize an informal literary group called *Siragumar Zhoghov* (Language Enhancement Meeting). The aim of the members was to encourage literature and learning among the Armenians, something that Hakob had desired before coming to Tiflis; thus, he became absorbed in the group's activities. The members discussed literary works and means for spreading literature among the youth. Some members translated the works of foreign writers; others published and distributed children's booklets,<sup>26</sup> and Hakob translated into grabar Friedrich von Schiller's



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ballad *Gang nach dem Eisenhammer* (*Darbnotsi chanabarhin*/On the Way to the Foundry) from the Russian version titled *Fritolin*.<sup>27</sup> Hakob's selection of this work showed his orientation at an early age toward exposing injustices and praising the triumph of the good and innocent over injustice and deceit. In 1855 he began working on his first novel titled *Khvlvik* (the name of a mischievous young female spirit), written in grabar, in which he depicted the wretched, ignorant, and lethargic lives of the Armenians in Persia. In the introduction, Hakob expressed his dismay that Armenians outside of Persia were unaware of the wretched conditions in the Salmas region, and Persia in general. The press in Tiflis did not discuss serious issues of daily life in Persia to resolve them, although such issues did arise in private conversations. Hakob saw and knew about the adverse effects of poverty on the people's lives. He felt an urge to inform other Armenians about the condition of their compatriots in Persia. With these thoughts, he began writing the novel.

Far away from home, Hakob grew homesick. To ease his longing for home, he wrote a poem, revealing his early thoughts on Armenians' perpetual wanderings. He continued adding stanzas after he returned home from Tiflis, until the poem encompassed most of his future literary subjects. He named the poem, *Sara*.

Childhood days, and childhood years,  
My life's beautiful spring bouquet,  
Oh, how many happy and sad  
Memories you left in my heart.

Childhood days, precious days,  
When you come to mind again and again,  
The sparks in my heart start burning,  
And my old wounds become inflamed.

I am an alien now in a far away land  
The longing for my birthplace is burning in my heart.  
Everything here is spurious and foreign,  
They cannot comfort my heart.<sup>28</sup>

. . . . .

Karapet Belakhian noticed Hakob's progress and abilities for higher education and decided that Hakob should study medicine in Moscow. For that, the Russian government required verification of Hakob's nobility, as indicated by his family name. Belakhian wrote to Melik Mirzabek to acquire

the necessary affidavit from the Persian government. Mirzabek received the papers and sent them to Belakhian, who in turn handed them to Hovhannes Ter Hovsepian. Years later, Garegin Yenkibarian<sup>29</sup> wrote about Belakhian's plan: "Raffi told me that when he was at the gymnasium, he had a Persian friend who came from a wealthy family. He and Raffi were supposed to go to St. Petersburg for higher education."<sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately, while Hakob was at the gymnasium, his father's business in Payajuk was deteriorating. Melik Mirzabek was already old and infirm, and his younger sons were too young to help him in his business. Melik Mirzabek asked Hakob to return home. Hakob had finished the sixth year of the gymnasium, with only one more year left to graduate. Obeying his father's wishes, he left with ambivalence for leaving the school and for desiring to see his family and Sara, his first love. He returned to Payajuk in 1856 to take over his father's business at the age of twenty-one. Hakob's unfinished schooling was attributed partly to his uncle Sargis, who considered Hakob's education useless and threatened to separate from Mirzabek if he did not bring Hakob home. Sargis doubted that Hakob's education would help the business, and he feared that Hakob was going to come back and tell them how to run the business.

Hakob left Tiflis and traveled with a caravan. On his way, he went to Vagharshapat and visited Ejmiatsin and stayed three days. There he wrote his first short poem *Khorhrdakan chrak* (Mysterious Light).<sup>31</sup> From Ejmiatsin he went to Khor Virap Monastery. He spent a few days there and wrote his lyrical poem *Dzhokhki kapalaruk*<sup>32</sup> (Hell's Taxmen). The deeper the caravan went into Persian territory, the more dangerous the place became for the travelers because of frequent attacks by bandit groups. The caravan came across a group of one hundred Armenian pilgrims, on their way to Saint Stepanos Nakhaveka Monastery, whom bandits had attacked and robbed. To help the victims, Hakob and a few others accompanied the pilgrims to the monastery. He learned from the victims that the bandits were only fifteen men. He became outraged that so few could terrorize so many, with none of the victims raising a hand in self-defense. This incident left a deep impression on Hakob, who would later describe the event in his literary works to emphasize his message of self-defense. From that time on, Hakob made this obsequious psyche of the Armenians a central theme in his writings, castigated such cowardly behavior, and strived to instill in the Armenian people national pride, self-confidence, and self-defense.<sup>33</sup> Hakob was unable to comprehend how human beings could be so peace loving, docile, and servile that they would not dare lift a finger in defense against the perpetrators of brutal atrocities beyond human imagination. Many Armenians and non-Armenians have made similar

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observations. Eugène Griselle witnessed the carnage and massacres of 1895–1896 in Sebastia City and described it in his book:

Blood is everywhere; wherever you step, you step on human brains and scalps. An armed Turkish beast wanted to kill seven or eight Armenians. Muted with raging fear, the victims, like sheep, *without attempting to defend themselves*, were slaughtered, despite that all were strong men.<sup>34</sup> (Emphasis added.)

At the monastery, Hakob had the opportunity to observe the pathetic lifestyle of the monks and their poor treatment of the pilgrims. He concluded that in the monasteries there were only lazy and ignorant monks, who thought only about their stomachs and prayers. The caravan left the monastery and headed toward Khoy Province (the old Armenian Her Province). In the town of Khoy, he stayed in a dirty caravan inn where he was mistaken for a European doctor because of his western clothes and mannerism. Raffi took advantage of the mistaken identity and seized the opportunity to learn about unusual events. Coincidentally, one of the young women in the mayor's harem was ill. The mayor sent for Hakob to come and treat the sick woman. His presence there gave him the opportunity to see the living conditions of harem women. His observations later became the subject of the novel *Harem*.<sup>35</sup>

Hakob left Khoy and headed home filled with cultural, educational, and liberation ideas acquired during his school years.





## Cultural and Liberation Movements

The Armenian cultural and liberation ideas had already infiltrated the Caucasus region when Hakob was a student in Tiflis. These movements were first started by the Armenian communities in India and by the Mkhitarists of Venice; they later spread among the Armenian communities in Turkey and Russia. In India, the Armenian community, exposed to British educational and political thoughts, developed their cultural and liberation ideologies along Western thoughts. Around 1750 Joseph Emin sought to liberate Armenia with the help of wealthy Armenian merchants. In 1792 he published in London his autobiography *The Life and Adventures of Joseph Emin: an Armenian*, expounding his ideas on liberating the Armenian nation through education and armed struggle. In 1772 Movses Baghramian wrote the booklet *Nor tetrak vor kochi hortorak* (New Booklet of Exhortation) to urge the Armenians toward Western enlightenment and to arouse their national awareness for armed struggle. In 1773 Shahamir Shahamirian published *Girk anvanial vorokait parats* (Snare of Glory), where he described the social and economic structure of a future Armenia—a republic—with a constitution and separation of church and state. In 1783 Shahamirian published *Tetrak vor kochi nshavak* (Booklet of Aim), where he urged liberation from ignorance through education, and from political slavery through armed struggle. These publications attracted the interest of a small number of educated Armenians in Turkey and Russia. The ideas advanced by these westernized authors and activists influenced Armenian political consciousness and planted the seeds of liberation movements. To inculcate the youth with nationalism, the Armenian community of Madras opened a school in 1798, and the Armenians of Calcutta founded the Hay Mardasirakan Jemaran (Armenian Philanthropic Academy) in 1821.

The Mkhitarists (founded in 1701), established in Venice since 1717, produced numerous works in classical Armenian that they had refined to a literary status. Beginning in the second decade of the nineteenth century, they undertook the translation of a large number of European literary works. The Vienna Mkhitarists, who had separated from the Venetian congregation in 1773 and settled in Trieste until 1810, moved to Vienna, Austria, in 1811 and

engaged in the critical study of the Armenian classical histories, linguistics, and archaeology.<sup>36</sup> Foremost among them with nationalistic literature was Ghevond Alishan, who wrote nationalistic songs, such as *Bam porotan* (Roar) and *Avarayri blbule* (The Avarayr Nightingale). The Mkhitarists in the West and the Indian Armenians in the East sowed the seeds of the new nationalism that gave rise to the literary renaissance of the nineteenth century.

In the 1830s young Armenian students went to attend French universities and the Mkhitarist Muradian and Rafayelian schools in Italy. Armenian students graduating from Russian universities and from Dorpat University in Germany (now in Estonia) were already exposed to Russian and European educational and cultural environments. Armenians in Russia and Persia read Armenian publications, such as *Azdarar* (Monitor), *Azgaser* (Patriot), and the *Azgaser Araratian* (Patriot from Ararat), sent to them from India. Years later when Raffi was already well-known, he described this period of Armenia's educational revival most eloquently: "The first half of the nineteenth century became that period of Ezekiel when God blew His spirit upon that moribund nation, and the Armenians in different countries started to stir, to transform, and to become aware of their national reality."<sup>37</sup>

The Samvel Muradian School was established in 1832 in Padua, Italy, with funds donated by Samvel Muradian, an Iranian Armenian merchant in India, and administered by the Venice Mkhitarists. They also established the Rafayelian School in 1836 in Venice with funds donated by Rafayel Ghahramanian, the son-in-law of Samvel Muradian. In 1846 the Muradian School moved to Paris, then to Venice in 1870 and joined the Rafayelian School. The resulting school was named Murad-Rafayelian School. In 1917 the school moved to Rome then back to Venice in 1918. In 1929 the Muradian School separated and moved to Paris; but the school in Venice retained the Murad-Rafayelian name. The Muradian and the Murad-Rafayelian schools closed during World War II. The former reopened in 1946, the latter in 1950. The French and Italian governments recognized their respective schools as gymnasiums. The Muradian School permanently closed its doors in 1980, the Murad-Rafayelian School in 1998.

By the 1850s a large number of European-educated Armenians returned home, inspired by democratic ideas. They were eager to share their enlightened thoughts with the Armenian population by introducing secular subjects in diocesan schools. Meanwhile, the Mkhitarists had already opened schools in Turkey and introduced Western educational methods; yet, at the beginning, they taught in grabar. The Western-educated class of intelligentsia in Turkey and Russia strived to replace the grabar to simplify and improve the education in Armenian schools. A common language to teach secular subjects and express



*Mkhitarist Father Ghevond Alishan*

enlightened ideas for national identity did not exist. The Armenians in the cultural centers of Constantinople and Smyrna spoke predominantly Turkish; those in Russian major cities, Russian. The only common element among all Armenians was grabar, understood by only a few people outside the Church. “Yet, the predominant inspiration of all was neither culture nor even church—it was national survival.”<sup>38</sup>

Khachatur Abovian was the first to advocate the creation of a modern Armenian vernacular—ashkharhabar—to make the language intelligible to the reader. In his *Verk Hayastani*, he stated:

How joyous the Armenians were at the prospects of having a “Christian” power rule their country. However, this dream was to

prove a delusion, and the Armenians were faced with the bitter disappointment of living under the tyrannical rule of the Russian Tsar . . . Abovian made an emotional appeal to his countrymen to be mindful of the sorrows of their native land and to mourn its martyrs . . . Abovian is the symbol of the modern nationalism that was to emerge in the following decades. He inspired and influenced Russian Armenian writers, glorified the revolutionaries, and tried to incite his downtrodden countrymen to act. His patriotic dedication set the groundwork and became the inspiration of the political parties of the nineteenth century. The new spirit of the age, as exemplified in Khachatur Abovian in Russian Armenia, was to become evident in Western Armenia by mid-century.<sup>39</sup>

Khachatur Abovian (1805–1848) was born in Kanaker (outskirts of Yerevan). When he was ten-years old, his father took him to Ejmiatsin to prepare for the priesthood. After five years, he could not tolerate the abusive treatment he received. Mesrop Taghiadian (see below) had witnessed the cruel treatment meted out to Abovian. He tried several times to escape, but he was unsuccessful. In 1820, however, he was able to go to Haghbat (a monastery of learning in the northern part of Armenia) where he studied for a short time, and then he went to Tiflis and continued his studies at the Nersisian Academy. The director was Father Harutiun Alamdarian (1824–1830), who, along with Gabriyel kahana Patkanian, was one of a few progressive clergy of that time. After his graduation in 1826, Abovian wanted to go to Venice and study with the Mkhitarists but was unable. Catholicos Hovhannes Krbetsi (1831–1842) hired Abovian as his secretary and translator.

In 1829 Dorpat University Professor Friedrich Parrot came to Ejmiatsin to ascend Mount Ararat. The catholicos assigned Abovian as translator to Parrot. During the journey, Abovian expressed to Professor Parrot his desire for a higher education. Impressed by the young man's passion for education, Professor Parrot assisted Abovian in receiving a scholarship to enter Dorpat University in 1830. Abovian graduated in 1836 and returned to Ejmiatsin to teach. He wanted to establish a school based on modern teaching methods to prepare teachers and to educate the clergy. Instead, he found opposition and condemnation from Catholicos Hovhannes. For this and his poor financial condition, he left Ejmiatsin and became the director of a state school in Tiflis. In 1839 he married a German woman named Emilia Lőse.

Abovian's passionate writings for the enlightenment of the Armenian people and his harsh criticism of the clerics prompted his opponents to





*Khachatur Abovian*

persecute him with malicious condemnation. Thus, he was dismissed from the school in Tiflis. He moved to Yerevan and found employment as the assistant director of the regional state school. After the death of Catholicos Hovhannes, Abovian appealed to Catholicos Nerses to become a cleric, but the catholicos refused him because he was married.

After writing poetry at the beginning of his writing career, Abovian soon realized that the public had to be educated, and that the Armenian writer had to write in the language of the people, not the Church. He abandoned the grabar in 1830 and began to write in ashkharhabar. With that conviction, he wrote *Verk Hayastani–Voghb Hayrenasiri* (Wounds of Armenia–Lament of the Patriot) in 1840. It was the first novel in the modern Eastern Armenian, written in his native Kanaker dialect. Although *Verk Hayastani* was not

published until 1858, the manuscript passed from person to person, among them Hakob. *Verk Hayastani* is an intensely emotional description of Yerevan Armenians' tragic condition under the oppressive Persian rule during the Russo-Persia War of 1826–1828. The hero Aghasi, leading a band of partisans, fought against the Persian lords for the liberation of Yerevan. He died at the end. The novel became the basis of resistance against oppression and persecution by tyrannical rule. Abovian presented the image of a rebellious Armenian by describing the first rebellion against oppression of the Armenian people and the formation of freedom-fighter groups who defended the honor and lives of their people. He believed that the Armenian intellectuals had to sacrifice their self-interests and make an effort to elevate the lives of the people, become the harbingers of collective revival, dedicate themselves to the educational task, and create works in the vernacular. He believed that by doing so, the intelligentsia would be persecuted but had to endure in order to destroy the prejudices for the sake of a new nation. Early in 1848 Abovian was dismissed from his position at the Yerevan school. On April 2, Abovian left home, and he was never seen again.

Taghiadiants was one of the early advocates of Armenia's liberation. He was impatient and critical of the obstinate conservatives, who were opposed to his ideas on education. Taghiadiants was born in Yerevan in 1803. He attended the Nersisian Academy in 1815 and graduated in 1823. In 1825 Catholicos Yeprem I Tsoraghegtsi sent Taghiadiants to India to teach at the Hay Mardasirakan Jemaran (Armenian Philanthropic Academy) in Calcutta. While there, he studied at the English Bishop College from 1826–1830, learning English, Persian, Greek, and Latin. He graduated with a doctoral degree. A year after graduation, he went to New Julfa (Isfahan, Persia) and became a teacher. Taghiadiants soon faced adversities for appearing as a conceited and hedonistic person. Driven away, he went to teach at Ejmiatsin but faced persecution by the clerics for his liberal ideas. In 1832 the catholicos sent him back to New Julfa, where the community received him warmly, despite his previous experience with them. Taghiadiants married in 1835. A year later, he was again driven away for his incisive comments against the slanderous, deceitful, treacherous, and hypocritical community. After several years in Constantinople, North Africa, and Western Armenia, the young intellectual went back to Calcutta in 1839, taught in several Armenian schools, and established a boys' and a girls' schools. He and his second wife founded the *Araratian Enkerutiun* (Ararat Association) and published the *Azgaser* and the *Azgaser Araratian* periodicals. Despite all his efforts and contributions, he became indigent. His wife died in Calcutta in 1855. The English offered him a teaching position, but he refused saying, "I was born an Armenian, I have

lived as an Armenian, and I will die as an Armenian.” With a burning desire to return to Armenia, he refused a position at the St. Harutiun Armenian Church. He left a broken-hearted man. On his way, he fell ill in Shiraz (Persia) and died on June 10, 1858. With a solid English education, he wanted to popularize other cultures among the Armenians and educate the masses. He translated English works by Shakespeare, Milton, etc., into Armenian. In 1846 he published *Veb Vardgesi* (Novel of Vardges), the first of three historical novels inspired by ancient Armenian literature. It was the first work of fiction in modern Armenian literature written in grabar.<sup>40</sup>

From the 1830s to the 1850s, the ashkharhabar language took hold first in Smyrna and Constantinople, then in Russian Armenia with the publication of Stepan Nazariant's *Hiusisapayl*. In Smyrna and Constantinople, the intelligentsia, along with Vienna Mkhitarist Father Arsen Aydenian, worked to develop a literary ashkharhabar from the popular vernacular. The pioneering periodical in literary ashkharhabar was *Arshaluys Araratian* (Dawn of Ararat), edited by Ghugas Baltasarian and published in Smyrna in 1840. Father Arsen Aydenian (1824–1902) published in 1866 his ashkharhabar grammar *Knnakan kerakanutiun* (Critical Grammar) that remains a significant contribution toward the establishment of the ashkharhabar literary language.<sup>41</sup>

Vahé Oshagan described the severity of the struggle to secularize the schools and adopt ashkharhabar as the literary language as a “class war between the wealthy, the powerful, and the new liberal-minded, European-educated professionals.” He explained:

When G. Panossian, born in 1828, entered the literary field at the age of 20, the Revival had gotten under way. Two issues occupied the minds—the *amira* [wealthy community leaders] and *esnaph* [tradesmen] class struggles, and the educational reforms. The clergy held absolute power. Panossian, together with the young [Armenag] Haikouni, [Grigor] Tchilinkarian and H. Sevadjan, attacked the clergy's abuse of power, the mismanagement of community affairs, and the corrupt social customs, through Panossian's Armeno-Turkish<sup>42</sup> papers “Manzume-i-Efkiair”, “Moda”, Munadi-i-Ergias”, and “Varaqa-i-Havadis.” He was the most outspoken and courageous voice of his time, and his anti-clericalism was so violent that the Church excommunicated him. Nevertheless, Panossian battled on and published several Armeno-Turkish books on Church Reform; he wrote against Armenians attending foreign schools and against the arbitrary nature of power in the community; but he was in favor of the new generations.<sup>43</sup>

Contemporaries of Abovian—Mikayel Nalbandian and Stepan Nazariants—supported the dissemination of ashkharhabar in Russia. Nazariants wrote a book strongly advocating the Ararat dialect as the basis for the ashkharhabar literary language. Grabar was entrenched as the literary language because Armenian educational institutions were under the control of the Church, as explained by Sarkis Shmavonian:

As important as the consolidation of Armenians in the area around Erevan was, this demographic process was less significant in the origins of Russian Armenian nationalism than were contemporary political-religious changes. After the annexation of the Erevan khanate [province] in 1828, the See of the Apostolic Church at Etchmiadzin lay within Russian territory for the first time. The number of apostolic dioceses in Russia grew from one to six . . . In recognition of the shift in political boundaries, the *Polozhenie* . . . (Law on the governance of the affairs of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Russia) in 1836 legally established the catholicos of Etchmiadzin over the Apostolic Armenians in the Russian Empire . . . Within this decentralized structure, the educational discipline and curriculum of diocesan schools . . . were the responsibility of the primate of each diocese. The primate would decide what subjects, secular and religious, to offer . . .

The election of an aggressive new Catholicos, Nerses V Ashtaraketsi . . . marked the final step in Etchmiadzin's assumption of *de facto* control over all Armenian Apostolic diocesan schools in Russia . . .

. . . After the suppression of an active territorial-political life for Russian Armenians, literature, along with the Church and Church politics, became a vital substitute for it in Armenian communities. A secular, non-territorial nationalism grew out of the cultural and political disputes within the Church and the emerging intelligentsia. Its articulation was further refined and expanded by bold young reformers, including Stepanos Nazariants, Rafayel Patkanian, and Mikayel Nalbandian.<sup>44</sup>

Mikayel Nalbandian (1829–1866), the son of a blacksmith, was born in Nor Nakhijevan.<sup>45</sup> He attended the local diocesan school run by Gabriyel kahana Patkanian. Later he attended the Nersisian Academy and the Lazarian Jemaran (Academy) in Moscow. He graduated in 1848 and returned to Nor Nakhijevan. He moved to Kishinev and became the secretary to Archbishop



*Mikayel Nalbandian*

Matteos Vehapetian, the primate of Bessarabia Province.<sup>46</sup> Because of Nalbandian's differences with the Nakhijevan church authorities and Harutiun Khalibov (Khalibian), the pro-clerical magistrate of Nor Nakhijevan from 1843–1848 and a supporter of Catholicos Nerses, Nalbandian was labeled a troublemaker.<sup>47</sup> With his powers of clerical government, the catholicos, with the assistance of the Russian police, ordered Nalbandian arrested and sent to Ejmiatsin. He evaded the police and left for Moscow. After taking the necessary tests and succeeding in obtaining a teaching certificate, Nalbandian received a teaching position at the Lazarian Academy in 1853; meanwhile, he audited classes at the Moscow University Medical School. At Lazarian, Nalbandian met Professor Stepanos Nazariants, and their association developed into a working relationship at *Hiusisapayl*, published by Nazariants.

The Lazarian Academy was a large educational and scientific center for Armenology and Eastern studies. The wealthy Lazarian Family funded and established the academy in Moscow in 1815. Initially it was an elementary school known as the Armenian Lazarian Study Center for Armenian adopted children, but children of other ethnic groups studied there as well. In 1820 it became academically equal to Russian gymnasiums. Along with basic subjects, the academy offered Russian, Armenian, Latin, French, German, Persian, Turkish, and Arabic languages. In 1827 it was renamed the Lazarian Institute for Oriental Languages and became under the control of the Russian government's Department of Education. In 1841 a division opened to prepare teachers for seminaries; in 1848 it became a first level educational institution; and in 1872 the institute was separated into two main branches—a gymnasium and a three-year special school for languages. Many distinguished Armenians and Russians graduated from Lazarian Academy, among them Rafayel Patkanian, Vahan Terian, Aleksandr Miasnikian, Leo Tolstoy, Ivan Turgenev, and A. Glinka. The printing press published literature in thirteen languages. By a government decree in 1919, the institute became the Armenian Institute and later the Asian Institute. In 1920 it was named the Eastern Living Languages Central Institute, and then it became the Moscow Institute for Eastern Studies.

The catholicos used his influence in Moscow and again wanted Nalbandian arrested; however, with Nazariants's mediation, he remained free. Nalbandian became an enthusiastic contributor with the pen name Koms Emmanuel. Inflicted with tuberculosis, he left for Constantinople to rest and recover. He met with the progressive writers and was particularly impressed by Stepan Voskan (Voskanian)<sup>48</sup> and his call for a general national awakening. From there he went to Europe and visited England, France, and Germany. Nalbandian was an early advocate for the liberation of the Armenian women from their traditional role of homemakers. He proclaimed that mothers have a similar mission as progressive writers, teachers, and intellectuals, and that the task of nation building started at home and continued in the national schools. After returning to Nor Nakhijevan from Europe in 1859 (after the death of Catholicos Nerses in 1857), Nalbandian was sent on a mission to India to secure an inheritance left for the city by a wealthy Armenian. After visiting numerous cities starting from Constantinople, Nalbandian returned in 1862 with part of the inheritance. The Russian police arrested him on charges of collaborating and sympathizing with Russian revolutionaries. Found guilty, he was imprisoned for three years, during which his tuberculosis worsened, and his health terminally deteriorated. He died in 1866.

Minas Tololyan wrote the following about Nalbandian's severe criticism

of the Church and the clerics:

The hostile stance toward the Church and ecclesiastics has been attributed to Nalbandians. That supposition is wrong. During a period when the clerics abused their calling and used their habit and cowl as a shield against their pursuit of opportunistic interests, the likes of Nalbandians and Nazarians had to speak out. The Armenian clerics drowned in ignorance. Church and religion had become the means and objects for unbridled exploitation . . . Nalbandians believed that religion was inseparable from the lives of people and nations; it was infinite. There were two types of religion—servile and liberal. He considered Christianity a fountain of love and freedom with doctrines to defeat oppression. He believed that the Armenian symbolized the secret of human existence.<sup>49</sup>

Nalbandian's discourse on agriculture titled *Yerkragortsutiune vorpes ughigh chanaparh* (Agriculture as the True Path),<sup>50</sup> published in 1862 under the penname Simeon Manikian, encouraged Armenians to remain on their lands, for only through agriculture could the Armenian peasant remain self-sufficient. He compared industrialized Europe with agrarian societies where in the former frequent unemployment led to poverty, but in the latter abundance from the land provided sustenance. As for his revolutionary ideas, Sarkis Atamian had written: "Nalbandian was intensely radical and revolutionary in his ideas for liberating Armenians intellectually and politically."<sup>51</sup> He was a passionate supporter of ashkharhabar. Nalbandian and Nazarians were the leaders of their generation who advocated the idea of nationality separated from the religious concept of nation. Nalbandian advocated for national secular "schools under the management of the nation, without the intervention of clerical functionaries, to become the birthplace for the vital enlightenment of our nation."<sup>52</sup> Nalbandian pointed out "the lack of national consciousness and that consciousness came from enlightenment. Nalbandian has been described as a tireless propagandist of enlightenment, science, and scientific approach. He was uncompromisingly anti-cleric and a zealous supporter of modern Armenian. For him, literature was a vehicle for reform; therefore, he called for the creation of a national literature."<sup>53</sup>

Stepan (Stepanos) Nazarians (1814–1879) was born in Tiflis. He attended the Nersisian Academy, where Khachatur Abovian was his classmate, and later the Lazarian Academy. He went on to study at Dorpat University in 1832 and graduated in 1841 with a specialty in linguistics. Besides Armenian and



*Stepanos Nazariants*

Russian, he knew Persian, Arabic, and Latin. In 1843 he became a teacher of Eastern studies at Ghazan University. Desiring to be closer to Armenian communities, Nazariants returned to Moscow and became a teacher at the Lazarian Academy. His first two literary works were in Russian. The first of his Armenian works was in grabar, published in 1851; the second in ashkharhabar, in 1853. The two works dealt with literary, linguistic, and educational concerns. Nazariants obtained permission from the Russian censor in 1856 to publish his journal *Hiusisapayl* and began publishing it on January 1, 1858. The intent of the paper was to enlighten the Armenian public and raise their cultural awareness during a period of ignorance. It also aimed “to combat Apostolic political and Mkhitarist cultural influences in the Armenian communities . . . Nazariants’s independence of action secured the exemption





*Hiusisapayl Monthly*

he desired from the inhibitions of clerical and institutional censorship. *Hiusisapayl* became the first Armenian periodical in Russia subject only to the usual restrictions of state censorship . . . unsupervised and unlicensed by Etchmiatsin.”<sup>54</sup>

The journal’s language was ashkharhabar, since Nazariants was a passionate advocate of the vernacular. Tololyan described Nazariants’s observation of the clergy’s behavior as follows:

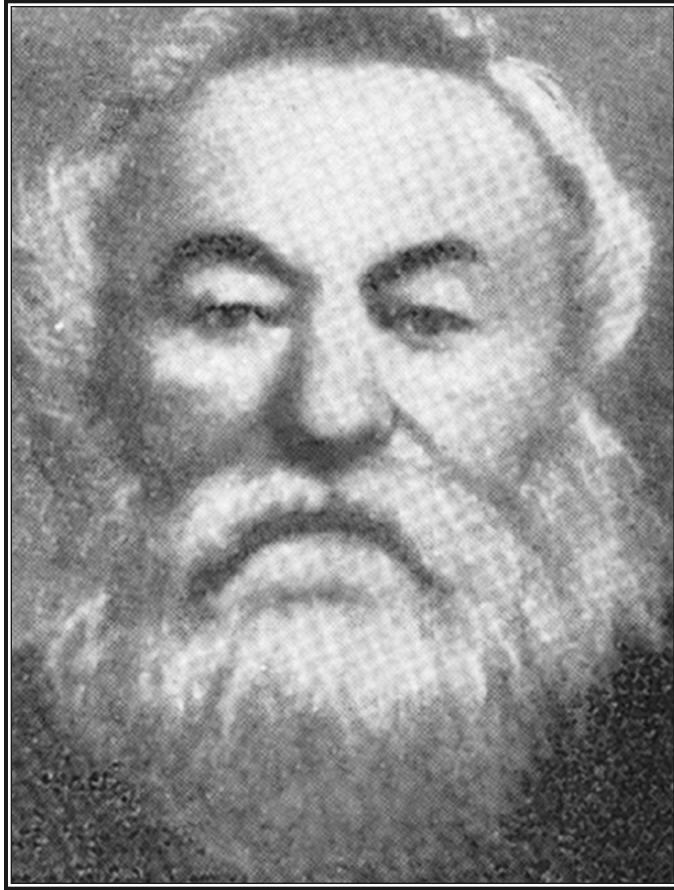
Stepan Nazariants believed that the true ecclesiastics lived in the fifth century. He considered the clergy of the 1850s as a class of opportunists, dealing with formalities of the Church, who did not have the convictions of Christian teachings, but used their habit for means of unspeakable exploitation to make a living.<sup>55</sup>

In 1864 Nazariants ceased publishing *Hiusisapayl* because of low subscription. He went on to assume the directorship of Nersisian Academy for a few years, after which he returned to teach again at Lazarian Academy. Nazariants died in 1879.

*Hiusisapayl* was a pioneer in the Armenian renaissance movement, and Stepan Nazariants and Mikayel Nalbandian were the pioneers of Armenian journalism in the Russian Empire. “Nazarian’s effective arguments on behalf of the Armenian bourgeoisie and the Russian aristocracy were breaking down some of the resistance of the clergy, the interests of whom were closely bound to the former. His great attack was against the position of the clergy toward the language, arguing that the task of education must be taken away from the clergy before a dead language killed a dying people.”<sup>56</sup>

Education among a few segments of Russian Armenians was already de facto secularized. Communities along the Black Sea trade routes were already westernized when Russia occupied the Caucasus. In Europeanized cities, such as Moscow, Nor Nakhijevan, and Tiflis “the secular education in the Armenian communities was dominated by elite of exceptionally accomplished *kahanas* . . . For example, between 1833 and 1845, Gabriyel kahana Patkanian taught modern classical Armenian, Russian, French, Armenian history, geography, mathematics, and the Greek classics at the diocesan school in Nor Nakhijevan.”<sup>57</sup>

Gabriyel kahana Patkanian (1802–1889), Rafayel Patkanian’s father, was one of the early nineteenth century liberal clerics. He had studied with his father, Serovbe, who had received his education from the Mkhitarist fathers in Venice. Gabriyel kahana wanted to introduce secular and Western subjects into the curriculum as European-educated and liberal-minded teachers had



*Gabriel kahana Patkanian*

already done at many diocesan schools. This infiltration had alarmed the religious and the powerful political figures. In 1845 Catholicos Nerses closed down or purged the diocesan schools in Tiflis, Astrakhan, and Nor Nakhijevan, disregarding the independent growth of secular education in these important provincial mercantile communities. The Russian state police helped the catholicos to arrest and remove Armenian clerics throughout the empire for resisting the elimination of independent secular curricula. During a visit to Nor Nakhijevan in 1845, the catholicos ordered Patkanian's school closed and exiled the "agitator and troublemaker" kahana to the Norashen Monastery in Georgia. In 1846 the catholicos appointed Patkanian director of Nersisian Academy, where in 1850 he published the weekly journal *Ararat* (1850–1851), printed at the school's printing shop. Several writers and the Soviet Armenian

Encyclopedia have stated that the language of *Ararat* was ashkharhabar. Gabriyel kahana passionately believed that the written Armenian language had to be in the “most beautiful language in the world.” Because Catholicos Nerses had permitted Patkanian to publish the journal, its language had to be that of the Church—grabar. Ruben Berberian, who was familiar with the journal, stated in his article “Gamar Katipa” that the “language of *Ararat* was of course grabar.”<sup>58</sup> Gabriyel kahana, however, printed a few works written in ashkharhabar, for example, several poems by Rafayel Patkanian and Mikayel Nalbandian—their first published works. According to Minas Tololyan, the language of *Ararat* was a mixture of grabar, Western Armenian, and Araratian dialects.<sup>59</sup> *Ararat* published religious, historical, and educational articles, and poetry. In 1851 the government suddenly ordered *Ararat* shut down, claiming violation of censorship regulations.<sup>60</sup> Catholicos Nerses dismissed Gabriyel kahana from Nersisian Academy, because of malicious accusations, and sent him to Nor Nakhijevan to face the charges. After declaring him guilty, Catholicos Nerses defrocked Gabriyel kahana.

The pioneers and advocates of ashkharhabar persevered and succeeded in pressuring diocesan schools to adopt the secular educational system. Ronald Suny stated that with secular education came anti-clericalism and secular nationalism.

By the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, intellectuals in Russia and Turkey were shifting to an anticlerical, secular nationalism. No longer willing to discuss cultural and political issues in the language of martyrdom and sin, men like Khachatur Abovian, Mikayel Nalbandian, Stepan Voskan, Grigor Odian, and Nahapet Rusinian, and later Rafael Patkanian, the novelist Raffi, and the journalist Grigor Artsruni articulated a new vision of a historic Armenian nation, one with a history that stretched back millennia.<sup>61</sup>

Rafayel Patkanian (1830–1892) was among the few who thought as Nazariants and Nalbandian. Patkanian was a linguist and a poet, who wrote revolutionary poems that impassioned the youth. He was a staunch advocate of ashkharhabar, and he promoted it through his writings to enlighten the Armenians. He was born on November 8, 1830, in Nor Nakhijevan. He attended the diocesan school run by his father, Gabriyel kahana Patkanian. After which he attended the Lazarian Academy for several years but left without graduating because of poor performance. His father, who was the director of the Nersisian Academy at that time, unhappy with his son's



*Rafayel Patkanian*

scholastic deficiency, sternly told him to return and hope to get a teaching position at Nersisian.

Rafayel arrived in Tiflis in 1849 and found it like the Tower of Babel, where Armenians from many parts of Western Armenia and the Caucasus spoke a variety of village dialects. Soon he became familiar with these disparate dialects and contemplated having a single general dialect, which would be comprehensible to every Armenian. Rafayel expressed the idea to his father; but the learned father was of the conviction that “if there ever was a single and uniform Armenian language, that was the grabar language of our ancestors—noble, sublime, rich, and most beautiful among all languages.” Rafayel excelled only in Armenian studies at the Lazarian Academy, where he had written several poems in ashkharhabar. Rafayel did become a teacher at Nersisian in 1850.

That year, during one of his father's absences from Tiflis for two days, when the printing shop was ready to print the week's issue of *Ararat*, Rafayel took advantage of his father's absence and inserted two of his poems into the publication. These were his first published poems in ashkharhabar, which aroused unexpected emotions and enthusiasm among the Nersisian students and teachers.<sup>62</sup>

When powerful clerics and political figures in Nor Nakhijevan maliciously accused and dismissed Gabriyel kahana from the Nersisian Academy for secularism, Rafayel felt embarrassed to remain in Tiflis and followed his father to Nakhijevan. He decided to continue his studies at Dorpat University. Unhappy with his life at the university, Rafayel returned to Moscow after two years and attended Moscow University's language department during 1853–1854. In Moscow, Rafayel and his friends Gevorg Kananian and Minas Temurian formed the *Gamar Katipa* (Kamar Katiba) literary group to publish comprehensible educational booklets. The name consisted of the initial letters of their first and last names with “a” and “i” inserted to form Gamar Katipa that became immortalized as Rafayel Patkanian's pen name.

He departed from Moscow for St. Petersburg and entered the Military Medical Academy. Rafayel did not like the hard work expected of him, so he left and entered the Eastern Languages Department. After graduation, he worked at a government office. Meanwhile, he managed to purchase a printing press to publish the booklets the group had planned. The first book with the motto “to write as people speak and to speak as they write” came out in 1856 followed by five other books. After *Hiusisapayl* closed in 1864, his father encouraged him to publish the *Hiusis* (North) newspaper. Soon after, Rafayel discontinued the publication because of low subscription. He kept operating the printing press because he had numerous printing orders. Ghazaros Aghayan worked at the printing house as a typesetter after *Hiusis* closed.<sup>63</sup>

The outspoken reformers in Turkey and Russia became the leaders and harbingers of the Armenian cultural and liberation movements. Active in their respective communities, they persevered in spite of “each facing the problem of the nature of authority that controlled the affairs of the nation . . . They all favored the separation of the secular and religious powers.”<sup>64</sup> The literary works of the mid-1800 writers were calling the Armenians of the Ottoman and Russian empires to take arms for the liberation of the fatherland. Mkrtich Khrimian, Mkrtich Beshiktashlian, and Stepan Voskan who wrote “They are preparing the censers . . . we need gunpowder,” spread their message in Western Armenia. Khachatur Abovian, Mikayel Nalbandian who wrote *Mer Hayrenik* (Our Fatherland) urging the Armenians to follow its example, and Rafayel Patkanian whose *Mayr Araksi* (Mother of Arax River) brought tears

## Cultural and Liberation Movements

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to readers' eyes, were doing the same in Eastern Armenia.

Hakob was aware of the popular developments that had started among the intellectual circles in India, Venice, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Tiflis, Constantinople, and Smyrna. As a young man, in Tiflis and in Payajuk, he matured ideologically in the environment of the nation's cultural awakening and liberation movements, while reading with great interest and zeal the literature of the national activists in the established Armenian literary centers. He immersed himself in the national rebirth with his entire being.







## Return Home

Back at home, Hakob's family and the villagers received him with joyous celebration. Before leaving for Tiflis, Hakob had fallen in love with a neighbor girl named Sara. He looked for her among the crowd, but did not see her. He went around the village looking for her at the places she had frequented—her family's field and Alo's spring—yet he still did not find her. Hakob could not confide in anyone of his secret love for Sara; so, he expressed it in the poem *Sara*.

. . . . .  
Even now I am frightened . . . there, the school,  
The slaughter house of my tender years.

There, the tree . . . the miserable willow.  
I have not forgotten you, rotten old tree.  
You always gave my teacher  
Tender branches to punish me with.

Everything is the same as before,  
The green and extensive fields,  
Only your picture is invisible to me,  
Pretty Sara, partner of my soul.

But where are you now gentle Sara?  
I am wasting away and dying worrying about you.  
Was Heaven so cruel?  
Oh, what am I thinking . . . all are lies.

. . . . .

Asking the villagers about Sara, he found out that the girl had waited for him, but eventually her parents had given her away, against her will, as a bride to a wealthy family's son whom she did not love or want to marry. On her wedding day, she had taken poison just before the wedding ceremony and

collapsed at the altar. Because she had committed suicide, she was not buried in the cemetery, but in a plot outside of the village. The tragic incident saddened Hakob. The villagers often saw Hakob at the cemetery. Her death left a lasting impression on him and influenced his literary creations. He poured his grief and nostalgia into the poem *Sara*.

. . . . .  
When all the people in front of the altar  
Were listening in awe to the sacred ceremony,  
Sara collapsed, and with her eyes closed  
Did not open them again.

“Not far from the village, on that hill  
You will find, Sir, a lone grave.  
Two willows bow their branches  
And spread their pleasant shade.”

Buried there is beautiful Sara  
Without a tombstone and without a cross,  
And even the priest, with his censer,  
Did not spread holy incense for that innocent soul.

She was not given a place in the cemetery,  
A sinful suicide victim  
And an obstinate free-spirited girl,  
Who opposed even her parents.

After a few days, a young man,  
With a sad heart and an unhappy face,  
On the black cemetery stone,  
Was writing the following sad lines:

Until when, you dark tyranny,  
Will you oppress our familial freedom?  
Until when will your black claws  
Pluck away victims like Sara?

*Sara* was first published in *Punj*, volume two, in 1874, consisting of 224 quatrains. The introduction stated that Hakob wrote *Harem*, *Sara*, and *Ghuylubani* during his years in Persia. That was after Hakob returned from

Tiflis in 1856 and the time he left Payajuk again in 1868. During those intervening years, he traveled between Tiflis, Tavriz, and Payajuk to escape the fraudulent demands of many merchants. *Sara* appears to be an autobiographical poem, based on his recollections and nostalgia of his childhood days. Years later when Raffi wrote *Kaytser*, he included in the novel many of the incidents and his ideas described in *Sara*. Hakob described the village life with its traditions and customs, prejudices and superstitions, persecutions and exploitations, wretchedness and servility, degradation of women, religious intolerance, fraudulent practices, love, illiteracy, ignorance, and backwardness. Hakob is the narrator of the poem, and Sara is the central character. Is *Sara* merely a tragic love story or a social commentary? Was Raffi in love with Sara? The poem reveals that he was, but then Hakob was only twelve-years old when he left Payajuk to attend school in Tiflis. The readers learn from the words of the narrator in *Kaytser* that Hakob was in love with Ter Todik's daughter, Sona, who had mutual feelings: "Although Sona wished to help me prepare my lessons, she could not because during the last days [before going to Tiflis] her parents would not let her work with me. I went alone to the field to harvest hay, and I was always sad when she was not with me."<sup>65</sup>

The poem is a metaphoric compilation of the ugliness that Hakob saw and abhorred, such as the oppressive social customs of forcing a young girl to marry someone she did not love, and the illogically cruel and ruthless religious practice of the Church's refusal to bury a suicide victim in the cemetery. These themes of dehumanizing customs also appeared in the novel *Khente* (The Fool). Sara was such a victim. Raffi often used the name Sara in many of his works, as in the poem *Ghuylubani*.

After several weeks, his thoughts turned to the suffering of the people at the hands of cruel and unjust authorities. The villagers toiled, but the fruits of their labor belonged to the feudal lord. He lamented the people's condition and questioned the wisdom of his return. He continued to describe his thoughts in the poem *Sara* where he expressed his mission to emancipate and enlighten his people.

. . . . .  
 But what I see . . . hurts my heart.  
 Here is the picture of my unfortunate fatherland  
 With its morbid and pale face,  
 It appears and horrifies me.  
 . . . . .  
 What brought me here again

To this living human hell?  
Was it that I will breathe more freely  
In my ancestral home?

No! Let me suffer with my people.  
Perhaps they are ignorant and in darkness,  
Perhaps I will be able to help them,  
And wipe the tears from their eyes.

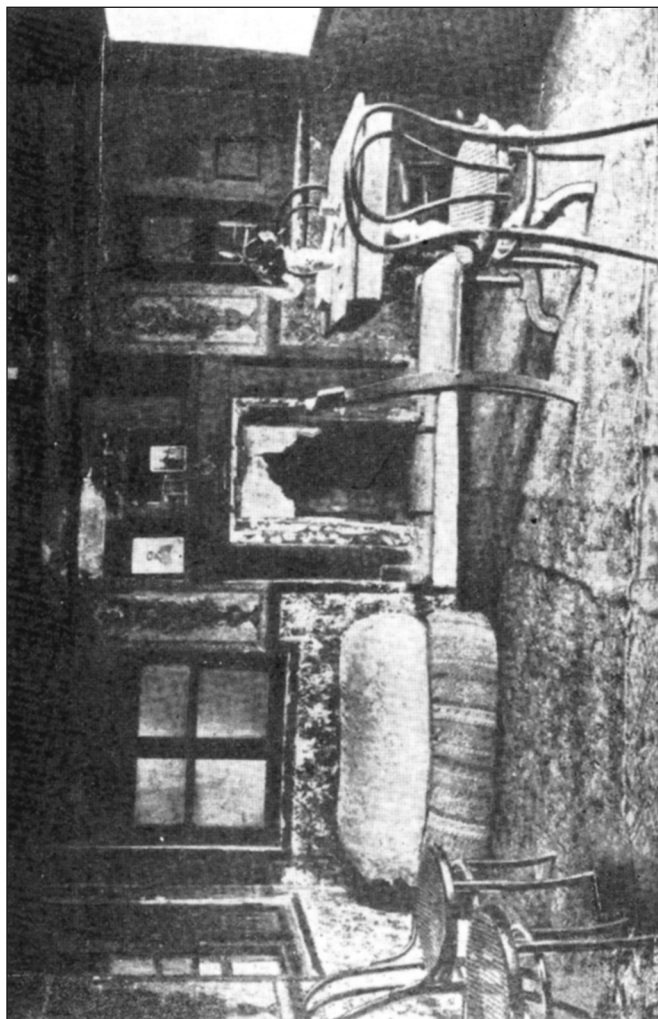
. . . . .

Melik Mirzabek's house was a large, two-story house, facing west. On the second floor and centrally located was Hakob's room, where he wrote and painted. Visitors were fascinated by his room because of all the colorful paintings of flowers and birds in oriental style on the walls and the ceiling. He had built small, recessed storage compartments into the walls. Facing east was a large window with two sashes, which framed two colorful mosaic glass panes. The morning sun filtered through the glass and produced colorful images on the walls and on the carpets. A large mirror covered the center of the ceiling. Painted on the west wall was a large image of a lyre and the sun, symbols of art and enlightenment. According to Hakob's mother, Jeyran Khanum, Hakob had painted the symbolic images.<sup>66</sup> He furnished his room in the European style he had adopted in Tiflis and built a rich library with the books he brought from Tiflis and those he ordered from Smyrna, Constantinople, and the Mkhitarist publishing houses in Venice and Vienna. Hakob was a voracious reader. On many days, he would remain in his room for hours on end reading. He had read all the books available to him in the languages he knew. Hakob developed his vernacular from the writings of Stepan Nazariants and Mikayel Nalbandian. Besides Armenian, he knew Russian, although not very well. He read Armenian translations of famous authors such as Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas. He read the works of Leo Tolstoy, Turgenev, Gogol, and Chernishevski. In the introduction to *Salpi*, the reader learns that Hakob was familiar with the philosophic and sociologic works of J. Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, Ludwig Buchner, L. A. Feuerbach, and Louise Plan.<sup>67</sup>

Along with running the family business, Hakob engaged in farming as his father had done; he liked the land more than the business. Hakob continued to explore the surrounding regions, enjoying trips to the mountains and swimming in the icy rivers. Sometimes he traveled with his friend Aftandilian to Aravul Mountain and Derik Monastery, both of which became famous during activities of the Armenian freedom fighters in the mid to late

## Return Home

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*Raffi's Room at his home in Payajuk*

1890s. The Khanasor Expedition against the murderous Mazrik Kurdish tribe took place around Aravul Mountain. Derik Monastery was a center for defense against Kurdish and Turkish attacks on the surrounding Armenian villages. Hakob did not attend village celebrations. He respected the elderly and asked them about past events. Sometimes he went to Savra Village to collect material for his future works, as was the purpose of his many explorations of near and far locations. He loved Armenian songs, especially *Mayr Araksi*, which he considered the queen of Armenian songs. Hakob received several newspapers from Constantinople. He read about Father Mkrtich Khrimian's announcement for the opening of a seminary (Zharangavorats Varzharan) at the Varag Monastery on August 1, 1857. The news delighted Hakob, and it renewed his dedication to enlighten his people. He wrote to Khrimian, "My joy had no bounds when I heard you have left all worldly fame, respect, and happy life, and come to rescue your wretched countrymen from the darkness of ignorance and to enlighten their minds with knowledge."<sup>68</sup>

Hakob was interested in the education of the youth, particularly that of the girls. As it happened one day, he met a young girl by the spring belonging to Alo's family. The story was included in the seventh letter of his series collectively titled *Chanaparhordutiun Parskastanum*<sup>69</sup> that appeared serially in *Mshak* years later:

"Whose daughter are you?" I asked.

The young girl did not answer and blushed. I felt as if I was talking to the beautiful Rebecca, who sat by such a spring and gave water to Abraham's elderly servant and his camels. Amazing girl! She radiated the innocence and bashfulness of the dainty Armenian female.

"Do you know how to read?" I asked the girl. A scornful smile appeared on her face, and she answered tersely.

"I am not going to be a priest to know how to read."

"But how do you keep yourself busy?"

"I do our housework, and when I do not have work, I go to learn sewing.

I departed thinking about the depth of prejudice that had taken root in our people that reading was considered the property of only the clergy.

The girl's response haunted Hakob; the words reverberated in his head, "I am not going to be a priest to know how to read." "No!" he thought, "I will get that erroneous idea out of your innocent head, poor girl; reading is

more important to you than to the priest. You must educate the new generation. You must prepare our bright future. You must learn to read. Only then will you no longer be poor and unfortunate, and your children will be happy and comfortable.”<sup>70</sup> The truth of the incident was irrelevant because Hakob had already decided the course of his mission. If real, it meant he was practicing his mission at its incipient stages; if imaginary, it was an expression of his mission.

After putting his father's business in somewhat fair order, Hakob delved into community activities. He began corresponding with editors of Armenian periodicals and planned to establish schools, libraries, and reading rooms in the nearby Armenian villages. During this time, Hakob met a student named Isahak Ter Abrahamian, who had been one of Mesrop Taghiadians's students in Calcutta. Hakob had read Taghiadians's writings and thought highly of him; he learned more about Taghiadians from Isahak. Isahak had lived in Calcutta for a long time and had recently come to Persia to study English at the American school in Urmia. In 1857 Hakob and Isahak opened a school in Payajuk to educate the children. During his attempts to open a school, Hakob had angered the villagers, clergy, and the businessmen by criticizing the villagers' life style, the clergy's ignorance, and the merchants' greed for excessive profits. Even his supporters gradually left him. He did not listen to his father's and his relatives' advice and countered them by saying that it was none of their concern. Hakob did not realize that his plans and intentions to bring about change were premature. All his efforts might have come to fruition had he used a measured approach.

During the turmoil of keeping his father's business alive and struggling to keep the village school open, Sara's memory was always on Hakob's mind. He wrote about her in another poem titled *Hishoghutiunk*<sup>71</sup> (Memories), describing how he missed her:

. . . . .  
 She vanished from me  
 In the darkness of disappearance,  
 And left me only a bitter ache  
 In my heart, an inextinguishable spark.

That inextinguishable fire of sacred love  
 I will keep burning in my heart  
 Till death, its sacred memory  
 I will dream in my mind.



Hakob withdrew from community efforts and occupied himself with the family's business and his writing, which gradually took up more of his time. Despite his unsuccessful reform efforts, Hakob remained somewhat active in public life and began to prepare his future mission on a wider pan-Armenian basis.





## Travels in Western Armenia

After helping his father to put the business in order, Hakob prepared for a trip to Western (Turkish-held) Armenia in 1857 with his friends Isahak and Minas Tumanian and his cousin Sahak Melik-Hakobian. Because traveling alone in Western Armenia was dangerous in those days, the group decided to travel with a caravan of pilgrims going from Salmast to Saint Karapet (Garabed) Monastery near Mush for the blessing of the grapes on the feast of the Assumption. Years later Hakob told his friend Avak Khan Aftandilian: "I traveled as a pilgrim because people would have considered me a fool had I just simply said that I was going to study my fatherland. In those days, teachers did not explain the meaning of the word *fatherland*, and they even discouraged its use. The village priest-teachers and their punishments had made this sacred word an anathema."<sup>72</sup>

Crossing the Persian–Turkish border, the group visited several Armenian villages and monasteries. The caravan reached Van in early August. Hakob took advantage of the caravan's sojourn there for a few days and stayed in the Armenian sector of Aygestan. He visited the historic sites, talked to the people, and met with the local priest Boghos *Vardapet* (celibate priest). From there he visited the monasteries on the islands of Lim and Gtuts, where he expected to see productive monasteries with monks carrying on the works of their predecessors. Instead, he saw a sorrowful picture of ignorance and a community leading an apathetic life. He saw on the windowsill of a monk's cell the manuscripts of Movses Khorenatsi, Ghazar Parpetsi, Yeghishe, and Davit Anhaght<sup>73</sup> strewn pell-mell, moldy, and rotting.<sup>74</sup>

The ignorant and lazy clerics at the island monasteries left negative impressions on young Hakob.

During his conversations with people in Van, Hakob learned about *pandukhts*, a sorrowful condition of young and able-bodied men leaving their homes to earn a living in far away big cities or foreign lands, because the exorbitant and unjust taxation on the fruits of their hard labor made it impossible for the peasants to make a living. He became sad and angry to hear that not a single family existed in Van that did not have a few of its members gone to find work elsewhere. He witnessed the horrible reality of poverty,

which forced young men to emigrate, thus depopulating the ancestral lands of their indigenous people.

Hakob and his friends had the opportunity to visit the Varag Monastery and meet Father Mkrtich Khrimian. One of Khrimian's students Sandents Ohannes greeted the group. Ohannes later became a renowned writer and bishop by the name of Garegin Sruandztians (1840–1892, born in Van). After meeting Khrimian, the students gave the group a tour of the Zharangavorats Varzharan with its classrooms, library, manuscripts, antiquities, collection of plants and various rock samples, the printing press, and the farm operations. Khrimian established the school to educate the children in the Van area, particularly those of poor families, using modern methods. Khrimian respected the students and did not use corporal punishment. Khrimian explained his plans and told the visitors about the forthcoming publication of *Artsvi Vaspurakan* monthly. Hakob was impressed by Khrimian's progressive ideas and efforts for the enlightenment of his students—the future clergy—and the general Armenian public. Everything Hakob saw at Varag left such a profound impression on him that years later he gave Khrimian exceptional importance in the novel *Kaytser*, where he compared Khrimian with Movses Khorenatsi, Ghazar Parpetsi, Koriun, and Yeznik—all important figures of Armenia's fifth century Golden Age. He wrote in *Kaytser*:

I envisioned him like one of our fifth century monks, who seemed to have just come back from Athens. With a staff in his hand like a wandering vagabond, he traveled around the country spreading enlightenment and knowledge, which he had brought back with him from the capital city of Socrates and Aristotle. The fatherland did not welcome this new apostle of education. The ignorant clergy were enraged with hatred toward him; but he scorned his persecutors and forged ahead with his sacred task courageously and confidently. He began to sow the seeds of goodness, which he had brought with him from the distant lands, among his compatriots' deserted intellectual fields.<sup>75</sup>

Hakob's impressions of Khrimian were that of a clergyman who was above religious narrow-mindedness, and that he was more of a broad-minded popular activist. He concluded that Khrimian's "patriotism reached fanaticism, and his religious fervor became a supreme virtue."<sup>76</sup> Hakob considered Khrimian an exceptional and a bright individual within the extensive dark reality. While at Varag, Hakob had written a poem in grabar titled *Never Vaspurakan artsvuyn* (A Gift to the Eagle of Vaspurakan) dedicated to



*Khrimian Hayrik's Library*

Khrimian on the occasion of the upcoming publication of *Artsvi Vaspurakan*,<sup>77</sup> praising his educational establishment and efforts. For whatever reason, the poem never reached Khrimian for publication. Anna Raffi discovered the poem after Raffi's death and published it in 1893 in *Artsiv Vaspurakani*, a collection of Raffi's unpublished works.

Mkrtich Khrimian (1820–1907) was affectionately called *Hayrik* (An endearing term literally meaning “little father.”) by the people for his caring personality and for his love of the people. He was one of a few liberal and progressive clergymen and early advocates of Armenian intellectual and ideological awakening in the 1830s. Khrimian was born in Aygestan, Vaspurakan. On the urging of his mother he married but soon left Van in 1847 during the Kurdish uprising to avoid compulsory military service.

He traveled for a year in Eastern and Western Armenias, after which he settled in Constantinople in 1848 and became a teacher. In 1850 he published his patriotic poem titled *Hravirak araratian* (Delegate from Ararat) and, in 1851, *Hravirak yerkrin avetiats* (Delegate from the Promised Land), expressing his love for Armenia and the dream of a free homeland and exhorting his people to love the land and liberate it from oppression. Khrimian returned to Van in 1853 and found out that his mother, wife, and daughter had died. He entered the seminary at Aghtamar, and he was ordained vardapet in 1854. He returned to Constantinople in 1855, established a printing press, and published *Artsvi Vaspurakan* in a mixture of grabar and ashkharhabar. At the end of 1856 he returned to Van, bringing with him his press—the very first



*Khrimian Hayrik*

one in Western Armenia—to Varag Monastery. In January of 1858 he began to publish *Artsvi Vaspurakan*. In 1862 he became the prelate of Mush, where he published *Artsvi Daron* during 1863–1865. In 1869 he was elected the Patriarch of Constantinople; he resigned in 1873. In 1878 Khrimian headed the Armenian delegation to the Berlin Congress. Disappointed with the outcome of the meeting regarding Armenians, he returned and reported to the congregation in Constantinople, announcing his famous metaphor—the *Iron Ladle*. From 1880 to 1885 he was the prelate of Van. In 1885 the Turkish government exiled him to Constantinople; and in 1890, to Jerusalem. In 1892 he was elected Catholicos. Khrimian *Hayrik* died in 1907.<sup>78</sup>

From Van the caravan traveled along the southern length of Lake Van and headed for Baghesh (Bitlis). The pilgrims witnessed deserted villages, abandoned monasteries, and ruined fortresses. At the foothills of Mount Artos, they noticed the ruins of a small monastery. Hakob and his friends visited the ruins and found the tomb of Yeghishe, historian of the Avarayr battle, and the



# ԱՐՇՈՒՒ ՎԱՍՊՈՒՐԱԿԱՆ

ԹՌՈՒՑԵԱԼ ՀԱՅՐԵՆԱՍԻՐ ԹԵՒՕԲ  
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## ԲՆԱՆԱՐԱՆ

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Որ ի հայրենի բնակատեղի գրե-  
կոյն ի գրականությանը մեծ լի-  
նան, ի լայնատարած ծագյալ Ար-  
թուրայի գաղափար հեռացնալ կան տա-  
րաշարժիկ բնակութեանս. ովքեր  
նի լայն է յաշիւ նոյն հեշտա-  
րար իշխանութիւն իւրեցեալ տա-  
րաշիւ.

Եւ ուրեմն, Արթուրի իմ նորա-  
փետուր, Թուրք. յիշեաց ի համարն

տեղիս Հայաստան աշխարհին մերում.  
Ժողովեա ի վերայ թերթից թերթից  
զհայրենաշատ բազմազան ծագկաւն  
թիւ-լիկնեան լիբանց, պայիս, տար-  
նախնա. Թարգմանեա մանկաշիւ,  
նախ գրքարանսն ողջոյն ի Միանա-  
նէ Գալէն պարթեւականին Գրիգորի,  
ի նոյն ի Բրիտանական լուսա-  
կաւոյց վեհ Տաճարին. Զախփա-  
նեանց կաւան իւրաքարծ զխոյզացի

*Khrimian's Artsvi Vaspurakan, First year, Number 1, June 1855*

tombs of the battle's heroes. Hakob fell on his knees and kissed the stones that marked the graves. Not far from the road was the village of Narek, the birthplace of Grigor Narekatsi, whose tomb was inside the church at the village center. Nearing Baghesh, Hakob and his friends went ahead of the caravan to spend some time in the city. Hakob found the community divided over religion caused by the presence of American missionaries, whose activities he found damaging, and he considered the schism among the Armenians dangerous. The conflict prompted him to write the poem *Miutian* (Unity), wherein he implored Armenians to love their language, traditions, ancient ruins, lands, and waters. After a few days, the pilgrims left for Daron, then to Mush, visiting villages and monasteries along the way. The first village the pilgrims approached was Khas, the ancient Armenian village of Hatsik, the birthplace of Mesrop Mashtots. In Mush, many of the pilgrims stayed in local inns, some at the church grounds, and others in tents on the surrounding fields. Hakob and his friends stayed at the home of a family friend. As usual Hakob asked his host for information about the condition of the Armenians in the area. The host explained:

The Turks plunder, we do not complain; they curse us, we remain silent; they spit on us, we patiently endure; but we live with them while they mistreat us this way. Despite the fertile land and the rich harvest, little is left for us after the government and the feudal lords take away the fruits of our hard labor; at the end, we remain in need of bread.

More than half the number of people of Daron has left to work as laborers in the big cities because of the plunder, the poverty, and the heavy debts imposed on them by the Turks and the Kurds. The villages and the fields are empty.<sup>79</sup>

The pilgrim's caravan reached Saint Karapet Monastery on the saint's holiday. Hakob saw the hundreds of pilgrims who had come from different parts of Armenia, observed their customs and demeanor, and listened to their stories of suffering. He watched the national games and, with his perceptive mind and keen observation, saw them as vestiges of pagan Armenia's *Navasard*<sup>80</sup> festivals.

Hakob wished to see other parts of Armenia, but he was obliged to return with the pilgrims. On their way back, Hakob and his friends took a side trip to the Arakelots Monastery near Mush. At the eastern wall of the monastery, Hakob noticed a group of ten *khachkars* (cross stones or tombstones), known by the local people as *targmanchats gerezman*<sup>81</sup> (cemetery of the translators).

Hakob fell on his knees and kissed the stones in reverence to those buried there. On one tombstone, he read the name of Davit Anahaght. Two other obscure tombstones with barely legible inscriptions were those of Movses Khorenatsi and Mambre Vertsanogh. Hakob agonized that Khorenatsi, who had given Armenia life and immortality with his book of Armenian history, was not honored with even a small chapel built in his name. Another tomb in worse condition belonged to Ghazar Parpetsi. Hakob was outraged that this mountainous area could not even provide a piece of its fine stones for such great men.

Reaching Van, Hakob made sure that he visited Aghtamar Monastery on Aghtamar Island in Lake Van. He and Isahak Ter Abrahamian went to the island, looked around the monastery complex, and studied the inscriptions and carvings on the building walls. In the evening, the two friends climbed a rocky high point to cool-off from the day's heat. Here Hakob conceived and later wrote his famous poem *Vana tsovak* (Lake of Van) also known by *Dzayn tur ov tsovak* (Speak O Little Sea),<sup>82</sup> which was included in his article *Aghtamara vanke* (The Aghtamar Monastery). The stone on which he sat became known as *Raffii kar* (Raffi's stone). He engaged in conversations with the monks, particularly the abbot, expressing his thoughts about the clergy's role in the task of enlightening the people. The monks derided Hakob that he was a *prod* (protestant) or a catholic. They complained about Khrimian leaving Aghtamar and disapproved of his educational efforts at Varag. A rumor had spread in the Vaspurakan and Atrpatakan provinces that the angry monks had threatened to throw Hakob in the lake, but that he had escaped from them. Supposedly, a pilgrim to Aghtamar had confirmed the incident decades later when he had asked a monk about the alleged incident. The monk had replied that he had not been there when Hakob had visited the monastery, but that he had heard such a story from the current abbot Boghos Vardapet.<sup>83</sup> In a footnote to *Aghtamara vanke*, Hakob gave brief information about Isahak Ter Abrahamian, who, perhaps on an earlier visit to Van and Aghtamar, had engaged in conversation with the monks. In a letter from Van, Isahak had written that during his conversation with the monks, he had angered them so much that they had threatened to throw him in the lake. The people may have attributed this incident to Hakob because he was outspoken against the ignorant clergy, and because he was better known than his friend was. Hakob's writings do not reveal that he experienced such an incident at Aghtamar. In the footnote, Hakob wrote, "Isahak came to visit me in 1857. After staying for a while, he went to visit Armenia, after which he was to go to Europe. They received a letter from Aghtamar where the poor soul, after uttering a few words, had angered the monks so much that they had picked him up and

threatened to throw him in the lake.” The note did not specify who “they” were, or whether Isahak went to visit Armenia earlier alone and then a second time with Hakob in July–August of the same year.<sup>84</sup>

Hakob returned to Payajuk, bringing with him personal impressions, descriptions, statistics and other information about the places he visited and the people he met. He worked incessantly to arrange his notes and write down what he had seen and heard. Even though Hakob’s curiosity had always been primarily Western Armenia and the Armenians living there, who constituted the majority of the Armenian people, he never lost sight of the Armenians living in other countries. Hakob planned to travel extensively throughout Western Armenia at a propitious time to accomplish his wishes of writing about other regions he had not seen. Unfortunately, financial and family circumstances did not offer him the opportunity to fulfill his wish.<sup>85</sup>

In September of 1857 Hakob and Isahak restarted the school. Leaving Isahak in charge, Hakob went to Urmia on business. Finishing his father’s business there, he decided to visit the nearby Assyrian villages and the American schools to observe their teaching methods. In one village, he visited the American missionary schools for girls and boys and the printing press that published an Assyrian newsletter. There he became friends with Hovhannes Avetisian Kalantar, who had come from Agulis to study with the Americans. Hovhannes had already completed his studies and was getting ready to leave for Constantinople to continue his studies at the Bebek School.<sup>86</sup> As much as Hakob disliked the American missionaries’ intentions, which he believed were to proselytize the Christians, he was very much impressed by their educational programs. He was inspired by the girls’ school and conceived a plan to open one for adolescent girls in Payajuk. When he finally was able to work on the project, the required funds were unavailable from his family because his father’s business was faltering.

The school in Payajuk ran successfully until April 1858. The animosity of the local priest and his followers had increased and caused many of the students to leave, depriving the school of its income and the respect of the parents. The priests and the greedy deacons accused Hakob of leading the students astray. These churchmen instigated some of the wealthy people in the region, and together they demanded the school’s closing. Supported by progressive elements, Hakob and Isahak were able to resist the assault and keep the school open. With the assistance of the Atrpatakan Prelate Hakob Shahbazian (1857–1859) and bribed government officials, the opposition succeeded in closing the school.<sup>87</sup> Despite its short and stormy existence, the school became the most important part of Hakob’s activities to enlighten the people during his early literary years.



Although Hakob was only twenty-three-years old, he had already reached a simple and certain conclusion concerning the basic political and social questions facing the Armenians. His early works expressed his thoughts on improving his people's lives, and he repeated his fundamental ideas with more clarity and direction in his future writings. Hakob expounded his ideas, expressions, and descriptions through the voices of his characters, always with the central themes of patriotism and Armenia's freedom from foreign domination. He expressed such thoughts early on in letters to friends and acquaintances.

Hakob wrote a letter from Payajuk to his friend Hovhannes Avetisian Kalantar, who was now attending Bebek School. He expressed his ideas and concern about the lack of education and the associated ills among the Armenians:

Dear Brother,

I received your letter dated<sup>88</sup> October 19, for which I waited eagerly. Truly, I was very happy to learn that you arrived in Constantinople and entered the Bebek School. I read about the school's advanced status and the various subjects it offered.

My dear, your purpose of going there was to receive an education to benefit our people and nation. Yes, Hovhannes, never forget your fatherland and the white-capped Ararat, covered with a dark veil of clouds in inconsolable sorrow for its pitiable children, the majority of whom has left for foreign lands and become captives of different nations. The rest who have stayed in the bosom of their motherland are likewise dejected and deprived of their ancient splendor.

Always remember the pitiable condition and uncivilized behavior of our people, surrounded by extreme ignorance. They have barely preserved their Armenian and Christian names, but not their meanings.

Do you know what kind of negative influence the Russian Empire has over its Armenian population with the intention to depopulate Armenia of its Armenians? Russia is even contemplating to eliminate the catholicosate and leave the nation leaderless, so that the Armenians will easily become preys to the wolves.

Always remember these issues. I hope you will always keep burning in your heart the flame of patriotism to melt the frozen spirits and be a light source in the dark abode of Armenia . . .

I would have gladly fulfilled Reverend Gevorg Khachaturian's request, but we have no definite plans to publish the old songs. A few new scholars (some of whom are familiar to you) have allocated a small sum to publish old and new national songs. They will also translate into modern Armenian and publish songs that the minstrels have sung in Persian and Turkish. If a close acquaintance happens to go to Constantinople, I will send you twenty-nine copies of each publication; present them to your and our friends . . .

Regarding the two Catholic priests who have come from Vienna to Salmast, I have heard that Father Ambrosios has obtained permission from the Persian government in Tehran to establish an Armenian school for children in Savra. Father Movses, the other priest who used to live in Khoruyvi, has attracted several misled people into Rome's sheepfold, but their straying is yet secret. Father Ambrosios's travel to Samarkand to save the Armenian old books did not materialize because of the dangers posed along the road by the barbaric Turks . . .

Please let us correspond frequently, and let me know of any interesting academic and political news. I hope that in May I will visit Constantinople for business. At that time, we will talk face to face at length about many topics. Very likely, I will bring my brother Karapet with me to place him in a good school.

Write to me about the quality of the schools; I want to prepare my brother early for entry to a school of higher education so that he will be admitted without difficulty. I wish you health.

Give my warmest wishes to your and our dear friends.<sup>89</sup>

Hakob Mirzaian<sup>90</sup>

A few months later, on April 20, 1858, in response to his friend's letter from Constantinople, Hakob again wrote a long letter full of reflective thoughts on the condition of the Armenian people.

April 20, 1858

Piajik [Payajuk] Geghj [Giugh-Village] – Salmast Province

I received your gracious letter on April 15, which I had hoped to receive. I felt great joy after reading about your being content with your studies. It seems from your letter that you are undecided about where to attend school. Meanwhile, you are waiting for your parents' decision to determine the direction you want to take to

reach your goal. When you were living safely with your family, it was worth your while to listen to their wishes. Now you are in far away Constantinople, and they are in Agulis. Armenian parents wish to have their children before their eyes.

You mention going to Malta after you finish at Bebek, then to a university, and later to the Armenian College [Muradian] in Paris; after that, God knows. How long is a person's life? Roaming around for such a long time will consume a large segment of a person's life. So when will you utilize your knowledge for the benefit of the nation, toward the end of your life? The bee collects nectar from different flowers and then returns to its hive to produce honey. If the bee spends all its time collecting nectar, when will it present us its sweet gift? The ways of the greedy students in Germany are familiar to you. When they finish their education at one university, they move on to another and another. Finally you see our respected student, with gray hair and various ailments, enter the real world—useless to us, and the world useless to them.

To fill the vast ocean of knowledge into a small head is impossible. The ocean of unlimited knowledge is difficult to confine in one's head. Excelling in one field is better than being mediocre in many to be useful to our people and nation.

The purpose of those American schools in Constantinople, Malta, and other places is inappropriate for our young people. My reason is that the Americans have established those schools for attracting the children of various nations to convert them to their people. Even their subjects are surreptitious means of attracting people to their side.

Recently, a young man from Nor Jugha<sup>91</sup> came to the missionaries in Urmia to learn English. At one time, he had been with the American missionaries in India where he had accepted Protestantism. The missionaries in India had suggested that he go to Bebek School. You will soon see him. He knows Armenian well, which is evident from his letter written to me from Urmia. When he gets there try to convince him to work in an Armenian school; otherwise, his future is useless for our nation.

I am thankful for the several news items you sent about our people. Sometimes when I hear good news about our people's advances at different places, my heart becomes overjoyed for a while; but then, when I see the wretched condition of the Armenians of Atrpatakan, sadness overwhelms me. Persian

Armenians are in a deathly stupor of extreme ignorance. The patriotic spirit to arouse them from their deep lethargy is absent.

The prelate [Hakob Shahbazian] is the biggest cause. I am very surprised that by entrusting themselves to such careless spiritual leaders, the people have not lost their national identity, especially in multiethnic Persia. It is an incomprehensible issue for me.

Oh, Hovhannes brother, starting from the time when Armenians lost their saintly fathers, the quality of the Armenian spiritual leaders has deteriorated. They have ruined, along with them, the spirituality and the true qualities of their sacred profession. Perhaps intellectual leaders have kept the shame covered to hide the nation's shortcomings.

Think of Armenia's innumerable monasteries, convents, cloisters, even Ejmiatsin, and the countless clergy of whom Armenians feel proud. Of what use are those temples now? They have become living quarters for greedy and lazy people, who, by taking the title of a clergy and becoming responsible for the nation, have left their people leaderless and helpless in the claws of wolves. They have isolated themselves in the monasteries to live comfortable and useless lives by robbing the nation. Sometimes the Lord drove away with a whip the priests and the Pharisees from the temples by saying, "My house is to be called a place of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves." I wish that with His divine love He would throw out from Armenia's sacred temples the corrupt clergy. Consider the large amount of contributions the devout Armenians make to their holy places; if an independent group were to administer those contributions, imagine the kinds of useful work they would perform to serve the nation; instead, they all go to the greedy clergy. This is the reason that when an Armenian clergy dies, he leaves behind a sum of money greater than that of a merchant. Where did he get all that money, if not from robbing the people?

Anyway, the ill deeds of the Armenian clergy are so many that they are not even worth mentioning or writing about.

Give my special greetings to your and our dear friends.

Hakob Mirzaian Melik-Hakobian<sup>92</sup>



## Business and Writing Careers

Although far from educational centers, Hakob was spiritually connected with the incipient movement of the Armenian national rebirth. Without reservation, he defended *Hiusisapayl's* progressive ideology—the drive for the victory of the popular vernacular over the difficult classical language. Inspired by *Hiusisapayl's* philosophy, Hakob rewrote his 1855 novel *Khvlilik* in the modern vernacular. In the introduction, he wrote, “When in 1858 the respected *Hiusisapayl* appeared to give our literature a new life and a new form, we realized our mistake and decided to change the old language to the new.”<sup>93</sup>

In early 1857 Khrimian started publishing his *Artsvi Vaspurakan* monthly. Hakob welcomed the news and sent a letter, written in either May or June 1858, to congratulate Khrimian for his enlightenment efforts, and he offered his help to increase the monthly's distribution. He included his impressions of the monasteries he had visited during his trip to Western Armenia, particularly those of Aghtamar, Lim, and Gtuts, and severely criticized the ignorant and lazy clergy. The letter was an indirect praise for Khrimian's educational efforts. Despite the harsh criticism, Khrimian published the letter in *Artsvi Vaspurakan*, No. 7, 1858, issue with a preface and an explanation to mitigate the severity of the criticism:

Truly, the news is very exciting. We wait to see how hard the new is going to struggle with the old. From the beginning of time, these two zealous enemies have warred with each other. The new must always win . . . A battle exists between new and old ideas, but eventually the new will triumph . . . The Europeans are opening more and more schools; whereas, the Armenian clergy are fighting against the same in Armenian communities.<sup>94</sup>

Khrimian included a note about Hakob's education, his enlightenment efforts in Salmast, and particularly his ideas expressed in the article. Khrimian considered the youth's criticism and intolerance of the unproductive lives of the clergy fair. He defended Hakob's points that the large number of spiritual members had certain responsibilities for the people's enlightenment; if they

did not serve their calling, then the educated young generation, with their new ideas, would rightfully struggle against the clergy and prevent them from remaining in their past indifference and indolence.

After the village school closed, Isahak left for Constantinople to continue his studies. Meanwhile, Melik Mirzabek's plans to send Hakob to Constantinople changed. Instead of Constantinople, Melik Mirzabek sent Hakob to Tiflis on a business matter. Hakob concluded his father's business and planned to enter Nersisian Academy to complete his gymnasium education. He went to see his teacher Karapet Belakhian and his mentor Hovhannes Ter Hovsepien, who introduced him to Hovhannes Katanian,<sup>95</sup> the principal of Nersisian Academy and a friend of Nazariants and Nalbandian. Ter Hovsepien was at his summer home in Manglis (fifty kilometers west of Tiflis). Hakob went to see him and stayed for the summer. Hakob befriended Garegin Yenikibarian, who years later wrote about his conversation with Hakob regarding Abovian's *Verk Hayastani*: "He spoke highly of Hovhannes Ter Hovsepien at whose house in Manglis Raffi had stayed one summer [in 1858]. Raffi excitedly told me that when Ter Hovsepien returned from Tiflis, he had brought a copy of *Verk Hayastani* and given it to Raffi to read."<sup>96</sup> Ter Hovsepien was a subscriber to *Hiuisapayl*, thus Hakob had the opportunity to read the monthly and absorb its philosophy. He was excited and filled with enthusiasm by Nazariants and Nalbandian's position on enlightenment and advancement of the popular vernacular for literature. When Hakob returned to Tiflis, he was unable to see Katanian because of Katanian's serious conflict with the school board and Prelate Sargis Jalalian. When Hakob returned to Payajuk at the end of 1858, he was elated to find copies of *Artsvi Vaspurakan* at his home. He was pleasantly surprised to see his letters published in two issues.<sup>97</sup> Throughout Atrpatakan in the late 1850s and the beginning of the 1860s, periodicals such as *Masis*, *Masiats Aghavni*, *Krunk*, *Hiuisapayl*, *Artsvi Vaspurakan*, published in Constantinople, Paris, Tiflis, Moscow, and Varag Monastery, respectively, were found only in Hakob's home.

In January 1859 Hakob sent his long article titled *Aghtamara vanke*<sup>98</sup> with a letter dated January 15, 1859, to Hovhannes Katanian, then at a school in Stavropol (northwest of Tiflis), asking for his help in having it published in *Hiuisapayl*. The article, signed Hakob Melik-Hakobian, and the letter to Katanian were published in the November 1860 issue of *Hiuisapayl*. Since the editor had delayed publishing the article for almost two years, he had changed the letter's date and the date of Hakob's travel in Western Armenia to make them commensurate with the paper's issue date. Reproducing the letter from *Hiuisapayl*, various writers kept the date shown in *Hiuisapayl* to preserve the integrity of the entire reproduction.<sup>99</sup> The article reflected the



*Artsvi Vaspurakan Published at Varag Monastery, Volume 2, No. 4, April 1858*

same issues and ideas that Stepan Nazarians and his fellow intellectuals forcefully proclaimed. Despite the title *Aghtamara vanke*, the article did not contain an extensive description of Lake Van or the monastery. After a few descriptive lines, Hakob allocated forty pages to his conversation with the abbot of Aghtamar. The article ended with his famous poem *Vana tsovak*, a lamentation for the Armenians' abject condition in Western Armenia.

Everywhere a profound quiet dominates,  
 As if nature was dead.  
 Sitting alone, a mournful stranger,  
 Oh, I see you, shinning moon.  
 . . . . .  
 Your heart is stone and your conscience is dead.  
 You saw so much blood and so many massacres,  
 And you kept silent; yet still so bright,  
 Over Armenian lands you have placed an arch.  
 . . . . .  
 Speak, O little sea, why are you silent?  
 Can you not lament for my misfortune?  
 Zephyrs, stir the waves, and  
 Mix my tears with these waters.  
 . . . . .  
 Will a day come, or a time,  
 To see a flag atop Masis,  
 And émigré Armenians from everywhere  
 Head toward their beautiful fatherland?

He wrote that he reminded the abbot about the presence of one thousand and one churches in Ani, yet not a single school existed. Likewise, there were countless monasteries in other parts of Armenia without a glimpse of a school. Turning to the inconsolable condition of the Armenian Church, Hakob asked the abbot, "Would it have been a sin to establish a small school in the monastery and bring a few intelligent children from the various districts, educate them in theology, ordain them as priests, and send them to their respective districts? Those educated clergy in turn would be able to educate the people by spreading knowledge and enlightenment."

Hakob's desire to see the Armenian clergy work for the enlightenment of their people was reasonable. He knew a few clergymen who comprehended their higher calling as educators and missionaries, ready to combat ignorance and darkness. Hakob was encouraged by one such clergy whom he personally



knew when he visited the Varag Monastery. That was Father Mkrtich Khrimian—Khrimian *Hayrik*.

“Father Mkrtich Khrimian,” Hakob wrote in his *Aghtamara vanke*, “is already familiar to the Armenian people in the Vaspurakan and Ararat regions by his periodicals, and by his monthly publications in Constantinople. This patriotic soul, inflamed with fervent nationalism, established at the Varag Monastery near the city of Van a printing press, a school, and the *Artsvi Vaspurakan*. Last year during my travels in that region, I met the saintly father. I had never seen anyone with such impassioned national spirit than this worthy religious man. Neither the multitude of enemies nor the lack of funds was able to curtail his hope or to extinguish his fiery nationalism.”

The illiterate abbot of Aghtamar Monastery did not agree with Hakob. When the abbot objected to the young man’s ideas, he was expressing his profound ignorance against that which the well-prepared intellectuals of the 1850s and 1860s had armed themselves.

“Hm,” the abbot shook his head. “I see that you also are one of those gentlemen who endeavor to destroy the nation’s monasteries and holy seats by fighting against the clergy. Many people like you have started criticizing us, especially those gentlemen in Moscow and Petersburg who have abandoned monasteries and abbots and want to establish schools. May God deny them their wishes! We are well aware of their intents.”

“Dear Reverend Father, I am a servant to your holy right hand,” Hakob replied, “I am perhaps misguided, but you as a knowledgeable priest are obligated to guide me by advising gently and without anger. I am a young man grieving for the nation’s ills; I have come to see Armenia to be somewhat consoled; but just the opposite has happened. From the minute I stepped foot in my sweet fatherland, my heart filled with new aches at every step. Lamentable scenes opened in front of my eyes. I see magnificent cities and ruined monasteries; but when I see my pitiful compatriots, I lose my mind and my eyes dim. These wretched people, who at one time had their glory and nation, are now in obscure darkness and deprived of glory and nation. Covering up the nation’s faults has brought us to this lamentable state. Barbaric nations have become enlightened, but Armenians in our nation’s heartland are surrounded with ignorance.”

“I am surprised,” answered the troubled abbot, “you always demand enlightenment. From where else will this enlightenment come, if not from the nation’s literary treasures? We have neither a kingdom nor a repository for our literature. We have barely isolated ourselves in monasteries to lament our dark days. Yes, yes, your Mkrtich Vardapet, that ungrateful, left the cloister, his holy place where he was educated, and wanted to establish a printing press

and a school to spread enlightenment. Now once a year, he runs like a caravan master to Constantinople to seek help from the amiras. He has incurred large debts for mindless and meaningless work. Oh miserable one, who forced you to carry a larger load than one you are able to carry? May your legs break and you fall. What are you going to produce from your work that it will feed you? The nation will remain in darkness a while and go into an abyss, what do you care? You have made all of Vaspurakan your enemy. What are you trying to do? In Varag, he has established a press and a school; let them both be damned. Why is it that you all live in Moscow, Paris, and Vienna? Write in your ancestors' language so readers can understand you. Why do you spoil your language with new words? Hey, Nazariants, what can I tell you? You are always yelling from Moscow that writing should be in the popular language so that everyone can understand. Let us see whether your popular language or the language of Narek is more profound. You want to make the popular language the common language. Is it not better that you make the grabar the common language, which is understood by a large number of people?" the infuriated abbot exclaimed.

"Is it not true that Christ aptly spoke about you? He said, 'If the salt becomes tasteless, will anything have taste?' You and the rest of you are in the dark; how can the unfortunate people become enlightened by you? The blind cannot lead the blind. Therefore, the best for you is to stay in the monasteries until the dawn of enlightenment shines from the Armenian Parnassus.<sup>100</sup> You are of no benefit to us. Let the Armenian musicians with their pleasant music revive the nation's moribund learning spirit," Hakob concluded.

Hakob's first work found wide reception by the readers. His daring castigation with his rich language and style attracted the attention of the readers, who wanted to know the identity of the unknown writer. Hakob's ideas expressed in *Aghtamara vanke* were the same as those expounded and defended by the *Hiusisapayl* editorials. Hakob cooperated with the editor to advance his struggle. From the first moment, Stepan Nazariants valued his new ally. He encouraged the youthful stranger from Persia—Hakob Melik-Hakobian—and published his writings. Years later, Raffi would always remember with gratitude Nazariants's fondness for him.

From his youth until his last breath, nation and fatherland were Hakob's obsessions. At the time Hakob left school, he already had a firm grasp on the entire plan for his nation's freedom. Without hesitation, he expounded his ideas during his whole life through his writings. Even in his youth, years before writing his novels, Hakob had a thorough understanding of the concept of a fatherland. The ideas expressed in the above letters to his friend in Constantinople foretold the appearance of this central theme in his future

novels. He wrote in *Kaytser*, “Whoever does not recognize his fatherland is unable to love it.” The revolutionary preacher—Raffi, the author of *Khente*—had not yet awoken.

Years later, several of Raffi’s friends had commented that his inability to get a higher education was a great loss for the Armenian literature and the Armenian political movement, and that his literary talent and unique ability would have greatly benefited from a university education. Furthermore, some had claimed that besides an advanced training, he would have had the opportunity in Russian university cities to become acquainted with Russian culture and philosophical leaders. As it turned out, the only city with some European semblance he knew was Tiflis. Conversely, if he were exposed to more Russian culture and philosophical ideas popular at that time, he might not have focused on his national liberation cause but drifted into supporting international causes. Many, however, believed that Hakob’s literary genius far exceeded any need for further education. Yeghishe Petrosyan opined, “The absence of his basic and formal education was replaced by indefatigable diligence. The introductions to his works, novels, and editorials witness Raffi’s superior mental ability and extensive knowledge, contrary to Shirvanzade’s opinion that Raffi did not have a highly developed literary philosophy.”<sup>101</sup>

Other than Armenia, Persia, and Russia, Hakob had not traveled to any other country. He was born and raised in Persian Armenia, traveled in Western Armenia, and lived and traveled extensively in Armenian territories in the Caucasus for a long time. He had no direct contact with European cultures and politics, although during his adult life he had struggled to direct Armenians toward European civilization. Luckier than Hakob were many Armenian greats who had received either Russian or European higher education. Among those were Khachatur Abovian, Stepan Nazariants, Mikayel Nalbandian, Grigor Artsruni, and Abgar Hovhannisian.

In his numerous works, Hakob wrote about past and contemporary important and remarkable events of Armenian life—all the so-called “cursed questions.” He was curious about all issues and questions relevant to Armenians. With his keen and observant mind, he saw everything that was to guide, encourage, and absorb his entire being toward the rebirth and emancipation of his fatherland. He was almost prophetic in predicting Armenia’s emancipation. Hakob scrutinized and studied all the past and contemporary obstacles that prevented Armenia’s freedom. He had done all that concurrently with his daily business responsibilities in a dull and obscure corner of Asia, like Salmast was in those days.

In the early 1860s finer European linen products penetrated the markets where the Salmast *shila* was traded. The consumers preferred the inexpensive

material, causing the decline of the *shila* business and the consequent decrease of Mirzabek's income. Melik Mirzabek contemplated closing his business and sending Hakob to Constantinople to negotiate with European companies to import their linen fabrics. Hakob wanted to take his younger brother Karapet and place him in a boarding school. Hakob had already written to his friend Kalantar about his possible visit. Instead, in the middle of 1859, Melik Mirzabek sent Hakob to Tiflis on a business trip. On the way back, Hakob stayed in Tavriz for a few days at Mirzabek's long time friend Gevorg Aftandilian's home. He met young Avak Aftandilian, who impressed Hakob by his spirited nature and knowledge of languages. At his departure, the two new friends separated and promised to keep in touch. In 1860 Avak Aftandilian went to Salmast to study French and Armenian with Vienna Mkhitarist Father Kghemes (Clemens) Sibilian. Aftandilian often visited Hakob at the family home, and the two developed a lifelong friendship.

During his visits with Hakob, Aftandilian often went to see him at Mirzabek's store. After Raffi's death, Aftandilian described the activities at the store in his memoirs of Raffi:

In the center of Salmast, the Persian village of Dilman is among the many Armenian villages of Ghalasar, Haftvan, Savra, Mahlam, and Sarna. Dilman was the region's marketplace and business center. Raffi had his store there . . .

On one side, the workers stacked thousands of *shila* bundles, which he traded. The workers opened the packages and made bales out of them; on the other side, Raffi conducted business with several Persian merchants. After entering the accounts in his ledger, Raffi explained to the Persians that since ancient times Armenians and Persians always had good relations as neighbors. He told them that the two peoples respected each other throughout the centuries, except in a few cases. He talked about Cyrus, Jemshid, and Xerxes; he told the customers that during the Arshakuni [Arsacid] dynasty the great king Arshak was the king of Persia and his brother Vagharshak was king in Armenia.<sup>102</sup>

Hakob was interested in Persia and the lives of its people because he thought that the fortunes of the Armenians in Persia depended on the Persians, and because he was an enlightened, a progressive, and an open-minded person. He was, however, resentful of the dominating violence and exploitation by Persia's oppressive feudal system, and he sympathized with the exploited and oppressed Persian people. Hakob greatly valued Persian literature and poetry.



*Avak Khan Aftandilian*

To learn more, he spoke with Persian merchants and *mullahs* (religious leaders) and discussed issues concerning Islam and Christianity. The Persian religious leaders respected Hakob because he was conversant with Islam.

One Sunday Hakob invited several Persian merchants to his house. He asked Aftandilian to be present. Before the guests arrived, Hakob told his friend that the Armenians avoided having relations with the Persians, which in his opinion was unwise. "We must mix with them, exchange ideas, and establish close relations because we live among them and they are the ruling faction."<sup>103</sup> Hakob had hired a Persian cook to prepare the food, in deference to his guests who did not eat Christian cooking. After the guests finished eating, the servants brought coffee and water pipes. Haji Fatali addressed Hakob and said, "We, the Persians, are more sympathetic toward the

Christians than toward the Sunni Muslims, who betray us. We believe in Jesus, who is a great prophet and born of Mary without a father, but I do not know how you accept him as God or a member of the Trinity. Our religion does not attribute a son or a companion to God; He is one. Christians are silent about our prophet and do not say anything about him. These two major points have become issues of contention between us. I would like to hear your opinion about these issues.”

“Your points are serious religious issues that even theologians have been unable to resolve,” Raffi said, “I will give you only my opinion. Our Bible was written almost six hundred years before your prophet founded Islam; that is why we do not find any references in it to your prophet. Coming to Jesus’ divinity, I can say that your laws and all Muslim people accept Him as ‘Jesus, Spirit of God.’ In addition, you accept that He was born of the Virgin and conceived by an angel’s breath, without a father. That in itself is a unique miracle. As for the Trinity, I can say that everyday we all see that the sun in the sky is just a sphere, but it gives light and warmth, which radiate from it and are inseparable. These issues are profound and abstract religious concepts; their solutions are beyond my abilities. To understand well, we must study both the Bible and the Koran, after which we can better discuss these issues.”

“It is true,” the pious man said, and he continued, “We call Jesus the Spirit of God, and we have given many prophets certain praiseworthy names according to their calling. For example, we call Abraham, God’s innocent; Moses, God’s messenger; Mohammed, God’s apostle. Those are titles, but no prophet or creature is equal to God. Praise onto Jesus and praise onto Mary.”<sup>104</sup>

Hakob knew that the Armenians were doubly oppressed, as Persian subjects and as declared foreigners. Along with the government officials, sometimes also the ignorant and fanatic Persian people oppressed the Armenians. He attributed such behavior to backwardness, ignorance, and religious fanaticism that caused suffering to minority ethnic groups who had lived among the Persians for centuries. Despite these traits, Hakob’s sympathy for the Persian people did not diminish because he loved their old culture and ascribed it to their creativity. While in Payajuk, Hakob studied the Persian language, planning to translate into Armenian the Persian classic writings. Persia and its people occupied large segments in his stories and essays. In some of his novels, Persia was depicted as an enemy— an oppressive and exploitative force; however, he dedicated other works to the Persian people, depicting their wretchedness with the same feelings as for the Armenian people. He recommended that Armenian villagers, who were permanently subject to the whims of Persian feudal lords and their oppressive taxation practices, should leave for the cities, where there was less oppression, and engage in trade. As

an alternative, he suggested that they strive to use their meager earnings to purchase land and produce such products that were permissible for Muslims to purchase. His advice to the merchant class, whose condition was relatively better than the villagers', was to engage in manufacturing rather than dealing with provisions they could not sell to the Muslim population. Hakob audaciously directed his suggestions toward the Persian Shah to introduce reforms and revive the nation according to ways of the civilized and enlightened century. To reach that goal, he boldly proposed that the Shah had to understand that ruling a nation or a kingdom did not mean oppressing its citizens and restricting their freedom. After enumerating the injustices imposed on the Christians, Hakob believed that the Shah would introduce freedom and enlightenment for the country's advancement. In all his writings, he attempted to reform, enlighten, and free the Armenian people and the Persian people from the government's oppression, as he expressed in the introduction to *Salpi*, where he addressed political, economic, and social issues:

Persia is the old bloodthirsty monster, which has remained until this enlightened nineteenth century in its Asiatic ugly and ridiculous form. The unjust Persian government, in addition to endangering its Christian population, has alienated its Persian and Turkish people . . . I have great hopes that Persian history someday will become the source of a new era for Asiatic culture. Let it take that bright glory to the end of time. If it follows the example of its ancestors, let it know that time will take care of its needs, and Persia will renew itself without the whims of becoming a dominating force. Persia's dawn has already begun to brighten, its sunrise foretold, when the dark clouds will disappear, and everything will fall in place.<sup>105</sup>

Only a patriotic Persian or an open-minded and enlightened non-Persian could write such words, someone who sincerely loved the Persian people. He had written these prophetic words fifty years before the Persian Revolution of 1908–1912. The Armenian freedom fighters, who participated in the Persian Revolution, fighting one day in Western Armenia against Turkish oppression and the next day showing armed resistance against Russian domination, did not spare their blood and vigor for the emancipation of the Persian people. Hakob had earned their respect for his interest in Persian history, literature, and religion. He often had conversations with his Persian acquaintances, merchants, and *mullahs* about similarities and differences between Islam and Christianity. “The Persians, in general, greatly respect those Armenians who

are able to discuss religion at length,” wrote Aftandilian, who told the story of a courageous mission, a very difficult and dangerous one that Hakob undertook, as a testament of the respect Persians had for him. Persians from the Dilman Muslim Village had abducted a twelve-year-old Armenian girl from the village of Mahlam and announced that the girl had accepted Islam. The girl’s mother had pleaded with Melik Mirzabek’s family to rescue her daughter. Young Hakob went alone at night to Dilman and met with the religious leader. After a long discussion, he was able to persuade the Persian to return the girl. On the same night, he brought the girl with him and delivered her to the mother.<sup>106</sup>

Hakob was interested in Persian archaeology. He had gathered a rich collection of coins, weapons, statues, pictures, and manuscripts. His interest in archaeology was an opportunity to meet Father Kghemes Sibilian, Aftandilian’s teacher, who resided in the village of Khosrova in Salmast. Father Sibilian was a well-known archaeologist and numismatist. After receiving permission from the Shah in 1860 to open a school, Father Kghemes settled in the village of Savra. He traveled throughout Persia, as he had done in Asia Minor, the Middle East, and Cilicia (Kilikia), to collect Armenian coins and other artifacts of numismatic and archaeological value. His main scholastic contribution was the research of Armenian coinage. In his only published work, in 1892, *Dasavorutiun Rubinian dramots* (Classification of Rubenid Coinage) he had catalogued about three thousand coins of the Rubenid Cilician Kingdom. This was a pioneering work and the main source of reference for all future Armenian numismatic research. Far away from cultural centers, Hakob enjoyed the Mkhitarist father’s visits. They had developed a close relationship and argued freely about the differences between the Armenian and Catholic churches.

One morning Father Kghemes and Aftandilian went to visit Hakob. They entered his library and found him busy writing. Hakob greeted the guests and welcomed them.

“God be helpful, Very Reverend Father, you have done well to have come with my friend to visit me. I was tired of conducting the village chores and running the business. For a person who has lived in the city, village life is unbearable. You have done me a favor, and you are my guests for the whole day.”

“Very well,” the priest replied. “Let me see what you have written lately, what recent newspapers you have received, and what interesting new items you have added to your collection?”

Hakob got up, brought an old skull pierced with a rusted metal rod, and put it on the desk. “A few days ago the workers and I were digging in our field,





*Mkhitarist Father Kghemes (Clemens) Sibilian*

when I saw them bring out this skull. I thought it was an ancient one because of its large size, so I kept it.”

“You were prudent,” the priest said, “this skull has a double meaning. First, it differs from current skulls by its size, and second, this metal rod indicates that the man was guilty of something, and he was punished with a piece of hot metal, as you can see, driven through the opening of the ears.”

Hakob showed the guests his archaeological collection of rare old coins,<sup>107</sup> delicate carvings, pictures, manuscripts, and other items of great value. He said that he had purchased most of his coin collection from the Jews.<sup>108</sup> He had learned from Father Sibilian how to ascertain archaeological objects. After Hakob finished discussing antiquities, Father Kghemes began turning the pages of a manuscript when he came across a passage and pointed it out to Hakob. A heated discussion ensued between the two men.

“The present clergy are not worthy of their calling,” Father Kghemes said. “They do not help the ignorant people and do not care enough to educate them. The clergy approach the people and the church when they want money from them. They perform the Mass, read the Bible, sing the *Sharakans*

(Hymns), but neither they nor the people understand what the words mean. I have entered the village churches. I must sadly say that they do not resemble churches. God's house must be clean and neat. The Church officials must have clean spirits and hold themselves high; they should be educated to be able to teach the people. For years the people have not heard sermons; thus, they know very little about the Mother of God and the saints. The Armenian people do not know much about church and prayers because the clergy have not taught them. If it continues like this, they will become captives of the Protestants around them. Ejmiatsin can help the people, but they have remained passive observers."

"I agree with you," Hakob replied. "You merely say these things and go on, but I will not let you get away. You too are at fault. We must search for the root causes of this evil. They are the result of ignorance. The Persian Armenian has not yet freed himself from the shackles of centuries and has not entered the fountain of education. Ejmiatsin does not have educated and capable clergymen to implement any educational plans through sermons and moral advice. Soon Ejmiatsin will be set free because in Russia Armenians have already begun to establish schools and publish books and newspapers. What do you think would have happened if the Mkhitarists did not settle in Europe? Do you think they would have produced linguists and educators? Never! You have wrapped the blame around the Church's neck and are looking at the sad affairs with no less apathy; perhaps in your heart you are rejoicing. Why do you not help the Armenians in general? You help only those who become Catholics. Excuse me if I say that many of you are infected with the Latin malady. Our coming generations will condemn you for that position. We will never forget the services that the Mkhitarists have rendered and their tireless work for the Armenian language, but they can do more. Let them be Catholics, that is their conviction, but they must let alone those who seek only their help. They should not insist on the Pope's infallibility and Peter's supremacy to those Armenians who seek their help."<sup>109</sup>

The heated discussion ended when a local villager entered the room.



## Travels Around Salmast

Hakob liked to visit nearby fields and forests, mountains and streams, and villages and people. He often visited Father Kghemes in Savra and discussed his new coins purchased during his trips and other issues of mutual interest. He talked to the workers in the fields and listened intently to the stories of the elderly. Hakob traveled alone on horseback and always carried a rifle and a pistol.

One spring day, Hakob, Aftandilian, and another friend traveled to the Armenian village of Hakhveran and the Kashkavis region of Ali Agha,<sup>110</sup> chief of the Kurdish Shikak tribe. Just before reaching Hakhveran, the group met the elderly village head, who was plowing his land while singing and praising his oxen:

Move the plow forward my strong oxen!  
 Yours is the field, we have not plowed it completely.  
 The rain will fall and the fields will turn green.  
 Get along, too many are my worries.  
 The Kurd took away my previous harvest  
 And did not leave any feed, barley, straw, or wheat for me.  
 It will be fall soon and then winter, with wind and snow,  
 And famine will come to unfortunate Hakhveran.  
 So pull, let us go ahead with the tilling.  
 The Lord alone is the guardian of my fields.  
 In the evening, I will release and feed you,  
 So plow, I am a sacrifice to your legs.  
 Le, le, le, le, lo, lo, lo, lo.<sup>111</sup>

The old man was a tall and a lively person who carried a rifle ready to defend himself. When the old man noticed the group, he stopped plowing and singing; he had recognized Hakob when the group got closer.

"I know you, you are Melik Mirza's lad," the old man called out from a distance.

"Yes," Hakob answered.

Hakob told his friends that it was worth meeting the brave old man, who had often fought the Kurds, for which the Kurds respected him. Had it not been for the old man, Hakhveran would have ceased to exist long ago. Although the old man was illiterate, he was an intelligent man. He had traveled in the Caucasus and visited Jerusalem.

During the conversation, the old man complained to the group about the villagers' miserable lives. "The villagers are not the owners of what they have. We till the land, sow, and reap; but we are still hungry and live under bitter servitude. The landowner troubles us and the Kurds rob us. I have a little more than the rest of the villagers; if I give them some of what I have, my family, animals, and I will not have enough. If I do not give them any, I will be unable to bear their complaints. As you know, a few brave villagers and I have protected ourselves against the Kurds and have beaten them with our weapons, but to what avail? They are numerous and we are few; they will always take their revenge."

"Do not be discouraged, old father, God is great," Hakob encouraged the old man. "Your bravery in defending the village will be rewarded. Hold tightly onto your staff of Moses and govern your flock like a shepherd, and wait patiently." Hearing the encouraging words, the elderly man smiled with happiness, changed the subject, and said, "I envy you for your education. We villagers have been born blind in this enlightened world, and we will die blind. I would give my life to have someone educate my only son."

"Do you have a school in the village?" Hakob asked.

"What are you talking about my dear child?" the old man answered.

"And how is the priest?"

"Our priest died a long time ago. We have a visiting priest who comes here and stays for a few weeks. He gathers us together during the long nights and tells us about our history and Christianity. He is a kind man."

"May your table be as full as Abraham's. We will not forget you respectable father. I am friends with Ali Agha; right now, we are going to his camp. I will ask him to protect your village. I am certain there will be no more unpleasant incidents against your village," Hakob promised.

After conversing for a couple of hours with the old man and enjoying his hospitality by sharing the lunch brought to him from the village, the group prepared to depart. Hakob and the old man separated from the group and engaged in a long conversation. Aftandilian overheard their last words when Hakob promised to send the old man a rifle as a token of friendship.<sup>112</sup> Readers of *Kaytser* can recognize this elderly Hakhveran villager as the brave farmer, who carried a rifle and a gun while plowing his land to protect himself from the marauding Kurds, and his song, which Hakob wrote as a poem and named

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it appropriately *Hasso's song*.<sup>113</sup>

Behold, the red sun has risen,  
Hot and bright is the day,  
Pull! You beautiful oxen,  
Move the plow forward!

Let us till the land and make furrows,  
Deep furrows in the field,  
Let us sow the seeds, so that we will reap,  
Then pile the wheat on the threshing ground.

Winter will come—we have no fear,  
Our days will be happy,  
We have plenty of provisions,  
Our stomachs are full and sated.

Let not our neighbors say,  
“Hasso's oxen are lazy.”  
Pull! You beautiful oxen,  
Let us hurry and plow the fields.

When in 1890 the police arrested Simon Zavarian (of Dashnaksutiun) in Trebizond, they found a copy of *Hasso's song* in his home. During the trial, the judge announced that he had understood well that the plow symbolized Armenian freedom; and the oxen, the Armenian *haytuks* (freedom fighters).

On the same day, Hakob and his friends visited Ali Agha, who was a tall, stout, and sixty-year-old man. His appearance was more that of an Armenian than a Kurd. He had over ten grown and brave sons. After welcoming the group, Ali Agha ordered his people to prepare lunch for the visitors. Hakob informed Ali Agha that they had already eaten lunch.

“I know with whom,” Ali Agha said. “I know the brave Armenian who was hospitable to you.”

“I must inform the Hakhveran village to commend you for your noble and favorable attitude toward the Armenians,” Hakob praised the Kurdish leader. “That village has often been unjustly trampled by vicious and predatory Kurds of other tribes.”

After lunch, the Kurdish chief gave his smoking pipe to Hakob to smoke, a sign of great honor among the Kurds.

“The vardapet [in this case the abbot] of Surb Bardoghimeos [Saint

Bartholomew Monastery] gave me this pipe with its precious amber mouthpiece as a token of friendship. I would like you to smoke it," Ali Agha said. He had pronounced the words *Surb Bardoghimeos* and *vardapet* so clearly as if he were an Armenian.<sup>114</sup>

To entertain his guests until the evening meal, Ali Agha sent them on an outing with two of his sons. Hakob and the two brothers hunted several partridges and quails. Upon their return, Ali Agha noticed the birds and told Hakob, "The Armenian's rifle is only able to kill a bird and nothing else. Would it not be better that you sell your beautiful guns to me at a high price? The Armenian is a peasant and does not know the purpose of guns."

Moved by Ali Agha's words, Hakob replied, "The Armenian uses his gun in a more useful way than the Kurd. The Armenian does not stain his name by using his gun to plunder and murder people. The Armenian resorts to his gun only when his life is threatened, but the Kurd, despite his bravery, has stained his weapon by unjustly spilling blood, which is sad. You may be offended by my words Agha, but you and your tribe are exceptions."

Ali Agha, who quietly listened and seemed to have regretted what he had said, responded: "What you are saying is not far from the truth; many atrocities have been committed by our people, but those are not typical. There are Kurds and there are Kurds. Please tell me, where have you learned to use a gun? The merchant class in our region is unfamiliar with guns. My sons told me that all three of you are fairly skillful with guns."

Hakob told the Kurdish chief that he had loved guns from early childhood, and that he had built a crude rifle from a reed and hunted birds with it. He said, "When I grew up somewhat, my love for guns grew even more, and gradually I became more familiar with guns, particularly during my travels. As you can see, I am now fairly well trained."

After the evening meal, Ali Agha called the singers and musicians to entertain the guests with Kurdish songs of valor. Hakob asked Ali Agha to have the singer sing the song composed in memory of his deceased son, who had died during one of the tribe's wars. Ali Agha reluctantly agreed. The singer started immediately:

You are not dead Ahmet Agha; your accomplishments are great,  
 As long as you have your son, you will be remembered.  
 He will grow up and ride a horse with a gun in his hand,  
 He will fulfill his father's revenge, and you will be immortal.  
 You died from a wound in your chest, Ahmet Agha,  
 You are the pride of your tribe.  
 This is the shirt of that brave man,

Who was your father.  
 “Revenge, revenge for the evil enemy,”  
 He is calling from his grave.<sup>115</sup>

The sorrowful song had saddened Ali Agha, who left the tent and went to the nearby Zola River. It was already late night. Ali Agha informed Hakob and his companion that a tent was prepared for them to stay the night. Hakob sat in his bed and wrote down the day's events by a lantern's dim light. In the morning, the group woke up to the din of people. One of Ali Agha's sons, with a worried look, came over to the group and informed them about his father's early morning departure to fight against a rival tribe, which had crossed over into Shikak territory. He said his father begged their pardon and sent them his best wishes. The group thanked Ali Agha's son for their hospitality and left the Kurdish camp. The visit to Ali Agha's camp is described in the first volume of *Kaytser*; the song about Ali Agha's son is the Yezidi Kurdish woman's song. These descriptions and others show how Raffi's vivid imagination infused life into dull subjects and weaved legends. He gave us descriptions of his life in his novels.

By the early 1860s American missionaries and French Lazarist priests had established themselves in the Urmia district, engaged in educational and cultural work in the Assyrian villages. Despite believing in freedom of conscience, Hakob watched with displeasure the missionaries' efforts driving these ancient Christians away from their national religion. Meanwhile, Hakob valued the missionaries' work of establishing modern schools and printing presses and publishing bibles and Assyrian newspapers, all of which attracted his attention during his business trips to Urmia. He took the opportunity to visit the missionary establishments as often as he could.

On a Sunday, Hakob and Aftandilian went to visit the missionaries at an Assyrian village. The church was full of men, women, and children listening to the preacher, an American speaking in Assyrian. After the sermon, the congregation sang a few religious songs, which ended the service. The two visitors went to see the printing press, which was printing a Bible and a newsletter. They visited the Lazarist homes, church, and school. They saw the missionaries helping the poor Assyrians morally and financially, and they observed the Sisters of Charity members visiting the sick and the disabled. Hakob's acquaintance with the missionaries found a place in his future novels where he described the missionaries' proselytizing shrouded in philanthropic work.

During one of his stays in Urmia, Hakob received a letter, dated March 7, 1861, from Hovhannes Katanian asking him to write an article about the

foreign missionaries in the Atrpatakan region. Hakob responded to Katanian from Urmia with a letter<sup>116</sup> dated April 25, 1861, in which he asked Katanian to thank Nazariants for making the editorial corrections and publishing *Aghtamara vanke*. Included in the letter was a brief description of the Catholic and Protestant missionary activities in the Urmia region. He also included several poems asking Katanian to give them to Nazariants for publication. Nazariants published the article, but not the poems. Despite Nazariants's fondness for Hakob, he did not publish all of Hakob's works, particularly the poems, perhaps because of the poor literary standard and the critical religious content.

On an outing in June 1861, Hakob and Aftandilian went to visit the city of Urmia and its surrounding hills. In the desolate outskirts of the city, old dirt mounds dotted the land. They saw large and deep holes dug into the mounds. Hakob told Aftandilian, "The greedy Jews enter through these holes, dig deep inside the mounds at night, and secretly bring out various objects made of copper, silver, and gold, including old coins. They are so shrewd that they do not sell the items in Urmia, in case the authorities detect and confiscate the objects. Instead, they hide the objects for a while, clean them, and take them to other towns to sell at high prices to curious buyers." He said that the deceitful Jews made counterfeits of the original coins and sold them at even higher prices than the genuine ones. He had purchased most of his coins from those Jews. "At the beginning I was naïve and purchased counterfeits coins along with genuine ones," he confided to his friend. "Upon Father Sibilian's advice, I threw away the fake ones. He taught me how to identify the genuine old coins and their condition." After their excursion, Aftandilian left, but Hakob stayed in Urmia for two months tending to his father's business. There he wrote the poem *Hayasiri voghb*<sup>117</sup> (Armenian Patriot's Lament) and sent it to Khrimian. After completing his business, Hakob left Urmia alone on horseback carrying a large sum of money in his saddlebags. In the evening, he stopped in an Assyrian village to spend the night at the home of family friends. Several Kurdish *aghas* with their guards had already settled at the same house, all armed with weapons. One of the Kurds asked Hakob, "Hey Armenian! How is it that you are so brave to travel in these parts? What will you do if tomorrow you encounter a few armed men?" Hakob put his hand in his pocket, calmly pulled out a gun, pointed it at the Kurd, and said, "You see? I will answer them with this." He deeply impressed the Kurds, who befriended him.<sup>118</sup> The next day, Hakob was in Dilman to take care of his father's store.

In August 1861 while passing through Dilman on their way from Yerevan to Varag, Garegin Sruandziant, Nahapet Atanasian, and Mikayel Aleksanian



heard that the author of *Aghtamara vanke* was there. The group went to see Hakob. Sruandzants introduced his friends, adding that Atanasian was from Yerevan and a former student of Khachatur Abovian. Hakob was elated and asked many questions, especially about Abovian's mysterious disappearance. Hakob invited the group to stay overnight at his family home, but they had to leave with the caravan, which was leaving that night. That year was an important year in young Hakob's literary life. The *Hayasiri voghb* poem appeared in the October 1861 issue of *Artsvi Vaspurakan*.<sup>119</sup> The following month, his article about the American and the French Lazarist missionaries appeared in the November 1861 issue of *Hiuisapayl*.

In the middle of 1862 the first graduate of Khrimian's seminary, Hakob Aghvastian, came to Tavriz with a friend to collect the subscription fees for *Artsvi Vaspurakan*. On the way back, they visited Hakob and stayed at Mirzabek's home before continuing their journey to Varag. This visit turned out to be significant because of a literary discussion that took place after Hakob read his story "Atrpatakani harsanik" (Atrpatakan Wedding) to the group. Years later, Aghvastian, already a bishop, upon reading *Kaytser*, had noticed that "Atrpatakani harsanik" was missing; whereas, he had expected it to be part of the novel. He had written a letter to Raffi inquiring about the missing literary piece. Whether Raffi responded to Aghvastian's letter is not known, but such a title did not appear in any of Raffi's works. Although Raffi had described a wedding scene in *Khvlulik* (*Salpi*), no wedding scene in any of Raffi's works was actually the one referred to by Aghvastian.<sup>120</sup>

During his travel to Western Armenia in 1857, Hakob had visited Varag and met Khrimian. The printing press, the plans for publishing *Artsvi Vaspurakan* monthly, and the Zharangavorats Varzharan fascinated him. If Khrimian was able to establish a printing house, and if the missionaries were able to do the same for the Assyrians, why could he not do the same in Salmast and enlighten his people. Encouraged by this idea, he planned to purchase printing equipment from either Constantinople or Russia with his own funds. Hakob understood well the importance of the press. He had commented about it to his friend Aftandilian, "The press is the mouthpiece for enlightenment. If I am able to establish a printing press, that would be the first step for us—Persian Armenians—and me to eventually publish my works and perhaps a small newspaper."<sup>121</sup> While Hakob contemplated establishing a printing press in Salmast, his business gradually deteriorated. After returning home from Tiflis, he had arduously worked to reform the public life, enlighten the people, introduce civility, and struggle against cultural retardation. His first efforts had provoked all the backward elements against him. Over the years enmity against Hakob became more venomous because he had

transferred his struggle into the pages of various publications, and because he fought against the negative attributes of Armenian life. Again merchants, clergymen, and villagers fiercely opposed his efforts. To destroy Hakob's business, his adversaries tried every despicable act against him.

Hakob went to Tavriz, Atrpatakan's capital, at least once a year for his business. He stayed at Aftandilian's house, next door to the Prelacy, in the Armenian section of town known as *Armenistan*. To promote his writings, he carried his works wherever he went.<sup>122</sup> The prelate of Atrpatakan was Archbishop Abel Mkhitarian (March 1860–May 1861), who was a learned man. He knew Hakob and had read his works. Once, Hakob and Aftandilian went to visit the archbishop and found him reading *Hiusisapayl* and several newspapers from Constantinople. During their conversation, the archbishop said that the Armenians of Salmast were numerous and many were wealthy, but they did not make any effort to open schools; he then changed the subject to Hakob's writings.

"I have read your writings fully," he said. "I commend your literary zeal, but I do not agree with your ideas. I do not consider your writing style a true Armenian style; it is a random style. I notice that you are following the language of *Hiusisapayl* and its direction. I confess that Nazariants, Nalbandian, and a group of like-minded friends are working diligently in our literary field, but they are misled by their foreign education. They are demanding that the Armenian Church reform; that is impossible. The Armenian Church will remain as it is to the end of time. I advise you that instead of working on *Khvlvliks*, *Salpies*, and *Kaytsers*,<sup>123</sup> instead of writing about the common people, you would do better to select your subjects from the inexhaustible treasures of our national history, which is full of various and beautiful subjects. Follow my writing style as I have written in *Anushavan*."

"I have read your *Anushavan* from cover to cover," Hakob responded. "It is written in neither the classical nor the modern Armenian used in Constantinople. It is a strange and fanciful style, the way our clergy think. Instead of writing the way the people speak and what is close to their hearts, the clergy demand that the people use their proposed dialect [grabar]. Look how different the current dialect of the people is, and how far it has come from that of Yeznik and Yeghishe.<sup>124</sup> To bring those two extremes together is impossible. That is not how *Hiusisapayl* thinks. It writes as the people speak, which gradually becomes the common and the literary language. Your writing style cannot become the vernacular because it is contrary to contemporary demands. As for the writings in *Hiusisapayl*, you and many others have misunderstood them. One must realize that *Hiusisapayl* is truly opposed to the subjugation of the Armenian Church to foreign doctrines or joining with

another denomination. It demands that the Armenian clergy become educated and recite the prayers and read the Bible in the common language. The Holy Mass, which takes three to four hours, and five hours during holidays, could be said in one or two hours, even in grabar. One hour is enough for the Mass, and one hour dedicated to a sermon so that the people will receive spiritual nourishment in a comprehensible language. After staying several hours in the church as stiff logs, the people still do not understand what the priest is delivering. I have been to Catholic and Protestant churches as an observer. In a Catholic church, the daily Mass lasts only twenty minutes; on Sundays, one hour, including a brief sermon. In Protestant churches, the Bible is read in a language the people understand, along with a sermon and a few spiritual songs, and all together the service lasts less than an hour. In our churches, ceremonies have no end. Thus, disappointed by the difficult language, the people scurry out of the church, and the clergy complain that the people do not love the church. For this reason, *Hiusisapayl* makes new demands, but always according to the Church's doctrines. Our spiritual songs, prayers, and hymns are marvelous with their sacred words, but I am sad that the illiterate churchgoers do not understand any of them. Many centuries have passed since the time when the people, besides attending morning and evening services, attended services during the rest of the day to hear about our history and the lives of the saints. Our drawn out church services come from past centuries, but conditions have changed at the present. People are concerned about earning a living, which is difficult nowadays. People are so busy during the week that they avoid staying long in church during Sunday and holiday services. Even the unintelligible and discordant singing has no attraction to excite the devoted. Excuse me, Father, for talking so long. Let the Armenian Church remain unaltered until the end of the world, as I likewise wish the same. If the Church introduces only a few reforms into the original traditions, no one among us will leave the Church, as thousands have done, and become Catholics and Protestants. Why do others not join our Church? The reason is very clear. Their church leaders have taken advantage of the times and simplified the services to make them intelligible. In our case, the opposite is true. The services are long, difficult, and abstract. A few more words and I will stop. You are demanding that we disregard selecting characters from the common people and use subjects only from our national history. Both are necessary. At the present, to describe the lives of those in our lower classes is more urgent. This is the demand of the times. We must even describe the general condition so that we are not judged in the future, as we are judging today our predecessors' negligence of our people's lives and customs."

The Archbishop, who was an irritable and easily provoked person, had

listened quietly. When Hakob finished his speech, the Archbishop reprimanded Hakob.

“Respectable sir, I gave you just one piece of advice and suggestion, but you gave a speech and read a whole sermon; both are the rights of the clergy. *I* must give speeches and sermons. I notice that you too are advocating Nazariant’s philosophy. He pretends to be a clergyman, and you are about to claim to be a sermonizer. Alas! I am advising you that from now on you do not utter such childish words in my presence, or else!”<sup>125</sup>

Offended by the Archbishop’s reprehensive words, Hakob spoke out even more forcefully.

A few days later when Hakob saw Aftandilian, he told him: “Do you see how shamefully the archbishop reacted to my writings and opinions, and he is our honest, open-minded, and knowledgeable clergyman? I think you must have formed a good picture of our other dark heads by now.” Hakob was not fond of most of the clergy. He would often say that vardapets desired only three things: to become bishops, to have a few thousand *rubles* in their pockets, and to wear a few decorations, nothing more. He knew that the Armenian people were lost in ignorance, and without a shepherd, many had become apostates, and their children had grown up without education. He had observed the clergy’s indifference toward their people. “The clergy,” he would say, “satisfied themselves by only reading long and lamentable prayers, then sitting comfortably in their seats and yawning.”<sup>126</sup>



## Marriage and Decline of Business

During one of his visits to the American missionary school in Urmia in 1863, Hakob met Anna Hurmuz, the daughter of an Assyrian minister *Ghasha* (Priest) Hunan and Sheri Khanum. Anna was born in the village of Gog-Tapa (Green Hill). After graduating from the village girls' school, she had gone to Urmia to continue her education at the American missionary school for girls. The school had invited Hakob to the graduation ceremonies, where he noticed Anna Hurmuz. The next day, Hakob went to Gog-Tapa, found her family, and asked Ghasha Hunan for his daughter's hand. In a separate account, one Sara Khanum told Levon Mesrop, a contributor to *Lusaghbiur*,<sup>127</sup> her recollections of the events leading to Hakob's marriage. Levon had written down Sara Khanum's story in 1937 but did not publish it until 1955. According to Sara Khanum, Anna's family name was Ghashajan; her father's name, Ghasha Hunan; her mother's, Sheri. Anna had three brothers and several sisters. Gog-Tapa was a large village, six kilometers from Urmia, and had three thousand Armenian and Assyrian families. Ghasha Hunan preached at the American missionaries' church. Anna and her sisters attended the American school in Urmia, and graduated from the ninth grade when she was eighteen-years old. On graduation day, Hakob was present at the ceremonies, where the beautiful girl attracted his attention. He liked the girl and decided to ask her parents for her hand. A few days later, Hakob went to the village to look for Anna. The villagers told him that her parents had already promised her to the local doctor's son. Undaunted, Hakob went directly to her parents, who had heard about him, and met them for the first time. Ghasha Hunan welcomed Hakob and had his girls sing a few religious songs for him. Word reached Anna's fiancé that someone was interested in her. The fiancé and several friends waited for Hakob on the rooftop of a nearby house to settle the score with him. When Hakob came out of Ghasha Hunan's house, the young men hit him with a large stone that knocked him to the ground, unconscious. The news reached Ghasha Hunan, who went and brought Hakob to his house and kept him there for a few days until he recovered. Hakob informed Ghasha Hunan that he wanted to marry Anna. The parents gladly granted his wish. Hakob went to Urmia and registered for marriage and

returned with a bride's dress and gifts. The marriage ceremony was simple and fast without music to avoid provoking those opposed to the marriage.<sup>128</sup> In 1864 the newlyweds had a child and named her Yester. Following his marriage and the birth of their daughter, Hakob became more pensive, serious, and thoughtful.

The year 1865 was an unfortunate year for Melik Mirzabek's family, and the region in general. The sudden death of the family patriarch led to the failure of the family business and the loss of the family's fame. The cholera endemic in the Salmast region took many lives. The unfortunate events left Hakob responsible for taking care of his mother, sisters, and brothers. Melik Mirzabek's hostile competitors made false claims in an attempt to destroy the family business. During the cruel attacks, Hakob's opponents even attacked his business representatives in other towns. Those business collaborators, whose interests behooved them to protect Hakob's business, joined his opponents. Hakob tried desperately to save the family business, but the animosity against him was so vicious, the treachery of the adversaries was so great, that he finally lost the business and became indignant. The malicious hostility destroyed his comfortable life. During this trying ordeal, however, the more his business deteriorated, the more he dedicated his time to writing. Despite the difficulties, Hakob wrote several poems and edited his other works. By the end of 1865 he had revised *Khvlulik* and added new material for the public's enlightenment, and he had prepared draft copies of *Harem* and the first volume of *Kaytser*. He completed editing *Khvlulik* at the end of 1866.

After the 1867 Christmas holidays, Hakob left for Tavriz to straighten out the chaotic accounts of his business agents. He found his stores robbed and the accounts defrauded. As if that were not enough, the agents demanded large sums against forged promissory notes. Aftandilian visited him one day and found him somber and depressed. His fiery spirit was absent. He did not engage in his usual jovial conversations. Even then, he did not leave his desk and wrote eagerly.

"What is it?" Aftandilian asked Hakob one day. "What has happened to you that your usual enthusiasm has left you? You do not speak or enjoy yourself."

"What else do you want to happen to me?" Hakob replied. "Our sworn enemies achieved their purpose. They destroyed my business and me financially. They confiscated my properties and sent us into an abyss. As if these were not enough, our business associates, who turned out to be ungrateful and dishonorable people, are making false demands instead of helping me and returning my personal possessions. I am exhausted from arguing with them. I am unable to understand anything from their convoluted

accounts. I have only one hope now, so I have decided to go to Tiflis, for I think our business associates hold a large amount of money; it might help improve our business. I do not feel sorry that our luck has worsened. Monetary riches, luck, and fortune are variable and fleeting. I am more saddened for losing my precious time than for our business and financial ruin. In order to write, peaceful conditions, a quiet heart, encouragement, and a little enthusiasm are necessary. All of these have already left me. Our fraudulent creditors are not giving me a chance to remain in our place. They are pursuing me like a hunted animal from one place to another. They have strangled me in debts and have blocked all my sources of income. My world has turned into a hell. Let them do what they want; I will not part from my writing. I will strengthen my pen and not let it tarnish. One must not be discouraged by unfortunate events but must endeavor.”<sup>129</sup>

Hakob returned to Salmast and prepared to leave for Tiflis. Before leaving home, he wrote a letter to Aftandilian:

January 1, 1868, Payajik [Payajuk]

Valued friend Mr. Avag Gevorgyan Aftandil[ian],

The Christian calendar has changed by one digit. Now, millions of people filled with happiness are greeting each other with “Happy New Year.” I do not like to participate in the public’s meaningless celebrations, so please excuse me for not greeting you with the same civility. On the contrary, during the moment when the calendar changed, my heart filled with grief, as if an invisible voice was whispering in my ear that another year of my life has passed, and I am another step closer to my grave.

On the last day of December, I was sitting alone, immersed in serious thoughts, when suddenly I heard unusual loud noises, and the roar of rifles disturbed the melancholy silence in my room. I went out and heard the tumult of people on the rooftops of their village homes. That Babylonian confusion lasted a few hours. I thought the villagers were threatening and chasing the devil, which had from ancient times nested in the villagers’ homes; but no, they told me that according to customary tradition, the villagers were pursuing the old year.

“Why?” I asked the first person I met.

“Because,” the peasant answered with a hoarse voice, “it has been an unfortunate year and has not brought us good fortunes, so let it get lost forever!”

“But do you think that the New Year will bring you new luck

or a new day?" I asked.

"Yes," the peasant said with self-confidence, and he left.

How many thousands of such Decembers have our people expelled, and how many new years have they lovingly greeted? None of those years brought them good luck. Indeed, the passing years have no effect on the Armenians' sorrowful lives. According to natural laws, the years change, the new replaces the old; but the Armenians, imperturbable in their funereal immobility, never think to alter their torpid condition. The Armenians do not change their lives according to the passing years.

Yours, Hakob M. Melik-Hakobian

Hakob received a letter and old copies of *Masis* and *Tsaghik* from Aftandilian in January 1868. He read about Nalbandian's death and was saddened to see such a short article about him. Hakob appreciated Nalbandian more than Nazariants or Patkanian. Hakob had not seen either Nalbandian or Nazariants; however, reading Nalbandian's writings and hearing about his activities, Hakob was influenced by him and admired the author of *Mer Hayrenik* (Our Fatherland—the Armenian National anthem) and *Azad Asduads* (Free God—a patriotic poem) to the point of adoration. Hakob wrote a letter to Aftandilian and expressed his feelings and thoughts about Nalbandian:

January 20, 1868, Payajuk  
Noble friend, Mr. Avak Gevorgyan,

I received the new calendar, which is a symbol, a memento of your friendship . . . How cheaply you value friendship, for which people erect marble and granite monuments that take a long time to wear away. Yet, your memento is just a book that will lose its meaning and be thrown away.

Excuse me for my sarcasm.

I received your short letter, a few copies of *Masis* newspaper, and a copy of *Tsaghik*, in which I read about Mikayel Nalbandian's death. This article was inappropriate in describing the tragic loss of that precious sacrifice. Famous Hugo's pen and Abovian's spirited and fiery heart are necessary. Did the article have to be so short about a man who has written so much and with such moving style about our national needs?

You have written that you saw Nalbandian's photograph in



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the possession of a man from Constantinople, and that you have requested a few copies of it. You will probably receive them in several months . . . How can one have such patience?

Do not spare any news from Tavriz. I have no news from here that would interest you. Goodbye for now.

Yours, Hakob M. Melik-Hakobian<sup>130</sup>

The degree of respect Hakob had for Nalbandian was such that he had dedicated his first novel, *Salpi*, to him:

To the immortal M. Nalbandians  
For his everlasting blessed memory  
With deepest respect  
A present

It was a joy for me to respect the eternal memory of that adorable man and offer him the first fruit of my works. Although the author of *Salpi* has not had a close acquaintance with the respected deceased, he knows that as long as the Armenian language and literature are alive, Mikayel Nalbandians's eternal memory will always remain forever in every Armenian's heart.

Salmast, 1867  
The author<sup>131</sup>

In 1868 Hakob's business in Salmast had already ruined. He traveled to Tiflis hoping to restore his nearly bankrupt business with the help of his business associates and representatives. He remained in Tiflis until the end of 1868, but he was unable to revive his business. The malfeasance of his adversaries had reached all the way to Tiflis. There too, the perfidy of his business agents was destroying him by preventing him from collecting his rightful funds. He abhorred those adversary merchants who had driven him to bankruptcy.

To make a living, he found a job as a sales clerk at a clothing store, on the famous Yerevanian Street, owned by Grigor Nasibian. He endured the indignation of the store owner, who on several occasions almost threw Hakob out of the store for selling clothes on credit to acquaintances. Years later, Makar Chmshkian wrote in *Mshak*, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Raffi's death, about his meeting with Hakob at Nasibian's store:

In the late 1860s [1868] when I worked at the Aladatian's bookstore on Yerevanian Street, I often passed by, and sometimes entered, Grigor Nasibian's store. At a desk on the right side and just inside the store entrance sat a short young man with a short beard, a tanned complexion, a pair of blue glasses, a tan-colored suit, and a lowered head. He was always preoccupied with numbers, reading newspapers, or writing in a notebook.

I was very curious to know who that was, but I did not have the courage to ask him. One day I ran into the store to make change. On my way out, the man, reading a newspaper, asked me.

"Did the store receive Mikayel Nalbandian's *Ghazar Parpetsi*?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Here is money, bring me a copy."

"I will bring it, and then pay me for it," I replied.

After that, he would ask me about other books. Soon I found out that his name was Hakob Melik-Hakobian. A few months later, he was not at the store anymore.<sup>132</sup>

While at Nasibian's store, Hakob found the opportunity to establish close contacts with the literati of Tiflis.

The movement of Armenia's rebirth from Saint Petersburg and Moscow had already reached Tiflis, creating excitement among the youth. In May 1868, Stepan Nazariants had applied for permission to publish in Moscow a daily named *Lapter Hayastani*. Nazariants had sent letters to friends and acquaintances, including Hakob, in various cities in Persia and Russia, asking them to send articles to the paper. Hakob sent the first two chapters of *Khvlvik* to Nazariants. Anticipating the publication of his paper, Nazariants made several suggestions for the manuscript and sent it back to Hakob, who made some changes and added the chapter titled "Salpi's Letter." Unfortunately, Nazariants did not receive permission to publish the paper. In a letter written from Tiflis to Aftandilian, Hakob wrote:

August 24, 1868, Tiflis

Dear Friend, Mr. Avak Aftandilian,

I am now in Tiflis, which you might have known for a long time. What a beautiful city Tiflis is. This profligate city is not what I had seen ten years ago. Now everything and every subject attract and amaze me. You might ask how a part-Asiatic-part-European city can be pleasant. The city has many fascinating parks and tree-lined boulevards.



*Hakob Melik-Hakobian, 1868*

I now have an enviable circle of enthusiastic students. My short story *Khvlvik* found surprising acceptance by the local readers. I have read my stories during special gatherings on many nights.

I have received letters from Nazariants asking me to send him my book to print in his *Labder Hayastani* daily, which he plans to publish this year.

I have come here to take care of my business, and I will remain for a while, because dishonest Zakaria, instigated by several malicious enemies, is unwilling to finish his business with us peacefully.

Yours, Hakob M. Melik-Hakobian<sup>133</sup>

In October 1868 Hakob had already left Grigor Nasibian's store, after his former teacher Karapet Belakhian had seen his talented student in the degrading clerk's position. Belakhian had brought Hakob to the school to tutor students in the preparatory class for the gymnasium. He also tutored students privately at their homes. Years later, Raffi described those two destitute hellish years to his friend Aftandilian:

Why keep it a secret? I was so much in need of money in Tiflis that my destitute condition urged me to find a simple job in a store, with meager pay. To live, I resorted to such inferiority. The store sold ready-made clothing. To make a sale, I tugged and pulled on the clothes to fit them well on the customers, and then I would lie about the quality of the merchandize, so that I would not lose the customer. One time, I sold a few items to an acquaintance on credit. On that day, the owner almost threw me out of the store. It was a boring and unbearable job.<sup>134</sup>

His failure to take control of the business drove him to extreme depression. Broken-hearted and with a longing to see his family, he left Tiflis in early January 1869. On his way, he went to Yerevan with the hope of collecting the funds due him by his agents. He was defrauded there too. Unable to provide for his extended family, Hakob went to Tavriz to find employment. Again, he met with hostile and rancorous adversaries, who pursued him with false accusations of unpaid debts.

In a letter written from Tavriz to his friend Aftandilian, who was in Tehran at that time, Hakob expressed his bitter feelings about his destitute state:

March 22, 1869, Tavriz  
Noble friend,

Not to cause anguish to a friend, I find it unnecessary to give you any information about my unbearable business affairs. I am amazed that when one's life strays from its natural course, the tempest of misfortune starts to attack furiously from all sides. Relatives, friends, and acquaintances all abandon the unfortunate person. In such a difficult situation, a person does not find any hope, comfort, or refuge except from that invisible being on Whom the destitute place their hopes.

Indeed, I am waging a big war against failure, but my heart and conscience are peaceful as before. I always find solace in thousands of examples I see and hear and read about as how

vicissitudes sometimes elevate a person to the stars, and at other times cast him to the depths of an abyss.

May the awareness of having foresight be blessed; we deal with life's uncertainties in constant awareness that life is fleeting.

My conscience bothers me (for an issue which I would like to resolve), and because of it I am obliged to write to you—a dear friend—something I have been unable to write before, but my present condition urges me to do so. Please give to Agha Yeramia the twenty *tumans*<sup>135</sup> you borrowed from me several years ago. Mr. Yeramia had loaned me that amount here.

In my present difficult financial state, I am hoping that you will honor your debt, for the sake of our sacred friendship, and return the favor that I did for you at a time when you, like me now, were in need of money.

Yours, Hakob M. Melik-Hakobian<sup>136</sup>

Hakob was in dire financial need. Finding no other source of income, he was compelled to pawn his *Khblvik* manuscript. He had spent sleepless nights writing the novel during his youth. It was surprising that there was a wealthy person, a merchant, who valued the young writer's work so much that he accepted it for collateral and loaned Hakob money. Unable to find work in Tavriz, impoverished financially and emotionally, and extremely homesick, he became hopeless. In desperation, he went back to Tiflis to earn a living through his writings, taking with him two precious items, his manuscripts and a deep knowledge of the Armenian people.

He arrived in Tiflis in early 1870 and sought employment. He found a job as a bookkeeper at the Hakhnazarian's store. The family provided him with shelter as partial payment for his services. In 1913, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Raffi's death, Aleksandr Hakhnazarian contributed his recollections in the form of an article written by *Mshak* editor Aleksandr Kalantar(ian):

In 1870 Raffi was in Tiflis to find work and earn a living. He came to work at our well-known clothing store in the Sololak neighborhood. Raffi asked us where he could find living quarters. We asked him who he was and where he was from. The young man impressed us so much that we invited him to stay with us for a few days until he found a place of his own. Raffi was such a pleasant guest that we asked him to stay with us for as long as he wanted.

He stayed and asked to repay the generosity by becoming the store's bookkeeper; we agreed, and he stayed with us until late 1871. Raffi read and wrote at night after his duties at the store. He did not reveal what he was writing, but he told us that he was going to publish his works soon, and that we would find out then.

Raffi was a quiet and modest person; he wore European style clothes, which impressed the youth. He liked to smoke and drink cold tea. After his stay with us, he moved to Svechnikov's house [*sic*],<sup>137</sup> but he never forgot us, and he came often to visit.

Raffi generally seemed like a cold and an introverted person, who did not smile; but in our house, he laughed and enjoyed himself. When we told him about the daily events and issues, he showed interest and asked us to repeat them. He liked to observe his surroundings from his balcony and in the streets. Sometimes, I would ask him why he spent sleepless nights, when the *kindos* [unemployed laborers] enjoyed themselves. He laughed heartily and said that for the *kindos* everything ended with their pleasure, but that he will speak with his writings for a long time.<sup>138</sup>

Hakob, who had painfully felt the absence of human and national dignity among the Armenian people, dedicated his entire literary works and activities to revive the lost dignity of his people. This same Hakob, for the sake of his daily bread, had tolerated the malevolence of a store owner in Tiflis. Is it possible to imagine a greater tragedy for the author of *Khente*, *Kaytser*, and *Samvel*?



## Raffi and *Mshak*

When Hakob arrived in Tiflis, he had suffered through dreadful financial crisis and severe emotional distress. He had published only a few articles, correspondences, and descriptive stories in *Hiusisapayl*. At nights, Hakob read and wrote in solitude—subdued and withdrawn. Despite his desperate condition, Hakob was glad that all the business related problems were behind him. This gave him the opportunity to dedicate his spare time to writing and pursuing his life's goal of enriching the poor Armenian literature. Until 1872 when Grigor Artsruni started publishing *Mshak*, Hakob had written many short stories such as *Sove*, *Kusagrutiun*, *Mi oravar hogh*, *Geghetsik Vartike*, *Anbakht Hripsimen*, and *Khvlilik*. He witnessed the fraudulent business methods at the clothing stores, and the experience gave him an insight into the merchandising world. He used this knowledge to write the novel *Zahrumar*, describing the profligate lives of wealthy Tiflis Armenians.

Grigor Artsruni, the son of General Yeramia Artsruni, returned from Europe in 1871, after graduating from Heidelberg University in Germany with a doctorate degree in philosophy, and after completing his Armenian studies with the Mkhitarists of Venice. He found that literary fervor and intellectual excitement prevailed in Tiflis. Artsruni noticed the aimless and reactionary positions of *Meghu Hayastani*, the major Armenian paper in Tiflis, and resolved to provide fresh and practical ideas for the people's advancement and improvement of their lives.

In 1871 Artsruni received permission from Saint Petersburg to publish his *Mshak* paper. Starting early in 1871 and for almost a year prior to *Mshak's* publication, Grigor Artsruni gathered around him a group of intellectuals to plan the paper's direction. The group discussed political, social, and literary issues, which Artsruni planned to debate in the paper. He chose a philosophy to stir the prevalent and stagnant environment—the ignorance of the clergy, the Asiatic business system, and the antiquated educational methods. Artsruni wanted to draw attention to the wretched conditions in the regions and expose unresolved issues. He planned to perpetuate Nalbandian and Nazariantz's ideas in the new civil and political environment. Some of the participants were already known literary figures, such as Gabriyel Sundukian, composer; Stepan

Palasanian, historian; and Perj Proshian, author. Although Artsruni was twenty-six-years old, readers recognized him for his articles in *Haykakan Ashkharh*<sup>139</sup> and *Meghu Hayastani*. The rest were unknown young men, some of whom later became distinguished personalities among the cultural and social circles. Those were Abgar Hovhannisian, the future editor of *Pordz* and *Ardzagank*; Poghos Izmayilian, the future mayor of Tiflis; Vasil Shahvertian; Martiros Simeonian; Senekerim Artsruni (Grigor's brother); Gevorg Yvanguian; Grigor Izmirian; Aleksandr Kishmishian; the future actors Mihrdat Amerikian and Gevorg Chmshkian; and historian Leo (Arakel Babakhanian).<sup>140</sup>

Senekerim Artsruni was already acquainted with a clothing sales clerk named Hakob Melik-Hakobian. He knew Hakob was a writer who had published articles in *Hiuisapayl*, and that he had a large number of unpublished works. Senekerim Artsruni thought Hakob would be helpful to *Mshak*, so he invited the future Raffi to Grigor Artsruni's literary meetings. Years later, Leo described Hakob's early participation at Artsruni's meetings:

We want to remember separately someone, a modest and taciturn person from Persia, who sat in the corner and listened. That man was a bookkeeper at an Armenian merchant's store in Tiflis. He would proudly tell anyone who asked that he was a contributor to *Hiuisapayl*. His literary past as a contributor to *Hiuisapayl* consisted of two articles, but no one recognized him at the meetings; however, they all knew that this man from Persia had a large number of writings and was a hidden force among the people.<sup>141</sup>

After Raffi's death in 1888, Grigor Artsruni described in *Mshak* how he first met Hakob in one of the group's literary meetings. The article gave an insight into the famous editorial meetings, which Hakob later began attending. That description in *Mshak* appeared in Leo's three-volume work titled *Grigor Artsruni*:

In 1871 I had already received permission to publish *Mshak*. I gathered around me unknown but capable young writers, formed the editorial staff, and held weekly literary meetings. Senekerim invited the group to his house for one of the meetings where he introduced me to a person whom he addressed only as Hakob. That man was Melik-Hakobian from Persia. While others talked and argued loudly, the young man from Persia, who seemed



between thirty- and thirty-five-years old, sat in one corner of the room and listened. He was an unknown salaried bookkeeper at an Armenian's store.

The general impression Melik-Hakobian initially left on me was his awareness of the intellectual and educational superiority of the group. His entire picture was that of a withdrawn and quiet person who considered himself an occasional guest among university-educated people. This dark-complexioned person, with a dark beard and black curly hair, seemed to be mysteriously observing and studying us all through his blue-colored glasses, with blood-shot, sickly, and tired eyes. Perhaps lacking self-confidence, he did not dare to engage in controversy with people of higher education. Senekerim Artsruni told me that the man had numerous unpublished works and could be useful to the newly established *Mshak*.

I asked Melik-Hakobian to also attend my editorial meetings. Just as I had noticed him before, he continued to conduct himself similarly in my meetings for a long time. He sat quietly in the corner of the room, listened to the conversations, smoked continuously, and seldom participated in the discussions. One day he brought one of his unpublished works, which I remember was *Khlvlík*. I openly expressed my opinion that the descriptive language was unique, but I did not like the novel's format. I considered it inappropriate to publish a novel in a newspaper, a weekly at that.

Thereafter, Melik-Hakobian started visiting me on non-meeting days. I explained my plans and direction. I was a twenty-six-year-old young man and had a European education; I was not familiar with the East. I told him, "You have seen the world, you are a Persian, a native of the East, you have traveled in Turkish Armenia [Western Armenia], give us original material." I would tell him often, "Leave the imaginary alone, and give us the reality, that which exists, that which you have seen and know; describe life in Persia as it exists."

During that particular conversation, we conceived the plan for *Parskakan namakner* [Persian Letters]; also the pseudonym *Raffi* was born, by which Hakob Melik-Hakobian henceforth became renowned in our literary world. From that moment on, Raffi's fortune linked with that of *Mshak*.<sup>142</sup>



*Grigor Artsruni, editor of Mshak*

The year 1872 was a fortunate year in Hakob's life. It was also a notable year for the Caucasus Armenians. The first issue of *Mshak* came out on January 1, 1872, and the paper sold out within a few hours. It was to play a major role in the national lives of the Armenians in the Caucasus. Hakob's association with *Mshak* became a fortunate turning point in his life. For years, he had dreamed of such an opportunity. He had plans to establish a press and publish a newspaper in Salmast, a place devoid of intellectuals but full of enemies. The press, of which Hakob dreamed and considered the "mouthpiece of enlightenment," was established now, not in backward Salmast, but in the intellectual environment of Tiflis. It became a reality not just by his efforts but also by the efforts of a group of educated, liberal, and enthusiastic young people led by Grigor Artsruni, a European-educated young man with financial



*Mshak, No. 3, January 20, 1872.*

capabilities and social graces. Thus, Hakob was to participate in a new and great enterprise. What Hakob was searching for and dreaming of were exactly what he had found. He immersed himself in the new endeavor with all his being.

At the start of *Mshak's* publication, the university crowd left Artsruni for various reasons, and the paper was left in the hands of a few dedicated people—financially poor but morally rich—who selflessly endured hostilities.

Years later Raffi described the meetings and the zeal of the young men in an extensive article he titled *Hay yeritasardutiune* (The Armenian Youth). The part referring to the meetings follows:

A certain period in the lives of every generation is precious. I can never forget the year 1872 when Artsruni began publishing *Mshak*. What kind of life existed in Tiflis, and what were the conditions in the outer regions? Stagnation prevailed everywhere—a sort of stupor and lifelessness. Suddenly, as if by the stroke of a magical staff, life awakened. No one but a small group of young people believed in the possibility of such an awakening. I remember those beautiful years and those wonderful nights when the group gathered in the editorial office, smoked, and discussed issues. Most of us did not even have decent clothes to wear, and we came with tattered shoes. Despite all, and with fatalistic hopes, we all believed that we would achieve a bright future.

At the beginning, a group of university-educated young men gathered around *Mshak*, but they soon dispersed, as if the work was alien to them; they did not believe in the future of the publication. There remained those of us without diplomas—self-educated children—stressed with failure, persecuted, yet still dignified children. These people raised *Mshak's* banner on their shoulders.

With the departure of the university-educated, *Mshak's* challenge was left to us. The editor made an accurate analogy when he said that he let the scribes and the Pharisees go and surrounded himself with the fishermen—the people's unspoiled children.

I can never forget the noisy meetings in the editorial office, as if they took place a few years ago. If I have had a few golden moments in my life, they belonged to that time.

The animated and provoked discussions at the meetings oftentimes lasted until two o'clock in the morning. The small, monetarily deprived, but morally rich group was planning great projects. This Don Quixotic and intensely imaginary zeal, despite sounding somewhat funny, nevertheless, was as beautiful as a baby's smile—a manifestation of a new life. In the midst of heavy intoxication with idealism, every one of us forgot the severity of his condition and thought about the public's welfare.

The meetings ended after midnight. The group dispersed into the streets when all the establishments had already closed. Yet, the

discussions continued in the quiet and deserted streets. At those hours when the fortunate people of Tiflis were sleeping in their glorious bedrooms, the poorly clad wanderers, disturbing the cobblestones on Golovinski Prospekt [Boulevard], were debating important public issues. The snow, the rain, and the cold wind could not drive them into their wretched homes. On the contrary, the elements refreshed them and intoxicated their hot heads. They separated when the morning bells rang, and they went to rest so the next day they would start work with new vigor.<sup>143</sup>

Hakob had found the circle of friends he had long sought. He embraced the work—his life's dream—and dedicated himself to *Mshak* with all his soul and youthful enthusiasm. He foresaw the paper's success in playing an important role for the Armenians. That role was going to be in the editorial and literary fields, where his strength lay. In joining *Mshak*'s editorial staff, his foremost intent was "to stir the public's withered body."<sup>144</sup>

Artsruni's keen mind had already recognized Hakob's literary abilities and his compassion for the common people. For that reason, Artsruni constantly encouraged Hakob to publish stories with realistic depictions. When Hakob had presented his novel *Khvlulik* to Artsruni for publication in *Mshak*, Artsruni had told him, "You have seen the world, you are a Persian, a native of the East, and you have traveled in Turkish Armenia. Give us original material; leave the imaginary alone and give us the reality, that which exists, that which you have seen and know. Describe life in Persia as it exists." Encouraged by Artsruni's request, Hakob abandoned the poetic form and embraced the romantic prose.

Three years after meeting Hakob at the Aladatian's store, Makar Chmshkian saw Hakob again at Artsruni's home. Years later Chmshkian described his encounter as follows:

Three years later, I left the bookstore and worked for *Mshak* as an accountant. One Friday, I was at Artsruni's house writing the subscribers' addresses to mail the newspapers. The doorbell rang. I got up, looked out the office door, and saw a man dressed in European clothes. He seemed familiar, but I could not remember where I had seen him.

"Is Mr. Editor at home?" he asked.

"Wait," I said to the man and went to notify Artsruni.

"I will go and let him in, you finish writing the addresses," Artsruni told me. He went and brought the man into the editorial office.

A few hours later when the man was leaving walking down the stairs, I recognized him as Hakob. Artsruni came in holding a thick notebook and placed it on the desk.

"This manuscript contains a large amount of information about Persia," he said, "we will place these letters on the front pages of the paper."

Artsruni told me that the title of the manuscript was *Parskastani namakner*. A few weeks later, *Mshak* began publishing the letters that were signed with the name *Raffi*. From that time on, the name *Raffi* became renowned.

On January 20, 1872, *Mshak* published *Arajin namak baron Raffi ughevorutiunits Parskastanum* (First Letter of Mr. Raffi's Travels in Persia). It was the first of the twenty-four letters published during 1872 and 1873. The first time the pseudonym *Raffi* appeared in his writings was in this first letter signed, "Yours, Aleksandr Raffi."<sup>145</sup> Thus, Hakob Melik-Hakobian became Raffi. The letters described Raffi's experiences during the journey from Tiflis to Payajuk in 1856, the trips he took in the Urmia region and the travels along the roads from Payajuk to Tavriz. Raffi described with deep anguish the oppression and the dismal economic lives of the Persian Armenians. The letters left a favorable impression on the curious readers. His deep insight of the subjects, the rich and fluent language, and the ability to create realistic and colorful characters revealed Raffi's true literary talent.

Raffi did not leave any account of his pseudonym's origin, and none of his contemporaries recorded any mention by Raffi on how the name *Raffi* came about. Raffi used the name Melikzade (son of a melik) mainly when writing stories and articles about people, as in *Sove* (the Famine). For descriptive articles, travelogues, essays, and editorials he used the pseudonym *Raffi*. Why did the novelist adopt this literary name? Leo made a passing attempt to point out the origin of the name: "Some say that Raffi had selected the name from the Arabic language. Perhaps it is worth mentioning that in the 1860s, one of the singers in the Italian opera performing in Tiflis was named Roffi."<sup>146</sup> Raffi and Artsruni would not have selected the name of some Italian opera singer. More plausible is Leo's assumption of an Arabic origin. M. Veratsin speculated that the name is from the Hebrew word *Rabbi* in the Assyrian pronunciation: "As far as we know, Raffi is an Assyrian word with the same meaning as the Hebrew words *Rabbi* or *Rabbuni*, meaning master or lord. Having studied the Bible, Hakob Melik-Hakobian was familiar with the name *Rabbi*, and used the Assyrian pronunciation of the word."<sup>147</sup>

Vardges Aharonian explained the origin of Raffi's name as follows:

*Makar Chmshkian*

More likely, *Raffi* comes from the Persian root word *Raf*, adopted from the Arabic, which is used as an honorary title given to Persian government officials for their loyal service. For example, *Lisan-i-Dovla*—Nation's Tongue, a title given to the nation's most eloquent speaker. Similar titles are *Ayn-i-Dovla*—Nation's Eye; *Mukhbi-i-Dovla*—Nation's Reporter; *Sayid-i-Dovla*—Nation's Support. Among the many such titles is *Raf-i-Dovla*, which means one who elevates the nation. In Persian, the word *Rabbi* is used as one of many words praising God.

Raffi dedicated his entire life to the supreme purpose of uplifting the unfortunate Armenian people intellectually, educating them politically, and raising them spiritually. Thus, he hoped to

elevate and restore the nation with the hands of enlightened Armenians. It is reasonable that Raffi would name himself the Armenian *Raf-i-Dovla*, meaning one who raises the nation.<sup>148</sup>

Soghomon Melik-Hakobian had come to the same conclusion for the name's origin, based on Raffi's deep knowledge of the Persian language and literature. "It was his intense desire to elevate and enlighten his people that he had chosen the Persian word *Raf-i*, meaning to elevate to a higher level."<sup>149</sup>

Raffi's widow, Anna Raffi, shed some light on the origin of her husband's pen name in her introduction to *Parskakan patkerner*. She wrote, "Beginning with its initial issues, *Mshak* started publishing *Raffi namaknere* (Raffi's Letters). The letters were selected from the novel *Salpi*. Raffi was one of the heroes, a doctor, and the letters were his travelogues in Persia."<sup>150</sup>

Hakob had edited *Khvlilik* following the suggestions made by Stepanos Nazariants, and he had added several new chapters, one of which was "Salpi's Letter." After many revisions, Raffi had changed the title of the novel to *Salpi*. The name *Raffi* does not appear in the first and only volume. Perhaps Raffi intended to use the name in the other two volumes, which do not exist; perhaps they were lost, or he never wrote them.

More powerful than Raffi's editorial voice was his literary writing ability. Even his editorials read like literary pieces. He believed and expected that *Mshak*, in the hands of its European and literary editor, was going to help greatly the progress of Armenian literature. From the beginning of his writing career, Raffi's goal was to attract the readers by giving them interesting literary works to read and then guide them toward his intended direction. By joining *Mshak*, Raffi had the opportunity to develop the Armenian novel. An editorial announced the paper's purpose to promote the novel genre, which was practically absent from Armenian literature. Raffi considered the novel the most effective means of attracting readers and instilling in them the dreams of an ideal society. Realizing the paucity of intelligible works to nourish the readers' minds, Raffi determined to give the public comprehensible and enjoyable works. He argued that books in grabar were difficult for most people, and he pointed out that the few works translated into the vernacular were inadequate because they were textbooks and above the general-public's understanding. He considered translated works alien to Armenians; he would say, "The meal at someone else's house does not sate one's stomach."<sup>151</sup> Raffi explained that novels played a most important role in the lives of nations because they depicted a nation's morale and mores for the future generations. Raffi knew that "the Armenians, as eastern people, have a vivid imagination of their natural environment and strong inclinations toward novels and fantasy.



The desire to read has to be instilled in people, and one way is to give them novels and poetry. What other writing can be close to the people's hearts than a novel, which, as a magical mirror, describes the lives of people with their beautiful and ugly attributes?"<sup>152</sup>

From 1872 through 1873 Raffi filled the pages of the weekly with editorials on current passionate issues, literary articles, and short stories, such as *Anbakht Hripsimen*, *Sove*, *Geghetsik Vartike*, *Kusagrutiun*, and *Mi oravar hogh*, under the pen name Melikzade, all written after arriving in Tiflis in 1870. The stories generated curiosity and excitement among *Mshak's* readers, who read them voraciously and demanded more. Raffi became the first writer of realist literature to expose and describe the oppressed and wretched lives of the Armenians in Persia. The popularity of Raffi's stories increased *Mshak's* sales. Artsruni asked Raffi to become a full time contributor as the literary editor and the editor of articles received from Persia. Raffi had many contacts in Persia whom he constantly urged to send articles to publicize the lives of the Armenians there. Raffi wrote articles relating to political, social, business, and public issues concerning Armenians everywhere. His articles increased the enmity between *Mshak* and *Meghu Hayastani*, and the controversy developed into a deep ideological antagonism,<sup>153</sup> which included attacks on his person. He wrote a series of articles dispelling the rancorous attacks published in *Meghu* and Ejmiatsin's *Ararat* against his writings and person.<sup>154</sup>

When Prelate Khrimian submitted his resignation to the National Assembly in 1873, Raffi criticized the Constitution Committee in the article *K. Polsi Surb Patriarki hrazharume* (The Resignation of Constantinople's Holy Patriarch). Raffi wrote that Khrimian resigned because of the Constitution Committee's improper activities. He pointed out that a constitution formulated for all the Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire did not include any input from those outside of Constantinople. "Imagine; the work of the Constitution Committee has not even crossed the Bosphorus," he wrote. The committee ignored the concerns of the Armenians in the remaining parts of the country. The patriarch proposed the formation of two committees, one for Constantinople, another for the distant regions. Raffi opined that the constitution was inadequate because it did not address the issues concerning the Armenians in the other regions. Khrimian asked the National Committee to re-examine its work to make it equitable for all the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. The committee ignored the patriarch's request and did not even consider it important enough to bring to the National Assembly. The refusal created dissension between the patriarch and the National Committee and its supporters, who proclaimed that the constitution did not need any changes and accused Khrimian of being opposed to it. Khrimian submitted

his resignation to the National Assembly. Raffi read the Constantinople newspaper articles and was surprised that such a regressive thinking prevailed. Raffi, as a progressive thinker, responded to the unfortunate event by writing, "A people who are governed by rigid laws will remain inflexible and will stagnate." The National Assembly examined and found Khrimian's proposals legitimate and asked him to rescind his resignation, which he did.<sup>155</sup>

Upon Khrimian's resignation, Raffi published in *Mshak* a brief biography titled *Mi kani gtser Khrimiani kyankits* (A Few Lines about Khrimian's Life), praising his patriotism and selfless dedication to his nation. Raffi stated that neither Constantinople nor the monasteries on the islands in Lake Van could keep Khrimian confined. He traveled throughout Eastern and Western Armenias and put his thoughts into his long poem *Hravirak araratian*. Raffi considered it the only poem in Armenian literature that expressed with such mesmerizing force all the painful emotions that awaken within a person watching the ruins of the fatherland. After becoming a vardapet, he was assigned to Varag Monastery. Raffi described Khrimian's difficulties with prelates and vardapets, whose comfort Khrimian had disturbed with his reform efforts. Khrimian showed that the vardapets' function was not to remain in their cells and "enlarge their girths with peoples' contributions." He was the peoples' friend and servant. He became the first Armenian cleric who left the monastery and preached from the altar about the people's daily needs, spurring them toward education, trade, and knowledge. He did not mention the biblical prophets in his sermons; instead, he resurrected the names of Hayk and Aram in the Christian Church. Soon he found enemies.

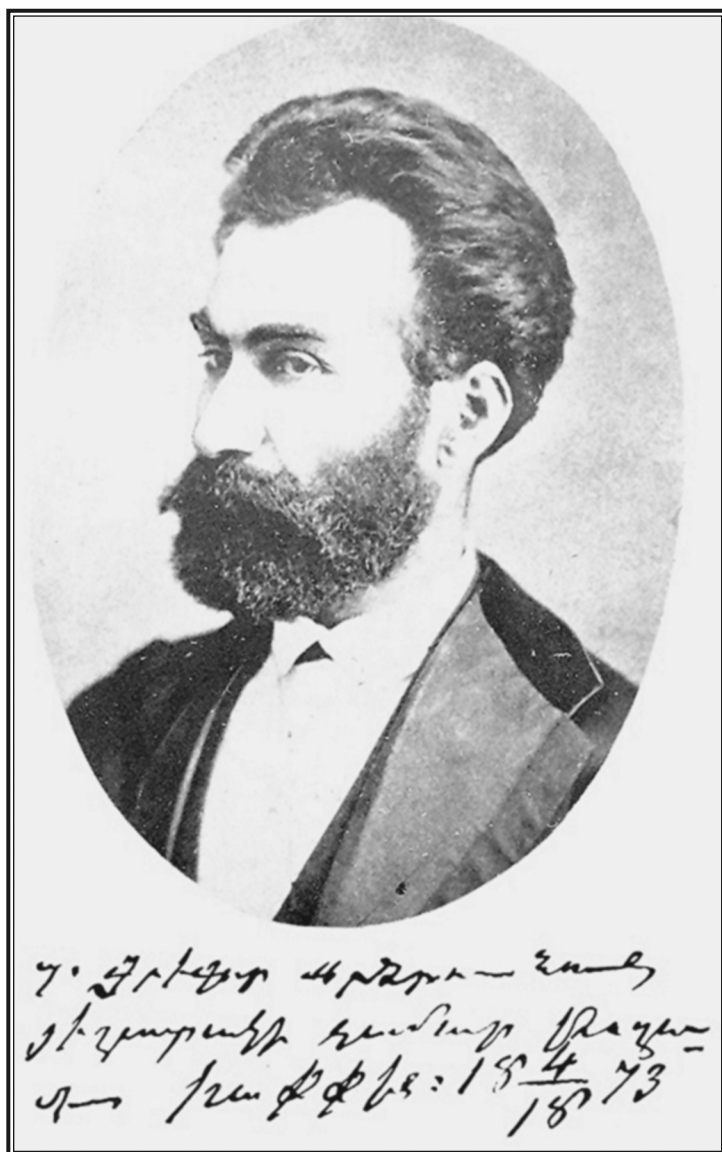
Khrimian was the first Armenian ecclesiastic publisher. In 1857 he received permission from Patriarch Hakob and the Turkish government to move his printing press from Constantinople to Varag Monastery. He established a boarding school and gathered thirty students from the villages to prepare them as teachers for the village schools. For the first time in Vaspurakan, students in a monastery were learning, along with religious subjects, different languages, trades, and the natural sciences. Khrimian instilled in the teachers and the students the love for knowledge. His popularity and his criticism of the vardapets did not sit well with the prelate of Van and several notables. The enmity drove his enemies to hire a Kurd to assassinate him. While traveling on foot from Van to Varag one day, Khrimian encountered the Kurd, pale and shaky.

"Why are you confused?" *Hayrik* asked.

"I wanted to kill you," the Kurd confessed.

"But why did you not kill me?" Khrimian asked calmly.

"God did not let me," the Kurd answered, fell to his knees, and asked



*Raffi presented this portrait to Grigor Artsruni in 1873*  
 (Photo by Perj Proshian)

*Hayrik's* forgiveness.

Khrimian did not even scold his would-be assassin.

Running out of funds for the school and his periodical, Khrimian received permission from Mateos Catholicos to solicit help from the Armenians in the Caucasus. In Tiflis Khrimian appealed for help for his school and publication. The public responded and pledged ten thousand rubles, but the funds never materialized. Despondent, he left for Persia.

In 1862 he was appointed the prelate of Daron at St. Karapet Monastery. Here, too, he encountered enemies. Many of the vardapets who lost control of the Monastery's income resorted to perfidious means and hired several Kurds to assassinate Khrimian. After several incidents of shots fired through his window, *Hayrik* saved himself by escaping to Karin (Erzerum) then to Constantinople. The government arrested four vardapets, condemned them for their criminal acts, and exiled them. They were soon set free because of *Hayrik's* pleas.

In 1887 Raffi dedicated a second poem titled *Mshak* to Khrimian *Hayrik*. The poem was a metaphor addressed to the Armenians to rise and liberate themselves. The censor rejected its publication. When Anna Raffi tried to publish it in 1892, the censor rejected it again. Finally, in 1893 Anna Raffi received permission to publish the poem in a collection of Raffi's works titled *Artsiv Vaspurakani*.<sup>156</sup>

Raffi's fascinating stories in *Mshak* helped to steadily increase the number of subscribers. In the first few months, *Mshak* had only fifty subscribers; by the end of the first year (1872), the number had increased to five hundred; yet, financially it was not self-supporting. Yeramia Artsruni had become too busy to manage the inn he owned on Dvortsova (Dvortsovaya) Street;<sup>157</sup> therefore, he turned its management over to his son, who used the income for *Mshak's* expenses. Grigor let Raffi live at the inn as compensation for his contribution to the paper. This arrangement did not last long when a disagreement arose between father and son. Raffi left and rented a room in Knyaz Tarkhanov's house, near the Sion Church (The Georgian Zion Cathedral).

Out of the planned fifty letters, Raffi published only twenty-four because he lacked enough material for the rest. To gather information and stories for the remaining letters, he wanted to travel to Tehran, "that beautiful city" he had never seen. In his nineteenth letter, published on January 25, 1873, he promised to write about the Armenian gypsies in Persia's Kyazzaz region. Lacking funds, he postponed his travel. Raffi published the last letter on July 19, 1873. He wrote to inform his friend Aftandilian about the delayed visit to Tehran:

March 17, 1873, Tiflis  
Noble Friend, Mr. Avak,

I have received all of your letters. The reason for delaying my letter is my poor health. For now, I have postponed my departure from Tiflis. I cannot definitely tell you when I will leave because various necessities are forcing me to wait.

I will send copies of *Mshak* to the addresses you have provided. I am surprised that the postal service is asking fifteen *kopeks* [one hundredth of a ruble; *italic mine*] for each issue. That is a big impediment for *Mshak's* distribution in Persia . . .

If you have time, please write a short comedy in the dialect of the Gharadagh<sup>158</sup> people.

Yours H[akob] M[irzabek] Melik-Hakobian<sup>159</sup>

Concluding his series of letters from Persia, Raffi began writing commentaries about issues in Constantinople and Western Armenia. Because *Mshak* did not have reporters there, Raffi collected news items from Constantinople newspapers and occasional visitors and wrote as a virtual reporter. He published the first letter, *Namak K. Bolisits* (Letter from Constantinople), in 1873, where he opined: "Subject people within a country, with some exceptions, live under similar conditions. If today a group lost their rights and properties, the same might happen to others tomorrow."<sup>160</sup> His prescience was prophetic. His prediction unfortunately was aptly demonstrated when the Kemalist government embarked on a campaign to destroy the Kurds, after Turkey had annihilated its Armenian population.





## Financial Difficulties and New Directions

While Raffi struggled to make a living in Tiflis and wrote articles for *Mshak*, Anna Raffi established a school in her home in Payajuk and taught language and handicraft to a group of boys and girls, two of whom were Raffi's sisters.<sup>161</sup>

During those financially difficult days, Raffi's brother Arshak Mirzaian came to attend the Nersisian Academy and lived with him. In 1872 Arshak became ill and died in the hospital. The distress from his brother's death and the inability to pay for Arshak's hospital and proper burial expenses affected Raffi emotionally. He had confided to Shirvanzade<sup>162</sup> the dire circumstance surrounding Arshak: "Fate had it so that one of my brothers came to Tiflis relying on me for support, and in a short time he died. I did not have money for his burial. Three times I went to ask Artsruni for help, but each time I returned. I could not bring myself to reveal my pain to even someone who could understand my condition without me explaining."<sup>163</sup> Somehow, Raffi found three rubles and purchased a coffin. At night with the help of two peasants, he placed the coffin in a cart and went with a priest to bury his brother. Raffi poured his bitter emotions into the short story *Spandanots* (Slaughter House), which did not appear in *Mshak* or elsewhere during his lifetime. Anna Raffi published it in 1890 and again in 1891.

An editorial in the May 10, 1873, issue of *Mshak* announced Raffi's intention to publish a series of ten volumes titled *Punj* (Bouquet), which were to contain *Khvlilik*, *Zabrumar*, all the letters as *Chanaparhortutiun Parskastani* (Travels in Persia), and other stories. The editorial appealed for financial sponsors. Unable to find any, and despite his existing financial difficulties, Raffi used his meager funds and published on February 28, 1874, volume one that contained a collection of his poems. It found a wide and enthusiastic reception by the readers; however, not everyone had the same sentiment. *Meghu Hayastani* published invective articles written by Haykuni (Hovakim Geghamian, the future Yeghishe kahana Geghamian). Ejmiatsin's *Ararat* published several articles by Galust Shermazanian denouncing some of the poems' anti-church and anti-cleric themes. Raffi did not remain silent against the hostile criticism. He considered Haykuni's polemics a "useless literary discourse" and Shermazanian's articles a "self appointed advocacy."

In July 1874 Raffi published volume two of *Punj*, containing a collection of short stories about the lives of Persian Armenians and part one of *Harem*. In the introduction, Raffi referred to the criticism the first volume had generated, even the one by Artsruni, and stated he was pleased with the reaction because it created unprecedented healthy criticism:

With these few short stories, we saw it appropriate to first encourage the readers' love for reading in their [mother] tongue and improve their taste for such literature. When readers demand more elaborate stories such as novels, we will offer them in the future. *Meghu* offered a few comments about *Punj*, volume one. We did not expect more when healthy or impartial criticism is lacking. Let the malicious people say what they want; our confidence remains the same. We are far from seeking glory, but we are glad that we have dropped in the savings box of the public's education an insignificant *Luma* [an Armenian coin of small denomination]; this is all we have.<sup>164</sup>

The public's response of praise and anger toward the first volume of *Punj* had pleased Raffi. The reaction showed that the book had affected readers and that feelings were still alive among the people. Haykuni, who had called volume one "a colorless and scentless bouquet," surprisingly praised Raffi after reading volume two. He wrote in *Meghu*, "In this area, a young man is visible and known to everyone. To warm up, he blows his breath onto his hands, begs protection for his weak eyes from the dim light of an ordinary candle, and perhaps his stomach hurts from hunger. Despite all, this patient young man works passionately for our literature. We do not know whether his circumstances have improved; but I know this for certain that even today, Mr. Raffi works with patience and love for the Armenian literature; perhaps he constantly utters to himself Balzac's words: 'Oh my noble and ungrateful nation.'"<sup>165</sup> These words showed that Raffi no longer was the person described by Grigor Artsruni as the "withdrawn, quiet, and insecure" Hakob Melik-Hakobian; but "he was self-confident Raffi," aware of his mission. The earlier short stories, such as *Geghetsik Vartike* and *Anbakht Hripsimen*, emphasized the oppression of Persian Armenians, subjected to unbridled and arbitrary violence, rape, and depredation; the stories in volume two of *Punj* dealt with social inequalities, exploitation, greed, and extravagance. Literary figures like Gamar Katipa praised the two *Punj* volumes. In August 1874 Raffi had sent twenty copies of each volume with a letter to Gamar Katipa asking his opinion. After reading *Harem*, Katipa wrote an enthusiastic and emotional letter dated



September 5, 1874, to Raffi from Nor Nakhijevan:

Your prose, in its internal and external forms, in its diction and contemporary subjects, and with all its qualities, is a new phenomenon in our newly born literature. Without wounding anyone's ego, without wresting a single leaf from someone's laurels, without degrading anyone's dignity, I declare to you that neither Abovian nor Nazariants nor Taghiadiants, no one, not one of your previous colleagues, has had the literary significance and influence that you will have, if only you do not deviate from your path that is the truest path.

You imperceptibly arouse our people's lethargic spirit that your predecessors vainly labored to awaken with fanfare and a thousand and one cries; yet they failed, despite their talents and abilities because they reproached the nation and the people. Someone attempting to awaken the people must have a different kind of strength, which they did not have, but you have.

You are one of those poets in whom resides the old prophets' everlasting divine spirit that stirs within you until it shows the nation its banner to follow the right path. I need not continue. You are one of those messianic poets for whom we were searching, but we could not find until now.

Write about that subject more and more. Would you believe that by reading your *Harem*, a thousand feelings ignited and excited in me, squeezed tears from my eyes, and provoked love and hate in me? You dominated my entire being and took my soul in whichever direction you wished. Why? because you are a poet in its utmost sense.<sup>166</sup>

The letter showed how Gamar Katipa recognized Raffi's great literary talent. It was a testimony to a broad-minded person of pure spirit, who appreciated the value of someone else in the same field, without envy or jealousy. Himself a literary idol, Gamar Katipa did not waver to greet with open and sincere enthusiasm and praise the appearance of a rising talent, Raffi, whom he considered "a new face in our newly born literature." Gamar Katipa foresaw Raffi's literary future. Few writers, and people in general, selflessly praise others; Gamar Katipa was one of those exceptional people.<sup>167</sup>

Many consider *Harem* one of Raffi's weakest works. Despite that, the influence of *Harem* was so great that it was translated into Russian, English, and German. In 1876 it was translated into Persian, not to introduce the

author's work to Persian readers, but to harm him (more about this later). Even hostile *Meghu* was unable to hide its admiration. An article by Haykuni praised Raffi by stating that the description of life in a harem was natural and beautiful, and that Raffi had achieved his purpose by giving the public a book to read. In 1884 Arthur Leist<sup>168</sup> sent a letter to Raffi via *Mshak* requesting his picture and copies of *Harem* and *Jalaleddin* (see later) to introduce them to German readers. Leo Rubenli (Abgar Hovhannisian), the editor and publisher of *Armenische Bibliothek* (Armenian Library) translated both and a few of Raffi's other stories and published them in volume three of *Armenische Bibliothek*.<sup>169</sup> Constantinople papers, which did not speak kindly about Raffi because of his critical articles, praised *Harem*. *Masis* weekly of February 15, 1886, stated that *Harem* was first class writing and that because of the stories in *Punj*, volume two, Raffi had produced vengeful enemies among the wealthy, one of whom was a woman with criminal thoughts.<sup>170</sup>

When Raffi published the two *Punj* volumes, he had recently moved out of Artsruni's inn and lived in the Sololak neighborhood near the Sion Church. During one of his visits, Hovhannes Ter Grigorian, an associate at *Mshak*, witnessed the communication between Raffi and Roza, who lived on the first floor and brought tea to Raffi twice a day. Years later, Ter Grigorian described in an article<sup>171</sup> how Raffi had used Roza's image to create the female character in the short story *Ukhtyal miandznuhi* (Female Votary), which appeared in *Punj*, volume two. Ter Grigorian's account demonstrated Raffi's deep perception of the human character:

Upon entering the alley next to the Sion Church, a narrow street on the left led to Ekzarshskaya Street, and at a short distance ahead, a side alley on the right led to the church. On the left and across from this alley, a small door opened into a small courtyard, from where stairs led to Raffi's apartment. The house was two-storied. On the lower level lived the beautiful Roza, and on the second floor lived Raffi. The modest apartment had a small and a larger room, if one can call a two-by-three-meters room large. The larger room was the living room, and the small room was a bedroom and workroom, with a bed and a desk; the furniture was even more modest. The bedroom window opened onto the balcony overlooking the Kur River, and a door from the living room led unto the balcony, which was furnished with a desk and two chairs. The view from the balcony was lovely as the river flowed calmly under it, and the surrounding was peaceful and conducive for Raffi to write. In that apartment, the talented writer wrote *Ukhtyal*

*miandznuhi*, and he published the two *Punj* volumes.

During all the years I knew Raffi closely, I had seen him without his eyeglasses only twice. The first time was at my house when Raffi lifted my son, who grabbed the glasses off his face. He put my son down and quickly retrieved his glasses. The second time was when I was waiting for him in his apartment. He came hurriedly, confused and without his hat and glasses. A few seconds later, Mrs. Roza brought Raffi's hat and glasses.

"Excuse me, Mister, my husband becomes violent when he gets drunk," the lovely Roza said with tears in her beautiful blue eyes. "Here are your hat and glasses. Again I apologize, a thousand times."

What kind of an apology was this? From Roza's voice, I heard notes of love, but there were tears on her lovely cheeks.

Raffi put his glasses on immediately, but I had already noticed an unusual anger in his eyes.

"Brother, that worthless drunkard struck me with a stick and knocked off my hat and glasses," Raffi uttered breathlessly.

"Your eyes could have been hurt by that strike," I said.

"No, the stick hit my hat and dislodged the glasses."

"You must file a complaint against that man, I will be a witness."

"No, it is not worth it," Raffi said.

"But that incident could happen again, and might have bad consequences. The drunkard is your neighbor," I cautioned him.

"It does not matter; Roza knows how to refrain him. In her presence, her husband is a pussycat. Everyday Roza brings me a samovar, and I pay her a small amount for it monthly. She is a beautiful woman, who transforms her husband with her enchanting gaze. I do not want to sever that bewitching woman's visits to my place," Raffi said with a smile.

At six o'clock every morning and evening, the balcony enlivened when dainty Roza brought the *samovar* and placed it on the table with charming undulations.

"Would you like tea?" Roza asked in Russian, then in Armenian.

"Please, I would be grateful," Raffi responded.

Roza poured a cup of tea and extended it through the window to Raffi, who put his pen down, rested his head on his hands, and from the top of his glasses looked and looked at the dainty young

woman, who radiated childlike innocence.

"Roza!" her husband called with a boorish, coarse voice.

"I am coming," she answered in her delicate and melodic voice, running toward her husband, and as always having something in her hands.

Again, Raffi took his pen and poured his harsh sentences and bitter poems that expressed his sadness, his heart's sorrow, his complaints against life's injustices, and his compassion toward the exploited, the vilified, and the unjustly and horribly restrained.

"Would you like some more tea?" Roza asked, extending her hand toward the empty cup.

"Roza, let your hand remain like that," Raffi said.

As he stared at her hand, Raffi's heavy breathing revealed the storm that had arisen in his anguished heart.

Roza took the empty cup and remained still with her arm extended. Raffi stared delightfully at her hand for a long time. Then she filled the cup with tea and handed it to Raffi, all the while keeping her eyes on him as she coquettishly straightened her apron.

"Mister, why do you not come out onto the balcony for a minute?" Roza asked. "See how the breeze from the Kur is so fresh and clean."

"I do not wish to," Raffi answered.

Every morning and evening, the two repeated the same question and answer; but Raffi would not go onto the balcony. The novelist was younger than he appeared. Perhaps he feared getting too near to Roza and becoming intoxicated by her warmth and sweetness. Was it possible that Raffi loved that beautiful woman and was charmed by her blue eyes? Yes, Raffi loved Roza very much, but with pure fatherly love. He would not even think of stroking her hair or holding her hand. Raffi loved Roza as a beautiful but unfortunate child, who had fallen into the clutches of a drunken beast. Roza obeyed Raffi's every wish and did whatever he asked. She had found a man who had sympathy for her and loved and cherished her. She believed that this kind man, who wrote so much and often wept while writing, would not dishonor her. Therefore, it was natural for Roza to trust him. For Raffi, the beautiful Roza was a model; for Roza, Raffi was an artist. When I read in Raffi's novels descriptions of blue eyes, marble-white hands, delicate lips, and white aprons, I immediately pictured the graceful and youthful Roza.

"Mister, what is it that you write about so much?" Roza asked, looking shyly at the writer while straightening her white apron with her delicate fingers.

"I am writing songs and stories," Raffi answered.

"Stories? Yes, I know some. My grandmother always told me stories when I was a child. I know the one about a thin, pious young man who defeated a bad giant. So, who told you the stories, your grandmother or grandfather?"

"No one, I myself invent them," Raffi responded.

"You invent them? Is it possible to invent stories? And the songs, do you also invent the songs? Excuse me, Mister, I would like to ask you something, but I am afraid you will get angry."

"I will not get angry," Raffi assured her. "Ask whatever you wish."

"Please sing one of your songs," Roza pleaded.

"I do not know how to sing," Raffi replied.

"How is it that you write songs, but you do not know how to sing? You are mocking me then!"

"I am not mocking you, child; I do not know how to sing. Go and rest, it is already late. God be with you."

"Good night, Mister. I wish to see you in my dreams like the enchanting prince who always wanders about but cannot approach his adored beauty," Roza said as she flirtingly tossed her head back and shuffled away.

Left alone, Raffi would write incessantly until dawn, when the sun's rays made him pull the dark curtains and rest.

During his early years of 1868–1875 in Tiflis, Raffi came to see the reprobate lives of the wealthy Armenians and their sons and daughters' fake and pretentious European lifestyle. His experiences and observations helped him to write a series of stories with such titles as *Shushan*, *Moda* (Fad), *Pogh* (Money), and *Shraylutiun* (Extravagance).

Firmly established in the literary field and respected by the reading public and literary people, Raffi grew confident in his literary ability. Encouraged by *Punj's* success, Raffi planned to publish the third volume in the middle of 1874 but was unable to for lack of funds. Raffi appealed to the *Punj* subscribers for the moneys owed him, but his appeal was in vain. Unable to sell enough of the two *Punj* volumes to raise the necessary funds, he abandoned plans to publish the intended volumes. He had hoped to raise enough funds for his planned travel to Tehran and collect information for the

remaining twenty-six letters. Ghazaros Aghayan, who worked at the Enfiajian printing press, where the *Punj* volumes were printed, witnessed and commented that unbound copies of *Punj* remained with the printer for non-payment of the printing costs. *They were sold by weight as wrapping paper*<sup>172</sup> (italics mine). Years later, Raffi reflected on his condition when he wrote a letter dated April 15, 1880, to Bishop Sukias Parzian of Ejmiatsin, seeking his help to solicit subscribers for *Kaytser*; he said, "I abandoned the publication of the remaining volumes of *Punj*, because I had financial losses."<sup>173</sup>

Despite his dire financial condition, Raffi was pleased that he was able to provide literature for the enlightenment and the cultural progress of the people, but emotionally he could not survive for long. Under these circumstances, in 1874 Raffi wrote the article *Heghinakneri vichake* (Condition of the Authors), comparing the income of authors with those of shoemakers and carpenters:

In general, writers among us are poor people. If one of us has written something, that work of many years will remain unpublished. What can the author do? His enthusiasm wanes and he becomes hopeless and stops writing. He realizes that his profession, in addition to depriving him of a living, does not even provide moral satisfaction.

The issue of modern education has already risen. We often hear that schools must employ new methods and systems of education. We must destroy the old and stale school system and establish a new one. Do we have textbooks for such necessary reforms? No one is thinking about that. Why do we not have books for scientific, technical, and literary education?

The shoemaker makes a living with his profession. The carpenter supports a family with his trade. Yet, a writer is unable to support even himself. People do not appreciate the product of his profession.

Let us not consider the publications in other nations, or those publishing organizations in Constantinople; let us mention only the Mkhitarists in Venice and Vienna. They rescued our manuscripts from rotting in our monasteries, and they gifted us original and translated books. They spread the love of reading among us and familiarized us with European knowledge; meanwhile, they enriched their monasteries.

The Ejmiatsin printing house could have done the same thing, if its activities were not confined, and its members consisted of



*Hovhannes Ter Grigorian*

knowledgeable priests dedicated to writing. Unfortunately, Ejmiatsin is involved in printing old interpretations of the Bible.<sup>174</sup>

Raffi continued to write passionate articles and editorials against whatever was old and whoever resisted new ideas. One such article was *Khavari arbanyaknere* (Associates of Darkness), written in 1875 but not published until Anna Raffi published it posthumously in 1890. He criticized the attacks on liberal writers, who strived to enlighten the people. He opined that historically every time activists in a society tried to elevate the masses from a depraved and debased state, they became victims of prejudices. Raffi gave examples from Armenia's ancient history:

Let us look at our history. Trdat [Drtad] the Great, who converted Armenia to Christianity, received the cup of poison for enlightening the people. The people persecuted Saint Gregory until he left and secluded himself and passed away in obscurity. His son Aristakes was poisoned. Nerses the Great committed suicide. *Mshak* is the protector of the national language and literature. It shows the path leading to knowledge and enlightenment . . . We do not have such things as old and new generations; both are similar to Egyptian mummies, with the only difference that the new generation has become debased and useless, and it has lost its ethnic identity.

We have deceived ourselves in rejoicing over trifling issues. We were encouraged by everything that was Armenian and hated everything that was foreign. We named our children Tigran and Ashkhen and placed pictures of Hayastan [Armenia] on our walls. What was the result of these patriotic expressions? A bitter self-deception. When we examined ourselves, we realized that a pathetic emptiness ruled our lives . . .

We have a few anonymous young persons who are accused as traitors, deniers of their race, heretics, and other falsehoods. Those young people are our strength.<sup>175</sup>

With similar articles, Raffi tried to galvanize the Armenians toward progress and enlightenment, urging them to abandon the old practices and embrace the new. With these thoughts in mind, Raffi embraced the teaching career to nature young minds.





## Teaching in Tavriz

In May 1874 Archbishop Andreas Hovhannisian became prelate of Atrpatakan. He was a well-educated, modest, and kind vardapet, whose first attention was to the deplorable condition of the school. In 1852 Prelate Sahak Saturian had established the school and named it Nersisian School in memory of Catholicos Nerses V, with the intention of educating the Armenian youth of Atrpatakan. After the prelate's death, the school stagnated. The new prelate preached from the altar and discussed at meetings the importance of education and of new teaching methods. He explained that if the people remained indifferent, he would be unable to do anything alone. The community leaders realized the cultural benefits expounded by the prelate, promised their support, and immediately raised funds that reached ten thousand *tumans*. He helped to prepare an educational plan and gathered educated and concerned people to form a board of trustees. In 1875 he renamed the school Aramian. The prelate worked with several progressive community members, opened a library next to the school, and filled it with Armenian and foreign languages books brought from Tiflis and Constantinople. Thus, educational and cultural activities took place among the Armenian communities in Persia, particularly in Tavriz.

*Mshak* was still a weekly in 1874, and Raffi was one of its editors. His salary was fifty rubles a month,<sup>176</sup> which was insufficient for him to live on in Tiflis and provide for his large family in Salmast, or to bring his family to Tiflis, where the cost of living was much higher. This and the separation from his family for so long urged Raffi to seek a better income. In the autumn of 1874 Raffi attempted to relocate to Tavriz. He wrote a letter to Archbishop Hovhannisian and asked for a teaching position at the Aramian School. Raffi's letter remained unanswered. In a letter dated January 20, 1875, to his friend Hambardzum Karapetian, a teacher at the Aramian School, Raffi inquired about the request for a teaching position he had sent to the prelate and the prelate's rejection of it:

Write to me as much as you know about the reason why the prelate rejected my request for a teaching position at the school; I am

curious to find out. I do not know why the prelate did not answer my letter. Is he that proud? Does he not know I have the ability to write against him? Lately, the paper has received so many letters complaining about him, but I did not publish them to spare his reputation. I allowed *Mshak* to publish only one letter, sent by an anonymous person, and I removed many sections dealing with personal attacks on the prelate.<sup>177</sup>

Hambardzum Karapetian wrote to Raffi and informed him that he had offended the prelate by publishing the anonymous letter, and that the prelate had accused Raffi of authoring the letter for having a grudge against him. The reason for the prelate's refusal to answer Raffi was that a few influential people had opposed giving Raffi a teaching position. Raffi responded to Karapetian with a letter written on March 24, 1875, to further explain the reason for publishing the "offensive" letter. Raffi explained that the publication of letters to the editor was determined by the editorial staff and not by him alone, or any other individual. He stated:

One can forgive the prelate for having the wrong opinion about a person whom he does not know, and especially when it seems he is unaware of editorial rules . . . If I had any grudge against him, I would not have written anonymously. My identity is well known; holding a grudge in the literary world has no meaning. It would have been very cruel of me to dishonor anyone for such a reason.

As for being offended by the prelate for ignoring my request, that is very childish. Regardless of whose fault, refusing my request does not matter. I do not have a grudge against anyone. If you see the prelate, give him my message that public figures should not shy away or get discouraged by misunderstandings. One must have a strong will and a firm conviction to push the national priority forward.<sup>178</sup>

At the end of March 1875 Raffi received an invitation to teach at the Aramian School, and he was overjoyed. He left *Mshak* to enter the educational field. He already knew about the school's condition from his earlier visits to Tavriz. He was going with definite ideas to improve and elevate the school's educational status. Raffi informed his friend in a letter dated May 22, 1875, that he was going to leave Tiflis at the end of the month and would see him in Tavriz in the middle of June.<sup>179</sup> Raffi left Tiflis at the beginning of June for Tavriz, where he met Karapetian, and together they worked on the educational

plans for the coming school year. Afterward, Raffi went to Payajuk to see his family.<sup>180</sup> On July 1, 1875, Raffi wrote a letter to Karapetian informing him about his poor health, but he hoped to be well enough to leave for Tavriz at the end of the month. In a second letter dated July 28, 1875, he again wrote to Karapetian to inform him that his health had improved and that he would leave Payajuk on July 30 in order to be present at the school ceremonies on August 3. He mentioned that his delay was due to the prelate's visit to Salmast and his need for assistance in some matters.<sup>181</sup> In 1876 Raffi had already settled in Tavriz. He again saw his friend Aftandilian and confided in him about his condition and financial difficulties:

When they offered me the teaching position at the Aramian School, I accepted it with joy in my heart and immediately traveled to Persia. I love Tiflis very much, but living expenses are very high there. Even though I was managing somehow, I was always away from my family. If I had brought my family to Tiflis, I would have incurred large expenses that I could not afford. Now I can live comfortably in Tavriz with my family because the living conditions here are favorable. I especially love to educate our new generation. The other advantage is that in tranquility I can prepare my works for publication and send articles to *Mshak*.<sup>182</sup>

After living in Tiflis for five difficult years, and deprived of adequate living conditions, Raffi's health had suffered drastically. When he arrived in Tavriz, he was practically a skeleton. Aftandilian described Raffi's physical condition:

I had not seen Raffi for five years. The indigent black days and the bitter living had oppressed him so such that he had almost become a skeleton. Deep furrows had formed on his face and forehead. He could not see well without glasses. His features were somber, his voice was hoarse, and his short stature seemed even shorter. One thing that had not changed was his proudly upheld head, which he did not lower in front of anyone. This was one of his identifying characteristics.<sup>183</sup>

Raffi had suffered poor eyesight for many years. He referred to his condition in the introduction to *Salpi*, indicating that he had poor eyesight as early as 1863, when he had completed the final editing of the novel. Anna Raffi noted the following at the end of the book: "Due to his poor eyesight and inability to copy the first volume, the author of *Salpi* gave the manuscript to a clerk to

copy. Because [the clerk] was unfamiliar with grammatical rules, our work is full of unforgivable errors.”<sup>184</sup>

With the opening of the Aramian School, a new era opened for the Persian Armenians. Raffi came to Tavrız full of hope and renewed spirit. He enthusiastically devoted his time to teaching and to his literary work. He edited the novel *Kaytser* and other incomplete works. Aftandilian described Raffi’s daily occupation: “In the daytime, Raffi worked at the school; in the evenings he settled comfortably and wrote vigorously. In a few months, he had changed and become cheerful, as if he had not seen miserable days. His demeanor showed profound satisfaction with his present condition.”<sup>185</sup>

At the beginning of 1876 Pilipos Vardanian planned to publish in Saint Petersburg the *Luma* monthly, supported by the wealthy Mkrtich Sanasarian. Vardanian invited Raffi to send articles. Raffi accepted the invitation and sent him an encouraging letter, dated March 20, 1876. He informed Vardanian that he would send him thirty to fifty pages on the twentieth of each month, and that he had already given an entire novel to a clerk to copy. In response to two letters from Vardanian, Raffi informed him that he would send long novels to last several months, the first being *Khachagoghi hishatakarane* (Memoirs of a Cross Thief). In a letter dated November 6, 1876, he informed Vardanian that he had mailed the first part consisting of 475 pages. He included a short background of the novel, stating that he had written it during the years 1872–1874.<sup>186</sup> Vardanian did not receive permission to publish *Luma*. Consequently, Raffi postponed completing the work and went on to write other novels.

At the beginning of 1876 Abgar Hovhannisian received permission to publish *Pordz*<sup>187</sup> monthly. Hovhannisian sent a letter dated February 23, 1876, to Raffi in Tavrız, asking him to contribute to the paper. The letter stated:

Finally, I was able to realize my wish, which I had discussed with you several times. Starting on July 1, I will publish *Pordz* monthly in Tiflis. Financially, it will be secure; I will pay contributors from ten to twenty rubles. As far as I know, this will be the first time that a paper compensates writers.

Of course, you have already guessed the purpose of my writing. I am reminding you of your promise to contribute, and I have no doubt that you will participate. I want to add that a writer of your caliber deserves more compensation than the maximum. I will consider myself fortunate if you send any article for the first issue. In later issues, I want to publish your “Letters from Persia” with your signature. I impatiently wait for your answer. Search your files

and send me any articles. If you do not have anything ready, send me a new piece in a week. I remember you mentioned once that your letters from Persia numbered fifty, but you have published only some of them and discontinued publishing the rest. If you have written all fifty letters and do not intend to continue publishing the rest in *Mshak*, I find it appropriate to publish all fifty letters. I will pay you the same amount for the old as the new ones.<sup>188</sup>

In response to Hovhannisian's offer, Raffi wrote a long article titled *Parskistan*<sup>189</sup> (Persia) during the summer recess and sent it to *Pordz* in June 1876. He dedicated the article to the social-political, educational, and cultural life of the Persian Armenians. He briefly pointed out that certain sects had appeared who were preaching reforms among the Muslim populace. Raffi envisioned the disintegration of Persia's feudal system in these movements. His main complaint, however, was against the Protestant and Catholic missionaries, whom he severely criticized for "coming to the East and fraudulently converting the people," particularly those in the Khosrova Village; although, he was against preventing the missionaries from carrying on their work. He stated, "Persecution encourages the progress and activities of the sects. If a sect does not appeal to the people's fundamental needs, it has no firm grounds and will naturally disappear." Thus, he attributed the missionaries' success to the ignorance and weakness of the local clergy.

Turning to the educational affairs, Raffi attributed its poor condition to the clergy's control of it. He stated that "the clergy took control of the schools and destroyed it," referring to the school's management by the clergy after the departure of Prelate Sahak Saturian, when succeeding prelates had taken over the school and neglected it, causing its physical and academic deterioration. This criticism did not sit well with the clergy, particularly the local Archpriest Father Hovsep.

Life in the Armenian community of Tavriz was relatively calm with no major conflicts. The community welcomed and embraced the national revival and progress. Raffi became a well-respected person in the community, and whenever the wealthy had celebrations, Raffi was always invited, but he seldom attended. He disliked noisy environments and ceremonies. He ate and drank moderately; he liked a few pieces of *khovrats* (grilled meat) and one or two glasses of wine. A good cup of tea and tobacco were his constant companions at home. He drank a few cups of tea and smoked, after which he wrote incessantly. Raffi liked long winter nights and waited eagerly for the season to write undisturbed. Aftandilian dropped by one evening and informed Raffi

of a dinner party at the Simeon Tumanians's home. Aftandilian was certain that also Raffi was invited; he urged Raffi to stop writing and to go with him.

"You know that I do not care for such invitations," Raffi replied. "I know there will be many guests and plenty of good food and drinks; so what can you expect from such a tumult? The unfamiliar foods and the environment exhaust me so much that I need several days to recover. They are fine people, and I am sure that they will forgive our absence. Let us not go. I enjoy small groups, and it would be good to spend the time here at my house."

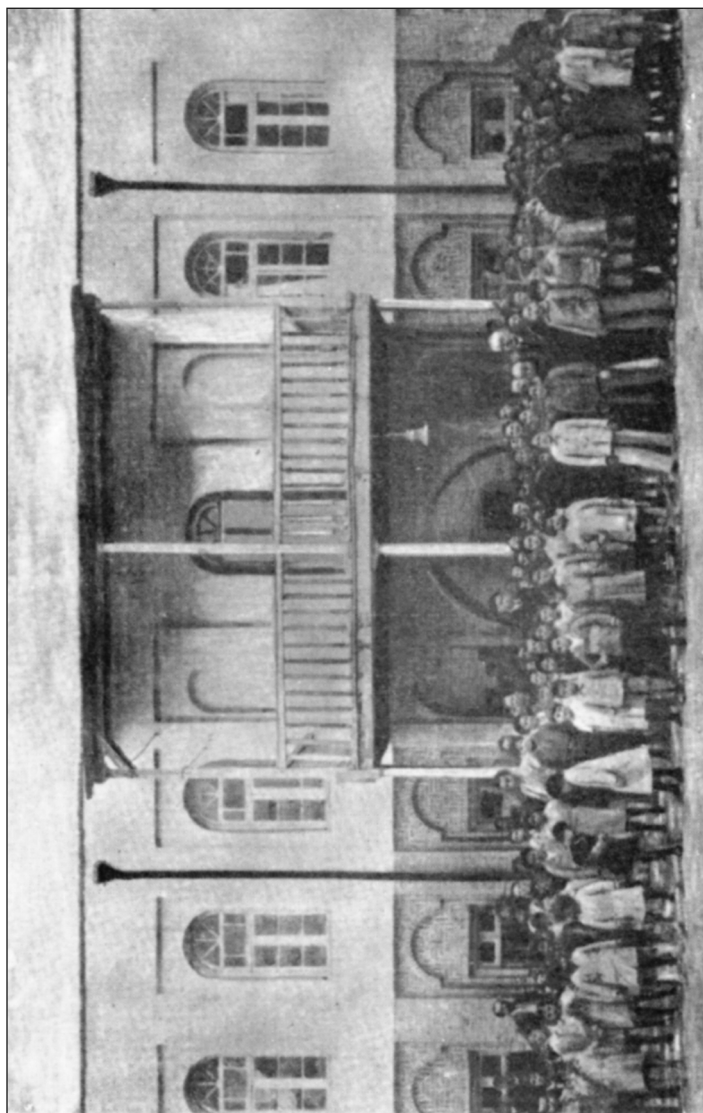
"Your observation is very correct," Aftandilian agreed, "but another necessity is to have a little change in one's life. Celebrations, large gatherings, and various places also have meaning. You need to participate in such crowds to listen and talk. To live detached and secluded is not good; you must go and have contact with the reading public."

"You have a hidden ax for my words," Raffi said, and he agreed to go reluctantly.

At the dinner table, Raffi was quiet and ate little. Occasionally, he looked thoughtfully at the guests. After dinner, the conversation turned to the topic of opening a girls' school with a permanent faculty. Raffi's disposition changed and he spoke excitedly.

"Our mothers, who were not educated in the past, did not give us formal education," he said. "The Armenian woman has remained the same everywhere. I am not speaking about the exceptions. Gentlemen, if you desire to have educated children, you must open a girls' school to prepare educated mothers. The necessity for such an education is evident not only in Tavriz but also among all the Armenians communities in Persia. First, the home provides education, then the school. The educated mother must prepare the child in the crib by singing lullabies. We must give priority to a girls' school. The issue of forming a permanent faculty is premature. That will be possible when well-educated students graduate. Now, we need to keep the current teachers and compensate them well. I have often stated that the community has not treated teachers well, but I must say that our teachers have given very little to the community up to now. Do you see how the public respects *Mshak*? The reason is that it provides the people subjects and information that are necessary and useful in their daily lives. Similarly, our teachers must give the community and the nation well-educated members," Raffi concluded.<sup>190</sup>

Raffi considered education the most important factor for the advancement and political emancipation of the Armenian people. He emphasized the education and progress of the Armenian woman, as he had expressed his thoughts at his host's dinner table. Raffi advanced the idea that unless the Armenian women achieved educational equality with the Armenian men, the



*The Aramian School in Tavriz*

Armenian people would not achieve either spiritual or political liberty. Even in his early public activities, Raffi had planned to establish schools for girls in the Atrpatakan region, and he had worked hard to achieve his goal; but his efforts in Tavriz became a pretext for his opponents to destroy him and eventually expel him from the Aramian School.

Despite the opposition, Raffi persuaded a few people to establish a girls' school. The group formed a committee and assigned Raffi and a young man named Hajinian from Constantinople to prepare the curriculum. Raffi and his wife volunteered to teach without pay. Raffi sent the news to *Mshak* in an article where he emphasized that the majority of the students would be from poor families. Formation of the committee was the easy part, but convincing parents to send their daughters to school was the hard part. The backward people and the ignorant members of the clergy were against the idea. Father Hovsep went from house to house and with invidious accusations persuaded the people to oppose the opening of a girls' school. He would ask, "Where has anyone seen men teaching girls?" Father Hovsep's campaign killed the project. Undaunted, Raffi continued to convince the parents that they follow the example of advanced nations. He expressed his concern to his friend Hambartzum Arakelian<sup>191</sup> in a letter dated January 10, 1876. Arakelian had asked Raffi to contribute to *Haykakan Ashkharh* (Armenian World), published by Father Khoren Stepane, with Arakelian as his assistant:

The condition of the school is not what it should be. To run smoothly, it needs much time. The school's present condition is leading it to destruction, caused by disunity among several groups, something, unfortunately, that is common among the Armenians. The reading room is doing well because we have dedicated young people working there.

From the day I came here, I strived to convince the people of opening a girls' school. The project practically succeeded; but just before its realization, the plan failed because of disagreements. I do not want to mention the names of the agitators, since you are familiar with the people here . . . We will continue to strive for that purpose, and if we do not succeed, at least our conscience is clear that we did our best.<sup>192</sup>

Discussions on opening a girls' school were conducted mostly at the home of wealthy Simeon Tumaniants, whose daughter Iskuhi (Hakovbians) witnessed the meetings. Years later, she described the meetings and other events in an article in *Hairenik Amsagir*.



A man with dark glasses, who taught at the Aramian school, frequently visited my father, who treated him with respect. That man was Hakob Melik-Hakobian, the renowned novelist Raffi. He visited my father during the spring and fall. We had a large garden with many trees and flowers. Every day after six o'clock in the evening, we had several guests. My grandparents greeted the guests before my father came home. He did not receive guests without the presence of my grandparents.

Raffi often came with a vardapet and sometimes with other men. They talked passionately about something I could not understand. Later I found out the discussions were about opening a girls' school. I envied the boys who attended the Aramian School, wondering why my sisters and I could not attend school. One Saturday, my father took me to Raffi's house. We entered a courtyard where a table and chairs were set up under a large tree, with a samovar and teacups arranged on the table. Raffi introduced me to his daughter, Yester, who was my age, and we quickly befriended each other and went to play. Raffi and my father talked passionately about the same topic as that discussed at our house. A short time later, Raffi left with his family for Tiflis [*sic*].<sup>193</sup> The meetings discontinued for some time; but they started again when my uncle Hovhannes Nazarian came from Tehran, and Father Mesrop Papazian and his wife came from Van. After two years of discussions and arguments, the majority of the people were still against opening a girls' school. They said that their daughters were not going to become priests, so they did not need schooling. Fortunately, the minority prevailed and opened a girls' school . . .

On the first day of school, my father took my sisters and me to the school. In a large room, chairs lined against the three walls, and a large desk stood against the fourth. There were many girls in the classroom. Soon other people came, among whom were Father Papazian, Hovhannes Nazarian, Simeon Tumanians, Aleksan Goroian, Z. Ter Ohanian, and Mesrop Taghiadiants. The priest blessed the classroom, after which Taghiadiants congratulated the students for the joyous day. We found out later that Raffi was the first person who had proposed the idea of a girls' school. For that praiseworthy idea, a group of ignorant people succeeded in driving Raffi out of Tavriz and deprived us of his presence . . .

Father Papazian taught religion; Avak Aftandilian, history and geography; and Mrs. Papazian, penmanship and knitting.

Gradually the number of students increased, which required larger and even larger school buildings. At the start of the fifth school year, my father rented a building with six rooms, but realized that the students soon would need a larger building. He bought a building near the prelacy and the church, had it torn down, and built a new school building. He named the school Annaian School, which opened in 1883 with new teachers from Tiflis. The school's location was where years earlier Raffi and his family had lived.<sup>194</sup>

Unsuccessful in starting a girls' school, Raffi embarked on a new project to establish a printing press. At the beginning of 1876 his supporters formed a committee to publish a newspaper and textbooks and gave Raffi the responsibility. He thought that he was finally going to realize his dream, but again financial difficulties and rancorous opposition caused the project to fail.

After the two disappointments, Raffi concentrated on his educational task and writing. He introduced modern teaching methods he had learned during his school days in Tiflis and from Khrimian's school. The bitter experiences at the primitive village school reminded Raffi to teach without threats and punishment. To reprimand naughty and unruly students, he sometimes resorted to strictness by gently pulling their hair. Years later, Harutjun Danielian, one of Raffi's students at the Aramian School, told the following story to Menavor:

One day, we decided to cut our hair very short. The next day, we all went to the classroom and waited for him. We were sure that he would be unable to pull our hair anymore. Raffi came in and noticed our mischievous game; he smiled and called one of the students to recite his lesson. The student floundered and hesitated. Raffi calmly grabbed the student's ear and said, "Now go and shave your ears."<sup>195</sup>

Raffi was vehemently opposed to corporal punishment, and he emphasized his opposition in his novels and during conversations. He criticized the traditional belief that physical punishment was necessary for learning, and he pointed out that it was not due to some evil trait of a teacher, but the result of the people's deep conviction that physical punishment was necessary to teach and discipline a child. Raffi knew that beatings and threats harmed the child's moral education and made him depraved and obstinate. He believed threats made a child timid, cowardly, passive, conforming, and deceitful when he grew up. Raffi was advocating, almost a century earlier, a

twentieth century modern educational philosophy. He said that the use of violence in the educational process must yield to love “because love is more powerful than force.” Prior to Raffi’s arrival at the Aramian School, his friend Hambardzum Karapetian had asked Raffi’s opinion about an incident of corporal punishment at the school. Raffi responded with a letter and explained, “To force a student to learn by physical punishment is a teacher’s shortcoming. It shows the teacher’s inability to inspire love and respect for him. When the students respect the teacher, they will love him and always prepare their lessons; but when the teacher uses physical punishment, it means that he has not yet won the students’ respect.”<sup>196</sup> Raffi believed that mild punishment to prevent a child’s bad behavior was appropriate; otherwise, such behavior would worsen because the child would be convinced that punishment was not forthcoming. Punishment had to be for the committed act—only when certain that the child was at fault. He stressed just punishment for those who were unquestionably responsible for disobedience, not just based on suspicion. Raffi expounded this idea in the novel *Kaytser* with the example of his teacher, Ter Todik, who had a habit of punishing all the students on the first day of school “in case” they had been unruly during holidays and vacations.

Raffi pointed out the importance of love for nature. As a young boy, he roamed the nearby fields, climbed the surrounding mountains, and swam in the Zola River. At the Aramian School, Raffi continued his youthful practices, but this time with his students. He and his students visited various sites around Tavriz, swam in the river, and climbed the nearby hills. Raffi believed that close communication with nature was necessary for the future of the nation. This was a strong theme in many of Raffi’s novels. He considered nature as a refuge from the influence of the public’s ugly morals and customs. Nature cleansed Raffi’s heroes of those moral blemishes, which they had acquired at Ter Todik’s school, such as stupidity, cowardice, and superstitions. He cautioned, however, that a prolonged isolation could alienate a person from humanity and turn him into a useless person.<sup>197</sup>

The newly established library and reading room became popular. It was a meeting place for a mixed crowd of businessmen, teachers, and young people, many of whom stayed late to read newspapers and engage in discussions. The library had a director, treasurer, and secretary, elected by the members. Raffi was the secretary and always present; he spoke with the members for a while, then he borrowed several books and left.

Raffi considered the Western Armenian dialect, what he called the Constantinople dialect, rich only in its vocabulary; however, he found the extended sentences and strange pronunciations unbearable. He said Western Armenian pronunciation seemed to belong to dull minds, and he attributed

its propagation to Mkhitarist scholars; but he believed keeping the differences between the Western and Eastern pronunciations enhanced the language. Despite his negative comments about the Constantinople dialect, he never criticized the journalists in any of his writings.

During one of the library nights, while Aftandilian was reading a Constantinople newspaper, Raffi suddenly asked him.

“What are you reading?”

“Recently arrived newspapers from Constantinople,” Aftandilian replied.

“What do you find educational in those papers?”

“I like the Constantinople style a little,” his friend responded mischievously.

“Why do you like it?”

“Because it is better arranged than ours.”

“How do you find its spelling?”

“Eh~ it too is some form of a style.”

“What do you say about their news orientation?”

“Their orientation is just another orientation.”

“No!” said Raffi. “You are not looking at the work with a critical eye. The Constantinople chorus style, which you like, does not have instructive value. It is sad that the editors have not yet given exciting literary material to the new generation. They must change their journalistic direction to bring it closer to the people’s hearts and enlighten their sluggish and stupefied minds. Instead of writing about the daily lives of the wealthy Armenians, they should give the people lively descriptive and educational novels. The demands of our times are different from before.”<sup>198</sup>

One day Aftandilian came to visit Raffi. Finding him engrossed in reading *Les Miserables*, he wanted to banter him a little.

“Why have you pored over that boastful Frenchman’s book? All that writing leaves only imaginary impressions on the reader’s mind, nothing else.”

Raffi raised his head and with a surprised expression said, “I never expected such an opinion from you. I thought you are one of Hugo’s admirers. No, undoubtedly you must be joking. I have often envied you, seeing on your desk Hugo’s books in French, which I do not know. I read only the Armenian translations, which lack the essence of the originals. How blessed you are, France, for having borne a novelist like Hugo. Who can equal him?”

Hugo’s writings fascinated Raffi, and he read his works voraciously. He considered Ivan Turgenev’s novels the best of Russian literature for their simplicity and beautiful nuances. He did not know any European languages, except a little Russian. Many writers have commented that if Raffi knew a European language and had a higher education, perhaps he would not have

been influenced by the style of foreign writers, especially that of Hugo. Regardless, Raffi is the foremost leader of Armenian literature. His will was so strong that he conquered utmost difficulties and advanced his works by the sweat of his brow. S. Harutiunian emphatically stated that Raffi “created and established his own style in Armenian literature. He is an author of great undertakings and a creative artist of various periods, countless events, and characters and scenes. One of his qualities is his wealth of knowledge and richness of his writing.”<sup>199</sup> With his noble and boundless idealism and with a mighty pen, Raffi described without embellishment the lives of the forgotten segments of society. The more he created, the deeper he understood the complicated life of the Armenian peasant, and his predictions became more prophetic.

The educated segment of Tavriz Armenians respected Raffi. Enjoying a relatively comfortable financial condition, Raffi engrossed himself in his literary works after school hours. He was preoccupied with his ideas and plans, without much attention to his social life. Aftandilian described Raffi’s teaching and writing efforts:

For Raffi there was not a day without writing. Avoiding life’s good and bad circumstances, he settled in front of his desk, leaned against it, and wrote. He was prolific. His only spiritual consolation was to have his beloved ideas condensed in his writings. When he was engrossed in writing *Kaytser*, he had a somber look as if he was in mourning. No one could distract him with a joke or amusing words, not even with laughter. Once he conceived an idea and started writing, he did not stop until he wrote down all the information. During such times, he forgot his guests, his family, and even his life. One Sunday at three o’clock, I visited the novelist and found him at his desk writing.

“Get up, let us go for a walk; people do not work much on holidays, they rest and enjoy themselves,” I said

“Yes,” he replied, “I know that on Sundays people amuse themselves after lunch. It is already three o’clock and I have not had lunch yet; I do not even have an appetite.”

With sympathetic and some cordial scolding, I added that to be so much occupied with writing would ruin his health. I started telling him about a recent incident, a curious event, which had just happened in our city. I had talked for ten minutes, during which he wrote and listened. When I stopped talking, he turned toward me and repeated what I had said without missing a word; he even

added several comments. I had tested his extraordinary mental ability several times before. That day he was working on *Kaytser*.<sup>200</sup>

Raffi had the habit of placing a section of his writing on the table and asking his friends to read it; at other times, he would read to them. After reading one or two sections, he would ask, "What kind of impression did it leave on you? I think you liked it, is that not so?" When someone made a comment or suggested a minor alteration, he would fire back a long list of reasons to defend his writing. He was steadfast in his beliefs and faithful to his pen and ideals. He knew what and who he was.

Raffi loved flowers. His love for flowers started when he arrived in Tiflis, and it lasted to the end of his life. Flowers had a special place in his otherwise routine life, devoid of social affairs. Visitors to his home immediately noticed the large number of flower plants. His childhood surroundings, where people loved flowers, might have influenced him. Aftandilian described Raffi's love for flowers and the time he spent cultivating them:

On a summer's day visit to Raffi, I found him in the courtyard occupied with the numerous flowers he had planted. Raffi had arranged the flowerpots in the shade, along the north wall of the house. He had leaned over examining the flowers with his fingers, something only he understood.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Do you see? As you know, I love flowers, and they require much care; otherwise, they will perish. The fragrance of flowers and their scent improve a person's taste and sense of smell. Sit down and let us drink the afternoon tea here, among the flowers."<sup>201</sup>

During the conversation in the garden, Raffi asked Aftandilian to tell him about the recent travels he had made in the south of Persia. Raffi was always interested in stories of his friends and acquaintances because they were sources for his stories. For that reason, he always savored listening to stories about other parts of Persia and the Zoroastrian Persians. In the previous year, Aftandilian had returned from Tehran and told Raffi about the city's progress and the cemeteries of the Zoroastrians, who did not bury the dead. They propped the bodies in vertical positions to let them decay and to have vultures and other animals consume the flesh. The Zoroastrians called the cemeteries *bibi sharabani*. The description had left a deep impression on Raffi. He later wrote a short story titled *Bibi Sharabani*, describing the cemeteries as if he had personally seen them.

Raffi continued sending articles to *Mshak*, condemning clerical and lay people alike for their conservative and reactionary beliefs. His articles provoked some people to organize against him, and many of the wealthy wanted to close down the reading room by threatening to withdraw their financial contributions to the school. To neutralize the influence of the wealthy, Raffi persuaded the school board to write a letter to Catholicos Gevorg IV to ask for financial aid. In response, the school board received a scornful refusal letter written by Bishop Manguni. The letter from Ejmiatsin angered the school board members. Raffi wrote an article in *Mshak* titled *Kgherakan harstaharutyun*<sup>202</sup> (Clerical Extortion) wherein he criticized the catholicos for the position he had taken. He wrote that Ejmiatsin did not have the right to keep the silver collected from the poor Persian Armenians, who had a thousand needs.

On January 1877 Raffi sent a long article titled *Teghekagirk gavarakan harstaharutyants*<sup>203</sup> (Report on Extortions in the Region) to *Pordz*. For reasons known only to Raffi, the article remained unpublished. When in July 1878 Raffi went from Agulis to Tiflis, he picked up the article and gave it to *Mshak*. Raffi criticized and elaborated on the oppressive conditions in Western Armenia, and he pointed out the root causes of the desperate social-economic and political conditions in Persia, which he attributed to the Persian government's abusive and tyrannical taxation policy. He exposed the provincial and local officials' arbitrary and unjust treatment and exploitation of the Armenian people. He described how the Kurdish *khans* (title for officials and dignitaries in Persia; for leaders, it implies a lord or prince) and Turkish *beks* (a governor of a region, title of respect) ravished the Armenian people. He pointed out the ruthless treatment of the peasants and the unjust confiscation of their lands that led to the exodus of the rightful owners.

During his adult years in Salmast, Raffi struggled against ignorant and dishonest merchants, who formed a group of sworn enemies to pursue him at all cost. Raffi's absence from his birthplace during the years 1869 to 1875 must have softened the enmity against him by now. When Raffi returned to Tavriz as a teacher and a renowned writer, his adversaries probably refrained from hurting him at first because of his public image. Bishop Andreas Hovhannisian, the prelate of Atrpatakan, appreciated Raffi's educational efforts and gave him moral support. The bishop was an educated man, who encouraged the education of his people. The protection Raffi received from the prelate apparently restrained the angry clergymen and their supporters. Raffi's main adversaries were in far away Salmast and seemed unable to pursue him effectively. These reasons could explain the relatively quiet life Raffi lived during his first year in Tavriz.

Raffi's quiet life in Tavrız did not last long. Barely a year had passed when the crusade against him rekindled. The hostility, which had developed against him nearly ten years earlier in Salmast, found its way to Tavrız, where several of his jealous enemies had settled. Joining with a few like-minded local people, using old and unsubstantiated documents, they fabricated false financial demands. Fortunately, a group of kind and sympathetic merchants got involved as arbitrators, held several meetings with Raffi's adversaries, and found them unable to show any evidence for their demands. The adversaries became further enraged. The malicious group tried to ascribe an ideological nature to the loathsome crusade against Raffi. Exploiting Raffi's writings against the ignorant Armenian clergymen, the group disparagingly labeled him a prod (Protestant), an apostate, a destroyer of the Armenian Church, and a thief. These accusations could not have been further from the truth. Raffi was a devout Christian. During his stay in Tavrız, he attended church regularly and listened to the Mass with devotion. On one Sunday, Raffi left the church early and flounced in front of the Prelacy. When his friend approached him, Raffi complained, "What is this? One is unable to listen and pay attention to the Mass and pray with devotion, even during the consecration. On one side, the merchants discuss their business, on the other side, the ushers start counting the collection on a nearby table. They have turned God's church into a money changers' house."<sup>204</sup>

Raffi was persecuted not only in Persia but also in Russia in his absence. In Tiflis, his adversaries, filled with despicable hatred and jealousy, reviled him and his writings, calling him a plagiarizer and a fraud. Despite all the false claims, Raffi did not worry about his financial losses as much as about the disgusting events in Tavrız. This was the beginning of renewed persecution. Instigators, usurers, Armenian aghas, khans, and ignorant clergymen incited and won over a segment of the community. They openly threatened and demanded Raffi's expulsion from the school. Raffi remained indifferent toward the threats and calmly continued his teaching duties.

The constant attacks against him by an increasing number of people drove Raffi into depression and despair. The despicable attacks had dispirited Raffi to the point of grief. For several days, he lay in bed sick and did not leave the house. His friend described Raffi's demoralized condition: "His tawny face had turned gloomy, and his hollowed eyes looked dreadful. His movements were slow, as if he had lost his mental ability, and he had become gaunt." Sometimes he responded with coldness and tolerated the attacks with Christian meekness; but at other times, he came out fighting with his pen against his tormenters. Tired of all the abuse he had endured, Raffi opened his heart to Aftandilian:



I am now convinced that our nation does not appreciate or respect its literary personalities and teachers. Supportive environments and influential organizations do not exist to benefit a person. Not even a peaceful environment exists for a writer to write without worries. Whenever I am engrossed in writing, suddenly the thought of my enemies disturbs my peace of mind; I lose my trend of thought and the ideas forever. I must have an inspiring state of mind; instead, I find myself confronted with an unfortunate event, a miserable condition, or a detestable job. Nowhere do I find comfort and happiness. How miserable I am! This is my written fortune.

These unfortunate events have already affected me and made me a nervous wreck. I was delirious all last night. I thought I would live comfortably in Tavriz; but on the contrary, circumstances have become so bad that I feel I will be a sacrifice here. I teach all day and have time only at night to write, think, and rest. I work so hard for a meager pay, which is uncertain. Writers among us do not have an enviable position. A writer must have unlimited opportunities. Even teaching is wearisome, torturous, and a thankless career. My family and I are in a thorny state; we have enough to eat today, but we may starve tomorrow. This is not a life, it is hell. My years are numbered. I feel I am not in good health because I am losing my strength. Most of our writers, teachers, and community workers have lived this way. *Our people know how to praise worthy people only after they are gone, only when they have stopped living.*<sup>205</sup> [Italics mine.]

Do you see how much I work on my novels and how much they wear me out? They are going to send me to my grave prematurely. I do not know with what and with whose hope I work. I have not found my expected respect and support here and in the Caucasus. Everywhere, people mock and pressure me; one does not know what to do. It is hell. They have given me the cup of bitterness.<sup>206</sup>

Raffi's stressful life aggravated his poor health. He feared the condition of his lungs would worsen. He had started to cough and clear his throat frequently because heavy smoking had damaged his lungs. During one of his usual visits to Raffi, Aftandilian found him lying down sick. When his friend came into the room, Raffi complained about his condition:

My chest is preparing the stairs to my grave, but it seems I still have a few more years to live. Writing has already become my flesh and bones. I know that writing incessantly is damaging my health, but I am unable to stop suddenly what I have started. Our new generation does not have books to read. The time for reading the *Yerazahan* [Meaning of Dreams] and such useless books has passed. I must do my best to give our new generation interesting, historical novels. Let others with higher education write novels that are more sophisticated. I am now getting old, but my mind is alert. I must fight against narrow mindedness and prejudice, which have shackled our people's progress. I must inexhaustibly follow my chosen plan.<sup>207</sup>

The general meeting of the Tavriz Reading Room Society took place on February 20, 1877, where Raffi presented the report of the organization's activities for the 1875–1876 fiscal year. He reported the progress and the positive influence of the reading room on the young people. He touched on the antagonistic opposition of the clergy, especially that of Father Hovsep, and their supporters. Referring to the opposition, Raffi wrote, "Those who have more need to read do not come to the reading room." Raffi sent the report titled *Davrizhu Entertsarani Enkerutiun* (Tavriz Reading Room Society) to *Mshak*, which published it in the March 17, 1877, issue. The article added fuel to the fire:

The importance of the reading room during its two-year existence is evident by the attendance. Whereas, some people at the beginning had contempt for the reading room, now the same people impatiently wait for the mail to deliver new reading material. Those who at first thought reading was not for the laity, and if reading was necessary, it had to be for reading a prayer book; now they confess that books give them satisfaction. Only one class has remained indifferent to this popular endeavor, and that is the clergy. Our clergy, who are more in need of learning to teach, I must sadly confess, have still not stepped one foot inside. My comment about the clergy is completely sincere. I did not intend to insult anyone.

Mr. A. Gharibekian, a school trustee, looking at my comments from a more practical view, added that our people still have the same old custom of following the clergy in spiritual and intellectual matters. For that reason, the society members place a responsibility

on the clergy to help in the progress of this organization. The people will attend the reading room with more confidence when they see also their priests attending. When the priests attend the reading room, they will abandon their false ideas that the members are reading anti-religious books. The reading room has nearly one hundred books on religious subjects. If the clergy do not wish to read other books, they can at least benefit from those religious books. Is it harmful for the clergy to read newspapers and non-religious books? Should they not know about important current events, people's concerns, and living conditions?

Father Mesrop Papazian, teacher of religion classes at the school, emphasized the importance of the reading room, especially for the Persian Armenians. After his comments, the Reverend Father suggested that we take a collection to help the indigent people of Van. It was very heartwarming to hear encouraging words of progress from a clergy. The sad thing is that this clergyman, who is one of the enthusiastic patrons of the reading room, is not a local person. Out of the five local priests, not even one has set foot in this place.

I was glad to witness the warm and enthusiastic discussions about the progress among the Persian Armenians, who until recently were indifferent toward education. Meanwhile, I cannot mention without feeling sad the impression left on me by the local archpriest's behavior. He was present at the same meeting, and he sat like a statue without saying anything throughout the meeting. The comments of Melik-Hakobian about the clergy had hurt him. Instead of realizing his mistakes and understanding his responsibilities, he was extremely troubled. He left the meeting with threatening remarks. When a few members invited him to become a member, he answered, "I do not have time to come to the reading room."

The next day, I heard that the priest was going from house to house inciting people and proclaiming that the reading room society is a harmful organization. As if that is not enough, he is having secret meetings with several like-minded people to plan a dirty cabal and inform the government that a dangerous organization is running the reading room. He is proclaiming in the streets, "I will close that satanic nest and send its defenders to where even the crows do not see the light of day."

The priest has the audacity to carry out his threat because he

has shown many times his talent for destroying everything that is good and beneficial. Last year, we formed a committee to plan for a girls' school. Mr. Hajinian and Mr. Melik-Hakobian wrote the bylaws, which the committee members accepted, and Prelate Andreas Hovhannisian authorized it with his seal. Many people donated funds, and others offered to teach without pay. Everything was ready except renting a school building. For a community conformed to Asiatic customs, a girls' school was unimaginable and a strange place for girls because they were going to see the faces of male teachers. To dispel the parents' prejudice, the committee invited Father Hovsep, the most influential priest, to one of its meetings, handed him an authorized paper, and asked him to convince parents to send their girls to school. The priest took the paper without a comment, but returned it the next day saying that it was outside of his responsibility as a clergyman to be involved in such matters. He was not satisfied with refusing the committee's wishes; instead, he visited homes and agitated the people by saying, "Where has anyone seen girls coming out of their homes and going to school and facing male teachers?" His actions were enough to spoil the plan. What was his purpose of spoiling the plans? Since the priest and his assistants taught the psalms to the daughters of several families, they feared their income would be in jeopardy with the opening of a girls' school.

We had seen dull-minded, ignorant, and reactionary priests in other countries, but we had not yet seen a despotic priest, who dominates and terrifies the people. Why? Because he is an informer.<sup>208</sup>

Raffi expressed his anguish and disappointment about the Tavriz Armenians' refusal to establish a girls' school, which he considered one of the most urgent and indispensable issues for the Atrpatakan Armenians. It was more pitiful to see the Armenian clergy insisting on the idea that it was shameful for Armenian girls to attend school with uncovered faces.

Reading the article, Raffi's adversaries were further inflamed. Troubled by Raffi's words, Father Hovsep, who was a malevolent person, spread accusations about Raffi, met with his supporters in a cabal and informed the government that the reading room was a dangerous establishment. "I will close that satanic nest and send its defenders to where even the crows do not see the light of day," the priest had announced.

Taking advantage of the prelate's absence, Father Hovsep and his

supporters became even more daring and dangerous. Raffi was uncomfortable with the developing circumstances, more for the future of the reading room than for himself. He had no other choice but to write an article in *Mshak*, addressed to the catholicos. Raffi wrote, "Father Hovsep has resorted to such means that I am in danger, and furthermore, the school, the reading room, and the church will suffer."<sup>209</sup> He appealed to the catholicos to restrain Father Hovsep's rage. The letter enraged the adversaries, who incited their supporters and resolved to expel Raffi forcefully from the school at any cost. Father Hovsep threatened to resign from his church duties and posted his written threat on the church door. His supporters tried to convince him to withdraw his threat, promising to expel Raffi from the school and Tavriz. The priest declared he would withdraw his resignation only after Raffi left Tavriz.

The group denigrated Raffi by spreading vicious and false rumors that besides committing all kinds of fraud, he was now attacking the honor of their families and the clergy. The malicious group succeeded in raising complaints, dissatisfaction, and anger against Raffi. The educated and the decent community members of Tavriz, led by the Aramian School trustees, supported and defended Raffi. The trustees declared that they invited Raffi to teach for three years and that he had already performed his duties impeccably for two years; therefore, merely one segment of the public did not have the right to expel him. The trustees argued that if, in the opinion of the malcontent, Raffi, with his article in *Mshak*, had offended the community by throwing their ignorance at their faces, it had no connection with his teaching position; furthermore, the discontented and the offended could answer Raffi in the same periodical.

Despite the trustees' fair suggestion, the malicious group decided to take matters into their own hands and physically remove Raffi from the school. One day the group leaders Tsatur Khan Setkhanian, Rostom Patmagrian, Anton Khan, and others stormed Raffi's classroom.

"What do you want?" Raffi asked, surprised and startled.

"We want you to leave the school today and leave Tavriz immediately." They informed Raffi that they had an order from the crown prince to expel him from the school.

Raffi asked to see the written order. Since there was none, he refused to leave.

"Why should I leave?" Raffi retorted.

"Just that! We do not want you at our school."

"But I do not recognize you. I was hired by the trustees."

"We have elected the trustees," the group insisted.

"Therefore, you can talk to the trustees," Raffi suggested.

At one point, some in the group shouted, “Khan, pull him out.” The khan replied that if he pulled so would Raffi.

“We can expel you by force,” threatened the malcontents.

“No, that is impossible, you cannot,” Raffi responded and firmly resisted the group’s threats.

Raffi’s steadfast refusal compelled the group to leave.

In another version, told by Abraham Melik-Abrahamian, supposedly when the supporters of Father Hovsep came to expel Raffi from the school, Raffi went to the teachers’ room and stood under Shah Nasreddin’s picture. His pursuers did not dare to touch him and left.<sup>210</sup> Nazar Melik-Zohrabian was a student in Raffi’s class when he witnessed the unpleasant event. He wrote his recollections in an article dated May 6, 1913, and sent it to *Mshak* on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Raffi’s death. Since the article arrived after the commemoration in April, *Mshak* did not publish it. Melik-Zohrabian’s article described the event as follows:

In 1877 I was a ten-year-old student at the Aramian School in Tavriz. I heard the upper-class students talking about our teacher, Hakob Melik-Hakobian, who had written an article in *Mshak* criticizing the archpriest, Father Hovsep. Immediately after Easter, Father Hovsep pinned his resignation, from the church and priesthood, on the church door. Several wealthy and influential supporters pleaded with Father Hovsep to retract his resignation, promising to punish the “defiant” and “disbeliever” teacher. They appealed to the Atrpatakan governor, Crown Prince Muzaferiddin Mirza, and his assistant, Sabah-Divan, with a translated copy of Raffi’s *Harem* and asked them to punish Raffi. The crown prince was not interested in doing anything; but upon the insistence of Father Hovsep’s supporters, he agreed to deport Raffi.

Our classroom, where Avak Aftandilian was teaching, was next to Raffi’s classroom. There was a door between our and Raffi’s classrooms. One day in May, we heard a large commotion in Raffi’s classroom where several wealthy Armenians and a few police officers had entered. When Aftandilian heard the commotion, he opened the door to see what was happening. Fearful and curious, we gathered at the door and heard the men demand in the name of the crown prince that Raffi leave the school and immediately depart from Tavriz, if he did not wish to suffer punishment.

Raffi responded calmly and told the men they had no right to insult him in front of his students. He asked them to leave him

alone to finish the lesson, and that they could then talk to him outside the classroom. The khans ignored him and pushed each other to grab Raffi. A few in the crowd shouted, "Pull him khans! Let us pull him out!" Realizing that the khans could take him out by force, Raffi grabbed his hat and left the school.

Raffi's daughter, Yester, was an eyewitness to the ugly scene. Frightened by the treatment her father received from the ugly crowd, she fell ill and died a few days later. Raffi left Tavriz brokenhearted, leaving his family behind in a financially difficult situation.<sup>211</sup>

When the School trustees heard about the incident, they called a meeting and advised Raffi to stay home for a few days, fearing a more serious incident. When the prelate heard about the ugly events, he immediately returned from Ejmiatsin and attempted to quell the inflamed passions peacefully with his sermons. The prelate's efforts and his pastoral advice did not help convince the malicious group. It had become impossible to reconcile the opposing factions. Raffi's friends and the school trustees advised him to leave Tavriz for a while.

A rumor circulated that Raffi's perfidious enemies planned to assassinate him. Supposedly, the group had hired a renowned Persian criminal named Karam and told him to "close his account." Late one night, Karam stealthily had entered Raffi's room and had seen him sitting at his desk writing. Engrossed in his thoughts, Raffi had not noticed or felt the presence of the notorious criminal, with a dagger in his hand watching Raffi work. Suddenly, Raffi had felt a hand on his shoulder and had turned around, startled and frightened. At that moment, Karam had told Raffi: "They sent me to kill you, but I have no business with people who use the pen instead of the sword. Get up, and hurry; I will help you get out of the city."

Raffi's nephew Soghomon Melik-Hakobian, who had heard the story within Raffi's family circle, wrote: "I do not know how authentic this incident is. I am unable to verify it, but let us accept that a wide chasm exists between Karam's and the Tavriz aghas' moral perceptions."<sup>212</sup>

Raffi described a similar incident in his novel *Salpi*. (Although Mrs. Anna Raffi published the novel posthumously, sections from it had appeared in *Mshak* as Raffi's letters.) Here, the enemies of the protagonist, Rustam, hired an assassin to kill him. The would-be assassin entered Rustam's home, but Rustam surprised and disarmed him. Because Rustam did not punish the criminal, the latter informed Rustam why and who sent him. Grateful for Rustam's generosity, the man promised to become a friend and help him in

any way he could.<sup>213</sup> The source of the rumor is unclear whether it was the earlier published passage from *Salpi* or the actual incident that became a topic in the published segment of the novel. Years later, such an attempt was made on Raffi's life in Tiflis.

Besides Raffi's stressful condition caused by the vicious adversaries, and after his twelve-year-old daughter, Yester, died, he fell into a depression. The malicious attacks did not even spare his grief, and his adversaries continued to vilify him.

At the end of May 1877 Raffi left Tavrız for Ejmiatsin to seek the catholicos's support for opening a girls' school. The Russo-Turkish war had already started in April 1877. The Turkish government had incited the Kurdish people in the northeast region of Van to attack the Christian population in the Haghbak and Bayazet areas. The displaced refugees filled the Salmast and Khoy regions. Before he left Tavrız, Raffi had met with Yeghyazar Vardapet, the abbot of Saint Bartholomew, who had miraculously escaped from the Kurds, and many of the refugees, who told Raffi their stories full of bloodshed and destruction. Raffi arrived in Yerevan at the beginning of June. While there, he wrote an article titled *Srbazan paterazme yev Kristonianeri vichake Asiaium*<sup>214</sup> (The Holy War and the Condition of the Christians in Asia), describing the atrocities and barbarism suffered by the Armenians at the hands of Turks and Kurds led by their religious leaders.

Raffi stayed in Yerevan for a month and a half and visited Ejmiatsin several times to persuade the catholicos to lend his support for the girls' school. Finally, the catholicos consented and reluctantly gave his permission. Raffi hurried back to Tavrız with the news. At the beginning of August, Andreas Hovhannisian, Mesrop Papazian, and Raffi revived the issue. His enemies immediately renewed their hostilities and resorted to treachery. The just arguments of the trustees and the prelate did not pacify the adversaries, whose only purpose was to find a pretext to settle their malicious score with Raffi. Thus, the community split into two fiercely opposing camps. One of the main agitators was Tsatur Khan Setkhanian, who was an official in the foreign ministry.<sup>215</sup> Raffi's enemies took the translated copies of *Harem*, *Parskastan*, and other articles unfavorable to the Persian government, to the crown prince and to the head of the Muslim religious leaders. They accused Raffi of being a political agitator and blasphemous of Islam. The group received verbal permission from the crown prince to drive Raffi out of the Aramian School and Tavrız. The Muslim religious leader issued a death sentence against Raffi, which meant any Muslim could kill Raffi at any time. At night, a crowd of people threw stones and fired shots at Raffi's house.<sup>216</sup> Realizing Raffi's life was in danger, the prelate appealed to the crown prince and to several foreign



consulates to intervene. The crown prince investigated the accusations and found them to be the malicious act of Raffi's personal enemies. To save Raffi from the fanatic Muslim crowd, the crown prince brought Raffi to his house and kept him for a week. He advised Raffi to leave Persia for his safety. The Russian Embassy and the Persian government provided Raffi with official papers to leave the country and settle in Russia. Deeply embittered and disheartened, Raffi left Tavriz, disguised, in the middle of the night in late August 1877, accompanied with two guards assigned by the government.

Aftandilian lamented the hostile and mean-spirited treatment Raffi received from his enemies, and years later he commented on the evil elements among the Armenian people:

This was a pitiful event. We dishonor our community activists with black dirt that not even their shadows are visible. The Armenian has always remained Armenian despite its conspicuous shortcomings. As a human being, if Raffi had a few faults, that may have been so. Who is without faults? He had, however, such exceptional qualities and amazing literary talent that in our days only a very few can equal him.<sup>217</sup>

How could such utterly ungrateful Armenians treat such a great man of all ages with such evil and malice? Many writers and artists have lived victimized and died in poverty. So was to be the life of Armenia's foremost novelist, who inspired generations and will continue to inspire generations yet to come. Raffi was not a person who desired to become the center of controversies, but he was always ready to struggle to the end for his ideas. The dispute at the Aramian School was a secondary issue for him. Despite his innocence, Raffi had already decided to leave and put an end to the ugly dispute and hostile communal conflict. Aftandilian described Raffi's nobility with these words: "To save the ship, Raffi threw himself into the sea."<sup>218</sup>

Raffi's short-lived presence and struggles in Tavriz were not in vain. Together with other teachers at the Aramian School, he was able to influence and prepare the new generation with renewed spirit. The sorrowful incidents presented an opportunity to that generation, exposed them to new ideas, and enriched community life. Not long after Raffi's departure, the young people and the graduates established reading rooms, prepared stage performances, founded benevolent organizations, formed women's societies, and opened a girls' school, all of which began to spread into the regions and into Armenian villages. Raffi observed all the progress from afar with endearment and satisfaction.



Ten to fifteen years later, Tavriz, Urmia, Salmast, and Khoy regions became important centers of Armenian revolutionary movements—manifestations of the national ideals Raffi had expounded and instilled in his young students and readers. Raffi's struggles and tribulations in his backward birthplace had borne new hopes for the nation.



## Teaching in Verin Agulis

At the end of August 1877 Raffi was already in Tiflis. This time he did not stay long, only a month. At the *Mshak* office, he met Mkrtich Portugalian,<sup>219</sup> who had witnessed atrocities committed by Jalaledin's men. They talked for a long time about the horrible events and the future of the Armenians in Turkey. Meanwhile, Raffi received an unexpected invitation to join the editorial staff of *Pordz* to replace Ghazaros Aghayan,<sup>220</sup> who was leaving to teach in Yerevan. In addition, the Nersisian Academy offered Raffi a teaching position. He declined both positions because he had received an invitation to teach at the schools in Verin Agulis.<sup>221</sup> He left during the second half of September and traveled through areas where Armenian refugees from Western Armenia had settled. The editor of *Pordz*, Abgar Hovhannisian, seized the opportunity and asked Raffi to write about the refugees and send articles to *Pordz*. Raffi traveled through Kazakh, Ijevan, Dilijan, Yerevan, and on to Agulis. In Dilijan, he came across a tent-camp for wounded soldiers from the Alashkert<sup>222</sup> and Bayazet war fronts. He saw multitudes of refugees in many villages on his way. Witnessing the wretchedness of the refugees, he wrote the article *Chanaparhordutiun Tiflisits minchev Agulis* (Travel from Tiflis to Agulis) and sent it to *Pordz* in 1878. The following, which deal with the events that impelled him to write his renowned novel *Khente*, are excerpts from the article:

In the Dilijan forest, under the cool shade of the trees, rows of tents are set up for wounded soldiers brought from the battlefields; near the tents, freshly dug graves are marked with only black crosses. Who are the buried in those graves, and of what nationality are they? Their identities are unknown. No written epitaphs keep their memories alive. I noticed a village priest and his deacon hurrying to one of the tents.

“Where are you headed, Ter Hayr?” I asked.

“An Armenian boy has died; I am going to bury him,” he said, and he left.

I was interested in going toward the other tents and not toward the dead person; I was curious about the living. Each tent had two

beds, made of dried branches, on which lay sallow and jaundiced patients; and here and there, young nurses with white hats tended to the wounded.

A young man, who had not fully recovered from his wounds, attracted my attention. He was sitting under a tree, away from the tents, alone, warming up under the sun. I approached him and noticed that he still had some strength, despite his weak condition. The young man was from Gharabagh [Artsakh] and was one of many volunteers most of whom the Kurds had massacred near Bayazet. He asked for a cigarette. When I noticed his trembling hands, I rolled a big cigarette for him. I was very curious to hear about the tragedy of Bayazet from this man, one of the heroes of the battle there. He willingly told me about the battle.

“When [Arshak] Ter Ghukasov went ahead to Saint Hovhannes in the Alashkert region, he left a very small force to protect Bayazet. It consisted of a few hundred soldiers and an equal number of cavalry, made up of Armenian and Turkish volunteers serving under the command of Turkish leaders. There was no need to keep a large force because we were not expecting attacks from anywhere.

“The Bayazet Armenians brought us news that a large number of Kurdish and irregular forces led by their religious leaders were advancing toward Bayazet. The Armenians were pleading that we allow them to escape from the town. No one listened to them, particularly a man who convinced them that the news was false, and that they were not in danger. This man was the assistant tax collector. We heard that he was an important man because the town had entrusted him with money to purchase wheat. I do not know why he was lying to the people. When the people realized the Kurds were coming, they stored their belongings at their Turkish neighbors’ homes for safekeeping from the invaders’ plunder. The Armenians sought the help of their Turkish neighbors, just as the Turks had done when the Russians first entered Bayazet.

“Nearly twenty thousand Kurds and irregulars, along with a smaller number of regular Turkish soldiers, surrounded Bayazet. The Russian soldiers and a small number of volunteers entered the fortress for protection. We remained outside the fortress because it was crowded. The assistant tax collector was among those entering the fortress.

“The Kurds were not only from Turkey and Persia but also from Russia. As if that was not enough, Kurds from the Ararat region in Russia joined the enemy. They were the ones who ravaged the villages in the Alashkert region and took away the women to the foothills of [Mount] Aragats. After ravishing them, they killed them.

“The Armenian volunteers who remained outside expected certain death, but we decided to die fighting. We fought until we exhausted our ammunition, after which we fought with our sabers. We were attacked from two sides—the enemy and our Turkish comrades. Only a few escaped; the Kurds annihilated the rest. The Kurds entered the town and ruthlessly massacred the Armenians. The barbarians did not even spare the women, the children, and the aged; they slaughtered everyone. The local Turks joined the Kurds in murdering their Armenian neighbors. Out of the four hundred Armenian families, only one hundred members escaped to Maku in Persia. The Kurds either killed or took the rest as captives.

“The Bayazet Armenians were wealthy. For that reason, the depredation was enormous. Whatever the Kurds could not carry away, they burned. In a few days, that beautiful town was devastated.”

I interrupted the young man and asked what happened to the man who assured the Armenians that the Kurds were not coming.

“I do not know. There were only rumors that he had not purchased the wheat with the money given to him, and that he had hoped for the attack to claim that he had lost the money.”

“What happened to those who entered the fortress?”

“They remained there for a long time, suffering hunger and thirst until a young Armenian man from Abaran, who knew Kurdish well and pretending to be a Kurd, was able to deliver a message to Ter Ghukasov, who came and rescued us. I have plenty to say, but my tongue does not let me. A Turkish comrade, not an enemy, wounded me here (pointing to his shoulder). He shot me right at the time when I pointed my rifle at the Kurdish leader, dressed in white, of enraged fighters.”<sup>223</sup> The wounded man finished telling his story.

On April 18, 1877, Arshak Ter Ghukasov (1819–1881), the commander of the Yerevan Corps, occupied Bayazet. He handed the protection of the town

to his assistant Kovalevski and Captain (provost marshal) Fiodor Edvardovich Shtokvich and went ahead to the Alashkert region. The commander of the Turkish forces, Ahmed Vefik Pasha, learned that the force protecting Bayazet was small. His forces and Ibadullah's and Jaleddin's hordes attacked the town on June 4, 1877, and massacred the unarmed and defenseless people. On June 6, Vefik Pasha surrounded the fortress. Meanwhile, Ter Ghukasov attacked Mukhtar Pasha's forces at the southern foothills of Dram-duz and routed them. The unsuccessful Russian campaign in the Kars region and the temporary Russian withdrawal created difficulties for the Yerevan forces. On June 14, 1877, General Loris-Melikov ordered Ter Ghukasov to start withdrawal of his forces toward Igdir on June 15. Ter Ghukasov had twenty thousand Armenian refugees with him. Despite Mukhtar Pasha's larger force in pursuit, Ter Ghukasov was able to organize the retreat with great proficiency and succeeded in attacking Bayazet and rescuing the besieged in the fortress.

The story told by the wounded soldier in Dilijan occupied Raffi's mind, and he conceived the idea for the novel *Khente*. He assigned a special role to the young man from Abaran whom the wounded soldier had identified as Samson Ter Poghosian. Raffi did not disclose his planned novel and Ter Poghosian's name in his article to *Pordz*. When Raffi reached Yerevan, he tried to find Ter Poghosian. Unable to find him, he went to Vagharshapat to search for him.

Raffi saw multitudes of refugees in Yerevan, Vagharshapat, and Ejmiatsin. He saw a young girl, sorrowful and pallid, sitting on the bare floor of a small, dark cell intended as living quarters for occasional pilgrims to Ejmiatsin. He was curious about the girl's circumstances, and to find out he asked her. He included the encounter in his article:

She sat near a tattered blanket in which a twelve-year-old boy was crying. I lifted the blanket and saw the sick boy lying naked on a cotton sheet.

"Who is he?" I asked the girl.

"My brother," she sighed.

"Do you have a mother or a father?"

"They were all killed," she agonized.<sup>224</sup>

Her answer was so heartrending and dreadful as if it were death itself. By this time, he had gathered enough information to write the novel. He still wanted to meet Samson Ter Poghosian, but he had to leave for Agulis.

Raffi returned to Yerevan and stayed three days and visited the girls' and the boys' schools. He commented in the article that Yerevan had not



*General Arshak Ter Ghukasov*

progressed since the Russian occupation. During an earlier trip to Yerevan, he had witnessed the pathetic state of the Armenians when pogrom rumors spread like wildfire throughout the town. Raffi described the havoc in the long article to *Pordz*:

Yerevan has remained a Turkish town. The streets, homes, and people are filthy. The Turk is still a savage and disdains the Christian population just as before. Unfortunately, the Armenians have not yet freed themselves from the Turkish terror. The reason is that the Turks are the same barbarians as before the arrival of the Russians, and the Armenians have not changed their servility.

This year in June [1877], I happened to be in Yerevan when

the horrible news from Igdir had just arrived. The police informed the Armenians about an imminent danger and warned them to protect themselves. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorra could not have been as terrible as that night in Yerevan. In a few minutes, the town filled with cries and wails . . . People locked their homes and moved into their neighbors' larger homes, placing their hopes on the strength of the buildings. The shop owners moved the merchandise to their homes. During such circumstances, the Armenian worries first about his beloved possessions. The Armenians anticipated twenty thousand Kurds to arrive at any moment and join the local Turks to kill and plunder.

During this agonizing anguish, I was standing on a rooftop and heard cries and moans all around me. Everyone was trying to escape or hide, but no one was preparing to defend himself, to fight, to kill, or be killed. Morbid silence dominated on the rooftops. There were no weapons in the homes because the Armenians feared weapons more than they feared the devil.

In front of my eyes, I saw the Armenians with all their ugliness. I was filled with hatred. I thought that whoever is incapable of protecting himself gives the enemy permission to kill him.

In the morning, those who were able to hire a carriage or a cart escaped from Yerevan, leaving their defenseless brothers behind. The anguish became more serious when orders came to gather the women in the fortress. Wicked smiles appeared on the faces of the Turks; the Armenians paled. Fortunately, after a few days, a group of military men arrived and stabilized the situation. The Armenians opened their stores again and soon forgot the past.<sup>225</sup>

In October 1877 Raffi was already at his teaching position in Verin Agulis. The tenth anniversary celebration of the Haykanushian School was on October 20. For that occasion, Raffi wrote a speech for Katarine Araskhanian to read. In it Raffi emphasized the role of the woman—the mother—in public life, and stressed that mothers were responsible for preparing exemplary children; thus, they had to be educated. He considered the success of educating a nation depended on the education of the women. He attributed the misfortune of a people to the women's subservient status. He concluded that a nation's servility started in the family where its first sacrifice was the woman. He sent the article to *Mshak* in the name of Katarine Araskhanian.<sup>226</sup>

As soon as Raffi settled in Agulis, he asked a family friend to bring his wife and son, Aram, to Julfa on the Persian side of the Araks River.





*General M. T. Loris-Melikov*

Unfortunately, Yester was not with them; they had left her buried in Tavriz. The friend was Abraham Melik-Abrahamian, a Tavriz resident, who told the story to H. Ajemian in 1936:

In October 1877 when the Russo-Turkish War started, I took Raffi's family from Tavriz to Julfa where Raffi had come from Agulis. Because Julfa was under quarantine, we remained for fifteen days. Countless refugees had come from Haghbak and the eastern regions of Van to Khoy and Salmast; from there many had gone to Julfa. Raffi gathered a group of refugees and recorded their experiences during Sheikh Jaleddin's atrocities and massacres. After staying fifteen days, he took his family and left for Agulis. At

that time, Raffi was forty-two-years old. Later he published the events in his famous *Jalaleddin*.<sup>227</sup>

A few months after the unpleasant storms in Tavrız, Raffi, with an open-mind and without bitterness, became interested in the Tavrız community and the Aramian School. He finally found time to write a letter to Aftandilian. He suggested that they forget the past, for he had forgiven his adversaries, and he exhorted the people to support the national education efforts.

November 3, 1877, Agulis

Noble Friend, Mr. A. Aftandilian,

Pardon me for being tardy in writing to you because of my laziness. Otherwise, I have always been cordial to my friends; especially you, who has justified my trust in you.

I know you are interested to know about my wandering life after leaving Tavrız; therefore, I am writing this letter. Before reaching Tiflis, my friends already knew about all the terrible events that I experienced in Tavrız. They had all considered me lost. For that reason, my unexpected appearance in Tiflis surprised everyone. They looked at me as if at a new Lazarus, who had just returned from the grave.

I stayed in Tiflis for a month, which went by as if it were only a few minutes. Everywhere I received compassion and sympathy from my friends. There was an opening for me as the editor of *Pordz* because Aghayan had gone to Yerevan and no one had taken his place. In addition, the Nersisian Academy offered me a teaching position, but I decided not to stay in Tiflis when I received the invitation from the Agulis school trustees. I have always loved to live in quiet and simple pastoral towns, and I have tried to stay away from the tumultuous life of large cities. Agulis is a place that agrees with my wishes. Here, I am able to breathe freely and rest from my past weariness.

Picture the Khosrova village in the Salmast region. Agulis is a similar place, except that it is mountainous, which is more healthful. Vineyards and gardens surround all the houses, and cool and clear springs run along the streets. I am staying at the splendid Tovma [St. Thomas] Monastery where I have three furnished rooms. The windows on both sides of my quarters look out onto gardens full of trees. The schoolrooms surround the courtyard. The abbot, Father Surenian, is an ardent and gracious young clergyman,

who is also the prelate's vicar. He has maintained under his cowl the pure person of a student and a scholar. He is the principal of the two schools and teaches geography and history. Although we live in separate quarters, we have lunch and dinner together.

I teach twenty-four periods a week of Armenian language and history courses to the upper class students. The classes start at eight o'clock and end at two in the afternoon, after which all the teachers are free. Every afternoon, I have free hours to write, in which I find my main comfort. The local population is educated and supports my efforts.

I would like to receive information about the Aramian School, particularly about its current condition. Work toward the improvement of the school, as you are someone who knows how important the national education is. Do not let the ignorant opposition discourage you. The ignorant fight against the light everywhere, but they are unable to weaken the enthusiasm of true patriots.

I do not know how the troubles in Tavriz ended after I left. I hope that the agitators have calmed their wicked passions. Their behavior does not bring honor to the Tavriz Armenians, other than opening a chasm between the people. I forgive my adversaries and strive to forget all the injustices to which they subjected me. I hope with the forgiveness of a Christian that God keep them away from their misguided ways.

Yours, H. Melik-Hakobian<sup>228</sup>

The Russo-Turkish War had raised the hopes of the Armenians for liberation. Russian advances led by Armenian Generals M. T. Loris-Melikov, A. A. Ter Ghukasov, and I. I. Lazarev<sup>229</sup> into Kars, Ardahan, Karin, and Bayazet convinced many Armenians in Russia that their anticipated emancipation depended on Russian victories. Among those were Patkanian and Artsruni. In Constantinople, the amiras and the patriarch understandably supported the Ottoman government. Raffi, however, sought liberation by the hands of the Armenians and the power of the weapon. He did not see any hope or salvation from Russia, Turkey, or the European nations. As always, whenever Russia engaged in war with Turkey, it raised the hopes of the Armenians with feigned political promises that it was fighting to liberate the Slavic people and the Christians in the Ottoman Empire. The Armenians of Turkey welcomed the Russian armies with open arms, but Russia left them with unrealized and

dashed hopes, as always after each Russo-Turkish war. Only Raffi was not disappointed, simply because he had not placed his hopes on the Russian victory for Armenia's liberation.

During the war, when Armenian lands in Turkey were battlegrounds, and when the pro-Russian and pro-Turkish factions were passionately discussing the war's outcome, Raffi had left Tiflis and gone to Agulis. If Raffi were convinced that Russia's victory would help liberate the Armenian lands, he would have remained poverty stricken in Tiflis and lent his support to the pro-Russian efforts. Instead, Raffi wrote an article to express his opinion and ideas for self-reliance and to criticize those who thought the question of Armenian lands was resolved by the Russian occupation. *Mshak* published the article on February 14, 1878, despite Raffi's opposition to Artsruni's pro-Russian position. He titled the article *Datark huyserov yenk khabvum* (We Are Deceived by Empty Hopes). Below are excerpts of what he wrote:

Hope is an amazing concept. Two types of hope prevail: one when a person works hard and hopes to reach his goal, the other when a person is lazy and hopes to receive the object of his hope. Individuals and nations have similar hopes.

Armenia fell under the yoke of the Mongolian races 850 years ago. Not a city exists that they did not destroy several times; not a piece of land that they did not soak with our blood; and not a single church that they did not desecrate. The sultans cut off thousands of tongues for speaking Armenian. The Mongolian ugly features improved by the beautiful Armenian women taken into Mongolian harems. For 850 years, the Turk, like an enraged beast, has been devouring, wasting, and consuming the body of the Armenian nation, and yet we endure . . .

Yes, for 850 years, the Armenians have been burning by the Mongolian fire, and yet they do not make a sound to complain. That is a sign of their demise because they do not have a sense of honor, self-respect, and freedom. We are saying death and not slavery because a slave has hatred toward his oppressor . . .

The warring powers considered the problem of the oppressed Christians in Turkey solved when the war started. Diplomats are calling it the solution of the Eastern Question. Other oppressed people revolted, and a great power came to their aid. What did the Armenians do? Nothing! They sat quietly in their places and let the warring parities mangle them like grass under their feet.

We rejoice when a European newspaper writes inaccurate



*St. Tovma Monastery and the school building in Verin Agulis*

articles about us, or we are comforted when the Europeans speak about the despised Armenians. We say, "Look, they are paying attention to us." We rejoice in thinking that Russia has declared war for the rights and the freedom of the Christians; therefore, also the Armenians will benefit from the blood Russia has spilled. The Armenians carelessly and quietly remain in their places . . .

Until now, the Armenians have not presented a single official complaint or sent a single delegation to present their case where it matters. The people and their leaders did nothing. Even the catholicos remained silent. For an issue concerning the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, the catholicos, who has the responsibility to protect the nation's rights, has remained indifferent . . .

Many think that the future of the Armenians is in Turkey, and that their existence depends on the Turkish government. They think today's barbarism and oppression will end someday when the Turk becomes civilized. Then, they say, the Armenians will have equal rights and enjoy freedom. That is nonsense. Today the Turk is uncivilized and barbarian; after he becomes civilized, he will be an educated thief and a more dangerous barbarian. Today, he abducts Armenian boys, girls, and women and converts them to Islam; tomorrow he will use such enticing methods that Armenians will voluntarily become Muslims . . . Is it possible that yesterday's beast will become today's angel? Until it becomes an angel, only the Armenian's name will remain in Turkey . . .

The war is almost over, but the Armenians have not done a single thing to benefit themselves. If the unbearable condition of the Armenians in Turkey does not improve, at least to avoid embarrassment in front of our future generations, we should strive to benefit from the present political atmosphere. Even if we do not succeed, at least our children will say that their parents tried.<sup>230</sup>

How prophetic and profound were his words. Less than forty years later, the Turks claimed that after they were done with the Genocide, "the only remaining Armenian will be found in a museum." Raffi was aware that an armed rebellion was not feasible; therefore, he proposed the diplomatic route. After the San Stefano meeting, he published the article titled *Deryevs ush che* (Perhaps It Is Not Late) in *Mshak* on March 16, 1878. He referred to the emancipation of the Balkan nations as an example for Armenians to have followed. He revealed that in Constantinople "there was a Russian-oriented group that opposed those we have described [amiras]. They believe that

freedom from Turkish tyranny is possible only with Russia's help. With Russia's victory, the group's desire is to either attach Western Armenia to Russia, or remain within Turkey, but under Russia's protection."<sup>231</sup> He criticized the amiras and Patriarch Nerses Varzhapetian for inaction during an opportune time when they could have demanded rights for the Armenians. He urged the patriarch and the Constantinople National Council to take a decisive step. He reminded them that the Berlin Conference was going to convene soon and warned that if the Armenians did not raise their voices, their future in Turkey would be lost. He predicted the condition of the Armenians was not going to improve after the San Stefano Treaty, and the Armenians had nothing to gain from Article 16 because of Europe's and Russia's machinations and Armenians' inaction. Raffi opined, "Politically, no one was indebted to think about the Armenians, since they remained passive and did not think about themselves. No one pays attention to people in graves because they are quiet and satisfied with their condition. Similarly, no one is responsible to care for someone else's hunger, if the hungry person does not complain."<sup>232</sup> In this article and others, Raffi seemed to prophesy the massacres of the 1890s and the tragedy of the Genocide.

The article revived the idea of an independent Armenia. It spurred the patriarch to hastily form two committees: one, headed by Khoren Nar-Bay and Mateos Izmirlian (later patriarch and catholicos in 1908), went to Russia; the other, headed by Bishop Mkrtich Khrimian, went to Berlin. Khrimian's delegation requested administrative autonomy for the Armenian lands governed by a Christian. Khrimian was unable to obtain the desired support from the Europeans. On the contrary, the Berlin Treaty even excluded the provisions of Article 16 and replaced it with the useless Article 61. Khrimian returned disappointed and described the Berlin Congress with his metaphoric *Iron Ladle*<sup>233</sup>. He urged the people to prepare for self-defense.

Earlier, Raffi had advocated liberation through armed struggle, but he realized that the Armenians in Western Armenia did not have the political maturity to struggle for freedom. Thus, he embarked on his mission to enlighten and motivate the people through education for self-awareness to prepare for the liberation movement. In his article *Inch kab ka mer yev Tachkastani Hayeri mej* (What Is the Relation between Us and Armenians in Turkey), published in *Mshak* in 1879, he wrote, "The condition of a people does not change suddenly; rather, preparations begin long before and are executed at the propitious time. The Armenians in Turkey were not prepared. Some saw a gold mine in Article 61 . . . We recognize only one mine from which we can possibly obtain the desired gold, that mine is *preparation*. The preparation of the Armenians in Turkey must be continual to be ready for the

right time, which may not be far.”<sup>234</sup> Preparations by revolutionary groups that he spawned led to the establishment of the Republic of Armenia less than thirty years later.

Raffi rushed to spread his message of preparation with poignant literature that would galvanize the Armenians for action. During his journey from Tiflis to Agulis, he had met the Alashkert refugees in the Ararat plain. He had predicted that the war was going to give the Turks and Kurds a free hand to attack the defenseless Armenians. With this in mind, arriving in Agulis, he used the information he had gathered from the refugees to write the *Jalaleddin* novella. A few weeks after signing the San Stefano Treaty, the Kurds attacked Armenian villages again and destroyed them. This incident showed how useless Article 16 was for the Armenians. Raffi hurried to complete *Jalaleddin* to show that the treaty could not create stable and durable security; and if the Armenians remained indifferent toward weapons and were unable to overcome Christianity's harmful doctrine of blind obedience, their lot would not change. Unless they took up arms to defend themselves against those who plundered the fruits of their labor, they could not expect help from elsewhere. He completed *Jalaleddin* in early 1878 and sent it to *Mshak*, which published it in the May issues, just after the San Stefano Treaty (March 3, 1878) and just before the start of the Berlin Congress (June 13–July 13, 1878). The response to *Jalaleddin* was unprecedented; its success, outstanding. It left a profound impression on the reading public. Raffi received numerous letters from mostly young people in many cities expressing admiration. Raffi quickly responded and appreciated the recognition he received. Raffi sent a letter dated June 11, 1878, from Agulis to the editor of *Mshak* expressing his gratitude to the readers for their exceptionally favorable reaction:

I received from different cities several letters with many signatures in which the readers expressed their appreciation for *Jalaleddin*. For the Armenian author, the appreciation of his work is a great consolation, if not financially, at least morally. I am happy to see that the large part of the letters is from the young generation and the realist students [those attending technical schools]. An author feels satisfied when the young people embrace his message. The seeds have fallen on fertile ground. I shake your hands, you fresh hopes of the future, may you live long.<sup>235</sup>

Leo, Raffi's contemporary, wrote the following about *Jalaleddin*: “The Russo-Turkish War had just ended, and the peoples' minds were preoccupied with reasons of the bloody war, when Raffi sent *Jalaleddin* to *Mshak* from





*General I. I. Lazarev (Lazarian)*

Agulis. The novella described the suffering of the people during the war. It was published in *Mshak* in 1878, and it greatly impressed the readers. *Jalaleddin* was the start of our novel's majestic triumph."<sup>236</sup> With *Jalaleddin*, Raffi established the cornerstone of Armenian national and political awareness. He enhanced his ideas with his future novels. He attacked the tyrannies and atrocities perpetrated by the Kurds, Turks, and Persians. He criticized the frivolous and indolent life of Armenian students attending Russian universities; but he praised students, in other European universities, who seriously devoted their education to benefit the nation. He pointed out the social ills he witnessed in his surroundings. Such criticism further aggravated his adversaries. Attacks on his personality continued, led by *Meghu* and its conservative supporters. Raffi responded with such articles as *Inknakhabeutiun*

(Self-deception) and criticized the false patriotism of people. Raffi pointed out:

*Inknakhabeutiun* is a simple word, but it is humanity's misfortune. Someone who is a coward thinks he is lion-hearted, and someone who is ignorant thinks he is genius . . .

*Inknakhabeutiun* has only one eye and sees only good things. Its other eye is blind to see ugliness, extravagance, and vices. Although wretched and pitiable, it is content with its condition because it does not see its faults. It stagnates and makes no effort to advance. Thus, self-deception is moral suicide . . .

The opposite of self-deception is self-awareness; its father is envy and its mother is discontent. Self-awareness is never satisfied; it has plenty, but always thinks it has less. It constantly looks upward and tries to advance. It has a grasp of all qualities of perfection and is familiar with lofty and noble ideals . . . For that reason it is always dissatisfied . . .

Fortunate is the man who is discontent . . . That is what drives a person toward continual progress and gives birth to genius, art, and well-being. Discontent is a gentle prod that leads to improvements . . .

Many nations are satisfied with their condition, thinking they have everything, but they are unaware of their shortcomings. Some other nations, no matter how much they progress . . . they remain dissatisfied.

We are in a state of self-deception.

The family, our nation's foundation, is spoiled and deteriorating, and extravagance and immorality are gradually destroying what are good and noble characteristics. The family has lost its traditional simplicity and has adopted only the appalling European customs.

Our language, we say, has begun to disappear. The Armenians in Persia speak Persian, the Armenians in Russia speak Russian, the Armenians in Turkey speak Turkish, and the Armenians in India speak English. The most dangerous part is that all these trends start in the family.

When we say that our Church has become extravagant, lost its early simplicity, and placed its emphasis on rituals; the people accuse us of being atheists and disbelievers; they tell us we cannot talk against the holiness of the Church . . .

Self-deception has created a type of *patriot* [italics in the original] whose motto is “whatever is Armenian is good . . .” These *patriots* are unfamiliar with the [national] task. They think they are doing a great favor to our nation when they talk about it always with people of like mentality. They are content with everything passed down from our ancestors, but they still refuse to undertake something new . . .

Their words are mere praises. They praise traits the nation lacks, yet they are inspired and happy thinking that such traits exist. They define their love for the nation by patriotic phrases. Someone who dares to point out the nation’s shortcomings or talks against its prejudices always troubles them; they accuse that person of being a traitor and a disbeliever . . . They say, “You are destroying what we have . . .”

A second type of *patriot* is a fake copy of the first type. They belong to various committees. They become indignant and angry when they hear someone criticize the nation, and they hate anyone who is not Armenian; but as soon as someone offers to pay for Hayk’s bones, they will immediately exhume and sell them.<sup>237</sup>

Raffi continued to write articles from Agulis. Above all, he dedicated himself to educate the students according to modern teaching methods and with fairness and respect. He elaborated on his teaching philosophy in his novels. He worked to eliminate improper teaching methods at the two schools in Agulis. He believed a child needed encouragement and inspiration because they increased a child’s enthusiasm. He emphasized the importance of a student’s work and rest routine because “the tired brain is unable to learn well.” Raffi abhorred the antiquated learning by memorizing without comprehending because it killed the child’s thinking ability and stole his curiosity. He pointed out in the novel *Voski akaghagh* (Golden Rooster) how Kalo attended the village school, run by the local priest, during the winter months to learn reading. “By saying reading, it was understood that he had memorized several prayers, psalms, and hymns even though he did not know the alphabet.” In *Kaytser*, Raffi described Ter Todik’s and Reverend Simon’s schools, where memorizing was so prevalent that the students could not read the same words in different books.

Despite criticizing schools for their emphasis on teaching the Bible, the Psalms, and the prayers, and for incorrectly interpreting religion, he was still in favor of religious education, but only topics with moral value and influence. During a brief stay in Yerevan on his way to Agulis, Raffi visited the Armenian

schools and observed the teaching methods of various subjects, including religion. He described, in an article, his impressions and expressed his opinions on teaching religion. He said, "I believe that teaching religion in the schools is important, but not theological ideas, which children do not understand. In my opinion, children will benefit more from learning parts of the Bible that morally influence them."<sup>238</sup> He stressed that a person's moral character was not inborn but shaped by education, and he blamed the schools for having a negative role in children's moral education. Raffi explained in *Kaytser*: "The schools further instilled in us servility, and the priest-teacher instilled in us blind obedience—to bow and submit to every authority no matter how heavy and unbearable was its yoke on us." He considered patriotism the most important topic of moral education. In the novel *Paruyr Haykazzn* (the name of the main character), Raffi moralized that anyone who does not acknowledge and love his nation stops belonging to humanity.

Raffi considered the observational and visual education of the natural sciences, combined with field excursions, important. He knew children developed mentally and spiritually by what they saw, heard, and touched. Raffi realized the difference between descriptions in books and the actual objects described. In *Kaytser*, Raffi referred to Khrimian's school at Varag as being exemplary with the excursions and the special rooms filled with various objects, such as rocks, insects, and colorful butterflies.

In the middle of July 1878 Raffi left for Tiflis to invite competent professional teachers who knew their subject matters and proper teaching methods. On his way to Tiflis, he again visited Vagharshapat hoping to find Samson Ter Poghosian, but again he was disappointed. During a later visit to Vagharshapat, he finally met Ter Poghosian. Ter Poghosian described his encounter and conversation with Raffi to Ashot Atanisian, who documented the incident in his memoirs:

I had gone to Ejmiatsin with a certain mission, when a man with a large black beard and blue glasses stopped me and introduced himself as Melik-Hakobian. He told me that he had an important issue to discuss with me. He took me into a cell belonging to a monk and started asking me questions about my activities during the siege of Bayazet a year earlier. I came up with excuses to cut him short, but he would not let me go. He asked questions and wrote down my answers in his notebook. Just then, Dr. Bagrat Navasardian, who treated the refugees, entered the cell and whispered in my ear, "This man is the renowned Raffi, tell him everything in detail. He wants to write something about the war."

I answered his questions, telling him whatever I knew. After that I got up and left.<sup>239</sup>

Raffi used the information he obtained from Ter Poghosian and the refugees during his visits to Yerevan and Vagharshapat to write *Khente*, but he had to delay it because of the important events taking place at the Berlin Congress that urged him to work feverishly and finish *Kaytser*. Raffi followed with apprehension the developments at the Berlin Congress and England's new policy toward Turkey. He expressed his concern in an article titled *Marde goyutian krvi mej* (Man's Struggle for Existence) and sent it to *Mshak* at the end of October 1878. Raffi referred to Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest, pointing out that every living organism instinctively desires self-preservation through struggle for food and land. He defined this natural phenomenon as a battle for existence. After lengthy elucidations, Raffi concluded:

We cannot deny that in the practical lives of nations, morality does not play a part when it comes to national interests. The immoral, merciless, and ruthless, who suffocates others for his gains, always moves forward and becomes a victor. Morality remains an idyllic dream. If an individual or a nation does not want to disappear, that person or nation must change the modes of operation according to the times and conditions. Change will not come if the person or the nation is unaware of the demands. In order to cope with the existing conditions, people must be educated according to those conditions. Whoever does not go along with the times, will stagnate; therein lies the death of a nation.<sup>240</sup>

Besides his teaching duties and writing, Raffi helped bring education to children of the surrounding area. During a dinner gathering at the home of B. Ter Mikayelian, a wealthy merchant, Raffi elaborated on the Armenian nation's disheartening state and the wretchedness of the Armenians in Western Armenia. He proposed to form a benevolent organization to publish books, establish cultural centers, and prepare children of poor families to become teachers by providing them free education. The guests warmly received the idea and asked Raffi to write the bylaws. When Raffi asked for two assistants, Dr. H. Derjanian, who had just returned from Paris, and M. Atabekian volunteered to help him. After they prepared a draft copy of the bylaws, the group met at the girls' school to discuss them. Raffi read the bylaws and explained the purpose of each article. The group accepted the bylaws with minor changes and named the organization *Goghnetsets Lusavorchakan*

*Enkerutiun* (Enlightenment Society of Goghtn<sup>241</sup>). Thirty-six attendees became members. Raffi's purpose for the organization was to educate the youth and prepare the people for future uncertainties.

Raffi taught Armenian language and history to the upper-grade students, and he strived to improve the students' educational level. He moved upper-grade students who performed poorly to lower grades, and he demanded strict discipline from the teachers. He changed the old teaching methods, dismissed incompetent teachers, brought competent teachers from Tiflis, and worked on securing funds for the schools. His reforms alienated many teachers, particularly those with wealthy financial supporters. Controversies and hard feelings developed between the wealthy supporters and Raffi because the wealthy supported the dismissed teachers, whom they controlled by threatening to withhold donations to the schools. K. T. Khachatryan described, in a letter written to *Mshak*, the following incident at a meeting:

One of the wealthy school supporters called a meeting on May 15, 1879, to discuss reforms at the two schools. Raffi and two like-minded teachers attended the meeting. When the wealthy chairman noticed Raffi, he delayed the meeting and waited for Raffi and his friends to leave; but the group refused to leave. An intense argument flared up between Raffi and the chairman. The quarrel continued outside and escalated to physical attacks by S. Ter Mkrtchian and his supporters against Raffi, who had to threaten the aggressors with his walking stick.<sup>242</sup>

Raffi's adversaries were not satisfied with just their physical threats. They sent slanderous letters to *Meghu*, which was more than happy to publish them. Thus, a new campaign began against Raffi because he had complained in several articles about some of the wealthy for imposing tuition increases. Raffi argued that by doing so they created hardships for poor families and prevented their children from getting an education.

Despite the hostile atmosphere, Raffi played an important role in improving and advancing the Armenian schools and the educational system in Tavriz and Agulis. His efforts helped to hire capable teachers, improve the teaching methods, ameliorate the financial conditions, and transfer the schools' leadership from the clergy to elected trustees. For the first time in Armenian educational life, free education and extended school-hours became realities.



## Back to Tiflis

Although Raffi enjoyed teaching in Agulis, he stayed barely a year. Because of sharp disagreements with the school trustees, he departed in the middle of 1879. He sent his family to Payajuk and left for Tiflis. He immediately went to the *Mshak* office and offered his services. Artsruni was expecting him. Exhausted and weary from continual struggles and the ongoing storms, Raffi abandoned his teaching career, settled in Tiflis, and dedicated all his time to his beloved writing. In a short time, he became a permanent member of the editorial staff. Leo reflected on Raffi's importance to *Mshak*: "Artsruni did not abandon the author of *Jalaleddin* in the dull corner of Agulis; he called Raffi to Tiflis and offered him a salary. Raffi became the first among Armenian writers to earn a living solely from his writing. He wrote only novels for *Mshak*."<sup>243</sup> He was pleased to earn a modest living for his family. A year later, he wrote a letter dated December 29, 1879, to Aftandilian about his life during that year in Tiflis:

December 29, 1879, Tiflis

Dear Friend, Mr. A. Aftandilian,

I have not written to you for a long time. Severing my ties with Persia, I have callously forgotten my friends. People, however, must forget the past. I hope that you will continue to write to me. Tossed in the waves of life, my ship seems to have reached its port. After wandering for a long time and enduring numerous unpleasant experiences, I finally found a respite in Tiflis. May God forbid that another new storm rise in front of me, something that has been my lot. At the present, I am in a world for which I have wished for a long time. Writing has always been my life's purpose, and I am satisfied that with this work I am able to earn a living and to spread my ideas.

Each day, I have two hours of work at the *Mshak* office, after which I write. You must have already read that next year I will publish *Kaytser*. Some people are helping me to raise funds here and in the regions to pay for the printing expenses. This is the first

time that our people are beginning to appreciate and support literature. That is a good sign.

Continue your correspondence with *Mshak*; your letters are very interesting. *I ask you to send the accompanying package of letters to Van with a trusted person.* (Italics mine.)

I press your hand.

H. Melik-Hakobian<sup>244</sup>

The last few lines of the letter are especially notable. The apostle of the Armenian revolutionary movement died without witnessing the formation of several major organized movements resulting from his political philosophy. The revolutionary characters described in Raffi's novels already existed dormant among the Armenian people. The armed brave farmer was the old village-head of Hakhveran, and the prelate of Van was Khrimian *Hayrik*, in *Kaytser*; the idealist doctor was the well-known community activist Doctor Bagrat Navasardian of Vagharshapat, in *Khente*.<sup>245</sup> Revolutionary agitations seethed among Armenian young men on both sides of the Russian-Turkish border. For example, in 1872 when Raffi had not yet published any of his novels, a secret organization named *Miutiun i Prkutium* (Union for Salvation) already existed in Van. The members had vowed in a written pact to either free the fatherland or die. In 1878 *Sev Khach Kazmakerputium* (Black Cross Society) established in Van. In 1881 *Pashtpan Hayrenyats* (Protectors of the fatherland) formed in Erzerum (Karin). A similar organization named *Gaghtni Enkerutiun Bardzr Hayots* (Secret Society of Greater Armenia) formed in Erzerum in 1882, but soon the Turkish government found out and arrested seventy-six artisans, merchants, and villagers.<sup>246</sup> Other secret organizations formed in Russia to liberate the Western Armenians from Turkish rule. They were: *Barenepatak Enkerutiun* (Goodwill Society); *Kontora Hayrenyats* (Fatherland Bureau); *Hayrenaserneri Miutiun* (Union of Patriots), formed by Moscow students in 1882, who published the weekly journal *Azatutian Avetaber* (Herald of Freedom), but it disbanded when the Russian police discovered them; *Uzh* (Power), in Shushi; and many others, in Yerevan, Baku, and elsewhere in the Caucasus.<sup>247</sup> Eventually, three major revolutionary groups were founded: the *Armenakan* party in Van in 1885 by Mkrtich Portuguese's students; the *Hinchakian* party in France in 1887; and *Hay Heghapokhakanneri Dashnaktsutiun* (Federation of Armenian Revolutionaries) in Tiflis in 1890, which later became *Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaktsutiun* (Armenian Revolutionary Federation, ARF).

The secret groups in Russia sent messengers to Western Armenia to survey the region and bring back news from Khrimian and Portuguese to Artsruni.



Aleksandr Petrosian (Sandal), Tigran Pirumian, Father Grigor of Daralagyaz, and Gevorg Tavakalian (later, Bagrat Vardapet Tavakalian, known by his revolutionary name Zakki) were some of the messengers who went disguised as either Kurds or pilgrims. Tavakalian was born in the late 1850s in Derbend on the western shores of the Caspian Sea. After graduating from the gymnasium, he entered the military academy in St. Petersburg. During the 1877–1878 Russo-Turkish War, he fell under the spell of Raffi's and Gamar Katipa's ideologies and became engrossed in the Armenian Question. He decided to leave the military academy and go to Armenia. An incident between him and the son of a Russian nobleman was a decisive factor for his departure. During a party, the Russian called Tavakalian *Armiashka* (dirty Armenian). The insult enraged Tavakalian, who grabbed a piece of bone from the table and hit the Russian on the head. He left the academy, went to the Caucasus, and became a follower of *Mshak's* philosophy. He crossed the border into Western Armenia for the first time in 1881 at twenty-one, and worked at the Uchkilisa Monastery in the Alashkert area, using the name Father Giut of Khoy. For a while, he was a teacher in Igdir along with Avetis Aharonian. For ten years, Tavakalian was involved in revolutionary activities, following the examples of Raffi's heroes. In 1890 already a vardapet, in order to move around freely, Tavakalian went to Salmast and became the abbot of Derik Monastery. His cleric status was just an external appearance. He engaged in educating the people and fighting for their freedom, here too following the examples of Raffi's heroes. At Derik, he participated in the frequent skirmishes with the area Kurds, who were constantly attacking the people within the monastery. In 1894 Catholicos Khrimian called him to Ejmiatsin. He went reluctantly because he left his revolutionary and educational activities that he loved. In 1902 an unidentified person assassinated him.<sup>248</sup>

Raffi was aware of the existence of such organizations. During his travels in Vaspurakan and Daron, he may have established ties with certain people to whom he was sending letters "in the hands of a trusted person," as Raffi had written in his December 29, 1879, letter to Aftandilian.

Vardges Aharonian elucidated the influence of Raffi's revolutionary novels on the Armenian liberation movement by giving examples from two of his novels:

Our liberation movement was enlivened and inspired by Raffi's writings, particularly *Kaytser*. He detailed plans to form revolutionary organizations and to train in tactical methods for revolutionary operations, sometimes in minute details. Our liberation movement on many occasions followed verbatim Raffi's

suggested directions.

For example, in the novel *Kaytser*, the center of the liberation movement was Van, as it happened in reality. Because Van was close to Persia, conditions were more favorable for revolutionary groups to organize their incursions into Turkish Armenia. An important station for freedom fighters was the Bardoghimios Monastery, mentioned in *Jalaleddin*, where Sarhad's group fought the Kurds. Already in 1880 Raffi had described in *Kaytser* the attack on the Kurds in the Khanasor Valley. Sixteen years later, in that same valley, the first organized fighting by Armenian liberation groups against the Kurds took place.

In *Kaytser* and *Jalaleddin*, Raffi pointed out those natural allies who could and were able to fight along with Armenians against the Turkish tyranny. They were the Assyrians and the Kurds of Julamerik, especially the Yezidi Kurds.<sup>249</sup> The Armenian liberation movement strived to bring the two groups into its movement, but it achieved modest results, independent of Armenians' wishes. Raffi described details of practical revolutionary conspiracies, such as the transportation of arms, the disguised propagandists' incursions into Armenian villages in Western Armenia, and the use of ciphered letters. In *Kaytser* the merchant Melik Mansur transported arms and ammunition along with merchandize by caravans into Armenia. Aslan received a letter, to which he applied a certain liquid that made the letters appear.

Raffi was a missionary, who preached liberation with his enchanting pen, and a conspiring revolutionary, who had studied the practical methods of the liberation movement. Many followed his inspiring plans. Kristapor Mikayelian became ARF's revolutionary theorist and the editor of *Droshak*.<sup>250</sup> An active revolutionary, he was killed by a bomb he was preparing.<sup>251</sup>

After the Berlin Treaty, the British established close ties with Turkey to counteract Russia's influence in the Balkans. Encouraged by British support, Turkey sprang the idea of Kurdish unity. The British named the Armenian lands Kurdistan and the British Consulate in Erzerum the Kurdish Consulate. The British betrayal of the Armenians alarmed the Armenian intellectuals in Tiflis. In 1880 a group led by Artsruni drew plans to prepare the Western Armenians for self-defense. Present at the meeting were Raffi, Captain Hakob Bek Lazarev (General Lazarev's brother), Doctor Bagrat Navasardian, Arsen Tokhmakhian, and others. They discussed forming freedom fighter groups to

*Mkrtich Portuguesean*

counter Kurdish attacks and to help Armenians resist Turkish government injustices. According to the group's plans, the members were to remain anonymous and communicate only by coded letters. The group later established branches in other towns such as Yerevan, Alexandropol, Igdir, and Akhaltskha. It recruited volunteer fighters, armed them, and sent them to Mush, Vaspurakan, Alashkert, and Bayazet to protect the Armenians from the Kurdish plunderers. Already in late 1880, these volunteer groups proved to be important in fighting off Kurdish attacks. The group's extended activities did not remain secret to the Russian authorities. As long as the volunteer groups were beneficial to Russian policies toward Turkey, Russia allowed the activities to continue across the border. Furthermore, the government secretly encouraged and supported the groups. At the end of 1880, Russian policy

toward Turkey changed drastically. To counter the British diplomacy, Russia began to court Turkey. The Russian government prohibited the volunteer groups' activities and monitored the intellectuals suspected of having connections with the Armenians in Turkey.<sup>252</sup>

Raffi recognized immediately this new diabolic policy as a means to strangle the Armenian Question in its infancy. He wrote an analytical commentary about the British and Turkish machinations in an article titled *Krdakan miutiun* (Kurdish Unity), published in *Mshak* in 1880. Raffi explained that during the Berlin Congress, in order for Turkey to counteract any possible reforms for the Armenians, and Britain's efforts to prevent Russian territorial gains in Western Armenia, the Turkish government, upon British encouragement, came up with the idea of Kurdish unity. Earlier sultans had persecuted the Kurds, who had lived peacefully with the Armenians. Hostilities between various Kurdish tribes were common; for example, most Kurds disliked the Yezidi Kurds because of religious differences. The somewhat peaceful relations between the Armenians and the Kurds ended during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 when the Turkish government endowed the Kurdish leaders, such as Sheikhs Jaleleddin and Ibadullah, with religious authority. Thus, the government exploited the Kurds' fanaticism and let them participate in the war, led by their religious leaders.

The Kurdish hordes did not affect the outcome of the war. Their only contribution was massacring the Armenian population and destroying their villages in the Turkish territories before the arrival of the Russian forces. The Kurds' barbarism attracted the attention of the British, whose agents were active among the Turkish forces. The victimized Armenians did not interest the British, who incited the Kurds and used them against Russian expansion into Asia Minor. After the war, the British consuls in Western Armenia paid special attention to the Kurds with the idea to create an imaginary unity, something that was difficult and improbable for the Kurds to achieve. Now that the British were paying attention to them, the Kurds intensified their barbarism. Even while the Russian armies were in San Stefano, the Kurds began massacring the Armenians in the Khnus region. Sheikh Ibadullah and his hordes destroyed fifty Armenian villages and massacred tens of thousands of Armenians. The British consul in Van visited the sheikh to honor him for his barbarism. When the Kurds plundered, burned, and massacred, the Armenians appealed to the Turkish government for help. Their appeal was futile because the government itself had instigated the Kurds to attack the Armenians. The Armenians turned to European nations for help, but the British were already part of the problem, and the other European nations were busy with the war. After the Berlin Treaty, however, changes in British policy



*Bagrat Vardapet Tavakalian (Zakki)*

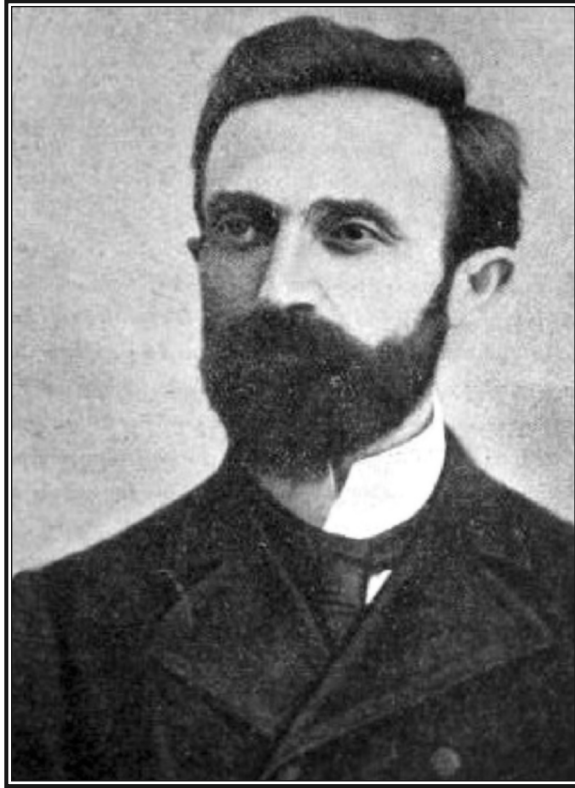
led to the collapse of the Kurdish imaginary unity, but the name Kurdistan remained. “The British could not even lick their own spit.” Now that the tide had turned, the British consul in Van sent a telegraph to Constantinople to inform the Embassy that the Kurds had destroyed thirteen Armenian villages.

The destruction of Armenian villages at the start of the war caused the famine of 1877, during which the Armenians saw the malevolence of the Turkish officials trying to increase the number of Armenian deaths by refusing to help the starving Armenians. A large number of peasants from Van, Mush, Baghesh (Bitlis), and Bayazet escaped from their villages and settled in the Caucasus. The famine prompted the Armenians to unite morally, galvanized Armenians in other parts of the world to send help, and reconciled relations between Armenians and several Kurdish tribes who received help from Armenian relief committees. In his article, Raffi appealed to the Armenians that the time had come to unite and form self-defense groups to fight against the Kurdish tyranny for survival. Many Armenian young men heeded his appeal and formed self-defense groups to punish Kurds who killed unarmed Armenian villagers. Some of the peasants who had escaped the war and the



*Kristapor Mikayelian*

famine returned and joined the self-defense groups to protect their homes and families. Raffi described the activities of the volunteer groups as news rather than as announcements. He reported in the article that several armed groups had formed to protect the Armenian villagers from marauding Kurds. He explained that the groups did not intend to revolt or fight against the Turkish government, but that their purpose was to monitor the Kurds' activities in the Armenian mountains. Whenever the groups encountered Kurds committing atrocities, they immediately attacked and meted out fair justice; they even protected the peaceful Kurds who became victims to the barbarism of their own race.<sup>253</sup> Raffi's information about the armed groups may have been a fact. He may have been referring to the secret organizations already existing in Western Armenia. Meanwhile, Raffi encouraged the formation of such groups, as he made their necessity a central part of his novels, particularly *Jalaleddin*, *Khente*, and *Kaytser*.

*Simon Zavarian*

Aleksandr Shirvanzade recalled that in the early 1880s Kristapor Mikayelian and Simon Zavarian,<sup>254</sup> admired by the Armenian youth, constantly visited Grigor Artsruni and Raffi to ask for advice.<sup>255</sup> Although Raffi was occupied with his writing, his door was always open to visitors. His modest home was full of young people, among them Simon Zavarian, Kristapor Mikayelian, Hovhannes Loris-Melikian, and Konstandin Khatisian—the true founders of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. These young men spoke predominantly in Russian, which Raffi tried to discourage. In the late 1800s spoken Armenian was rare in the Caucasus, particularly in Tiflis. The Russian language prevailed among the middle and upper classes of the Armenian community in Tiflis. In his articles, Raffi criticized this trend among the Armenian society. Mikayelian described, in one of his articles, the influence of the Russian language:

During the 1884–1885 school year, when I was involved with both the Moscow and the Tiflis groups, discussions among fellow students about various topics were in Russian; however, we did follow the events in the Armenian community. Outside of our studies, we made an effort to speak Armenian and taught Armenian to those who did not speak it. We received and read Armenian papers and periodicals, and some of us wrote in Armenian papers. We often visited Raffi and Artsruni.<sup>256</sup>

Simon Zavarian's memoirs reveal that Raffi's novels and Artsruni's articles influenced Zavarian and his colleagues. As for the group's meetings, Zavarian reiterated Mikayelian's description: "Our group consisted exclusively of Armenians. We invited two students from the Nersisian Academy with a special purpose. The group's leaders wanted the students to teach us Armenian language and history. Gamar Katipa and Raffi held first place in the Armenian literary arena. Gradually, Nalbandian and Raffi, Garo and Aslan [in *Kaytser*] occupied our minds and souls in place of N. G. Chernishevski, Nikolai A. Nekrasov, Sofia L. Perovskaya, and other Russian intellectuals."<sup>257</sup> Raffi's patriotic fervor was such that "during the educational conflict in 1883 at the Gevorgian College in Ejmiatsin, more than fifty students were expelled, among them Mikayel Ter Avetikian and Aleksandr Katanian. Influenced by the political and ideological environment and by Raffi's *Kaytser*, Mikayel and Aleksandr became gunsmiths and dedicated their lives to the Armenian Cause."<sup>258</sup>

News of freedom fighters in the Armenian territories in Turkey became a driving force for impassioned and patriotic young men to sacrifice themselves fighting for freedom. These young men searched for ways to cross the border, often unaware of what was waiting for them, or what their mission was. One such example was the case of Aleksandr (Vardan) Goloshian. He came from an intellectual and a wealthy family. Still a young man impassioned with patriotism, he left his family and went to Salmast; from there he crossed the border into Vaspurakan several times and returned to Tiflis bringing news about the condition of the Armenians. In May 1889 he left his family for the last time. On the night of May 16 (May 28 of the current calendar), he and his friends Hovhannes Agripasian and Karapet Golakszian left from the Armenian Haftvan village in the Salmast region and crossed the Persian border into Vaspurakan. On May 24, they encountered a group of Turkish soldiers and engaged in a skirmish with them. During the fighting Goloshian and Agripasian were killed. Golakszian escaped leaving behind his weapons and pouch. The soldiers found two letters in the pouch, one written by Mkrtich



Portugalian, the other by one Avetis Badikian of London. The Turkish authorities gave the letters to the British consul George Pollard Davie, in Van, who sent them with a cover letter to the British Embassy in Constantinople.<sup>259</sup> Before his last departure, Goloshian had sent a letter to his parents from Salmast, in which he had written: "During my adolescent years, Raffi shined in our public arena. The remarkable work of the sympathetic man guided an important ideology . . . Reading Raffi's novels instilled in me a passionate and a noble love toward my nation and fatherland; it inspired me to go and help the unfortunate Armenians. I decided to work until my death to liberate the fatherland and to consider its welfare my joy."<sup>260</sup>

Stepan Stepanian (aka Tseruni and Balajan), who was a participant in the Kukunian Expedition, explained years later his reasons for volunteering: "The role played by Raffi's novels and writings was great. Raffi's influence on us was enormous. His novels were the most loved and most read literature, which ruled everyone's mind. His detailed plans and designs became realities when young men followed them and sacrificed their lives fighting to defend the oppressed Armenians."<sup>261</sup>

Kukunian's Expedition consisted of approximately one hundred volunteers, who crossed into Western Armenia to help the wretched Armenians and protect them from the Turkish officials and Kurdish marauders. The group crossed the Russian–Turkish border on September 24, 1890, under Sargis Kukunian's leadership. Just at the border, the inexperienced members unexpectedly engaged in a fight with a Kurdish group. This alarmed the Russian border guards. Trapped between two fires, the group dispersed, but the guards arrested many of them; the rest escaped. The arrested members were tried, and a few of them were imprisoned on the Sakhalin Island, from where Kukunian and others escaped later.





## The Decade of Novels

Raffi's most productive years began in 1879, when he permanently settled in Tiflis and continued for a decade to the end of his life. After the publication of *Jalaleddin*, Raffi enjoyed the fame of a peerless novelist. In 1879 he began publishing in *Mshak* his new novel *Voski akaghagh*, which he had started writing in the early 1870s. It is one of the best works in Armenian realism literature. Inspired by the political and social events of the coming years, Raffi published other novels in short successions.

An uprising in 1878 erupted in the mountains of Zeytun. Frustrated by the indifference of the Great Powers toward the Armenian Question, and encouraged by Zeytun's determined struggle for freedom, Raffi worked relentlessly to finish *Kaytser*. He had already written a few segments of the novel as early as the late 1860s. In 1879 Raffi prepared to publish *Kaytser* in two volumes. He informed Artsruni that he had written *Kaytser* based on his impressions of the Russo-Turkish war.<sup>262</sup> In December Raffi announced in the article *Yerku khosk mer entertsogh hasarakutiane* (Two Words to Our Reading Public) his purpose for writing *Kaytser* and his desire to publish it:

To describe the present condition of the Western Armenians and because of the latest political events, I began writing the novel *Kaytser*. This work contains descriptions of all the horrors experienced by Armenians in Western Armenia. The novel consists of two separate volumes, each having approximately four hundred pages. The events take place in the province of Vaspurakan, and the characters are freedom fighters. The topic deals with the Armenian agitations in Vaspurakan three-quarters of a century ago; the local people still remember the sad events of those days.

I realized that the problem of Western Armenia is attracting the attention of all Armenians; therefore, I hastened as much as possible to publish this work to shed light on the solution of the Armenian Question, which still needs serious investigation. The lack of publishing expenses compelled me to appeal to the reading public and ask their consideration for this undertaking, which

requires sincere supporters. I hope that with the help of the subscribers I will realize my expectations. The price of the two volumes will be three rubles. I will publish the two volumes consecutively, after which I will send them to the subscribers. Printing will start immediately after I receive enough funds from subscriptions to cover the printing costs.<sup>263</sup>

Raffi's appeal did not generate enough subscribers to publish *Kaytser*. Besides the censor's objections, he faced financial difficulties; thus, he delayed the first volume's publication until 1883, the second volume's, until 1887. In his novels, Raffi never sought the assistance of foreigners, especially the Russians, to liberate the Armenians. Raffi's heroes sought the assistance of the Julamerik Assyrians and the Yezidi Kurds. Raffi wrote in *Kaytser*:

We cannot expect help from foreigners. A nation that always yearns for help from foreigners will always remain unfortunate. No one will help us for the sake of his father's soul; he must take ten things from us to give us one. Supplicants' faces will always be black and their purses empty. A man must stand up by his own efforts and strength. The foreigner's help resembles a pillar, when removed the supported object will collapse.<sup>264</sup>

Early in the novel, Raffi declared his ideology of liberation and stated that liberty requires force. His uncles were gunsmiths and had inherited the trade from past generations. Raffi used this familial fact in his novel and pointed out that almost all the gunsmiths in Persia and Turkey were Armenians. They made weapons for the enemy, who could not make their own weapons, but they knew how to use them well. The uncles were renowned gunsmiths in the Salmast region. Their large shop was crowded with Persians, Turks, and Kurds, who brought their weapons for repairs. Many of them came from far away and stayed at his uncles' house for days without paying for lodging, and often without paying for the services because they were the leaders of the Mohammedan people. The uncles treated these leaders well and gingerly to earn their protection and support in collecting payments from the common Muslim customers. Raffi placed great importance on learning trades to help in future liberation activities. The hunter in *Kaytser* urged Farhad to leave the hell that was Ter Todik's school and become a gunsmith at his uncles' shop.

Raffi had confidence in the Armenian people. He expressed that confidence in *Kaytser*: "The Armenians are an amazing people, and to kill them is almost impossible . . . Throughout the ages they were struck, forged,

and hewn so much on the anvil of the world that they became strong as steel. They are extremely durable and indestructible.”<sup>265</sup> Several non-Armenian authors have expressed similar attributes. H.F.B. Lynch commented that “the distinguishing characteristic of the Armenians is grit—toughness and endurance—to which they owe their continued existence as a people.”<sup>266</sup> David Marshal Lang had stressed this point about the Armenians’ penchant for survival: “Logically he should have given up the struggle and lain down to die long ago. But he refused, and still refuses to surrender; here lies the key to understanding the nature of this dogged, invincible, little people, whose contributions to human civilization is out of proportion to its numerical strength.”<sup>267</sup>

With confidence in the power of his pen, Raffi embarked on his enormous task of liberating Armenia with clear and precise plans and a strong pen. He advanced his thoughts through his characters. In *Kaytser*, Aslan and Farhad had just concluded their visit with the Mute, a mathematician and a scientist turned monk at the Arakelots Monastery, when Farhad asked Aslan why the Mute had left his field and secluded himself at the monastery. Raffi explained his literary philosophy with Aslan’s words:

In his opinion, we have only a few highly educated people who would use their knowledge for important needs. The Europeans have thousands of people engaged in scientific research to find new inventions. We can translate their books and benefit from them. Science is the same for all nations, but one thing that Europe is unable to give us is a national literature, which we must create. The Mute left the scientific field and started writing literature. He had a natural talent and a flowing language. He wrote poems, descriptive stories, and novels. He published some of his works, which the readers cherished; but many remained unpublished when the government officials confiscated them before imprisoning him.

He was the first writer who left the European style of writing and decided to write about life’s realities and necessities. He was the first writer who depicted the misfortunes of the oppressed and the exploited people. He was the first writer who abandoned the pretentious mercenary writings, which praised the wealthy and the influential people, and wrote about the indigent laborers. I agree with the Mute’s idea that literature is biased.

Poetry and all literary works must invigorate and lead a nation. Science gives dry and tasteless nourishment to peoples’ minds, but

literature gives nourishment to their hearts, souls, and imagination. The writer creates lofty and universal ideals for the people. If he does not find his ideal characters in the present, he enters the depths of history and evokes from antiquity his desired heroes with their attributes and noble deeds, which he does not find in the present, and presents them to his readers so that they will learn and emulate them. He sees with the foresight of a prophet the glimpses that, perhaps years or even centuries later, will grow from their embryonic stage, progress, and acquire perfect form and shape. He describes their images beforehand and offers them to the public. The true writer knows the past, the present, and the future. Ages are in his hands. A well-written book can save a whole nation.<sup>268</sup>

One day in December 1879 Grigor Artsruni asked the *Mshak* editors, among them Aleksandr Kalantar, to gather and listen to Raffi read his *Khente* manuscript. Before the reading started, a fire broke out in a store across the street. Everyone ran out to watch the fire and the confusion. Raffi stood quietly and intently watched the flames rising and consuming the building. The group postponed the reading. On the next day when Raffi started reading the manuscript, everyone was surprised to hear the description of Bayazet burning as if it were the previous day's fire. "I benefited from yesterday's fire scene and used appropriate words to better describe the Bayazet conflagration."<sup>269</sup> *Khente* appeared in *Mshak* from February 25 to mid June 1880.

Before the novel concluded, Raffi received congratulatory letters from readers, among them Rafayel Patkanian, who was marveled by the novel. He wrote a letter to congratulate Raffi and mentioned that at one time he had contemplated writing such a novel, but he had realized that he was unfamiliar with the locations and the people whom Raffi had described with such realism and enthrallment. Patkanian had met Raffi in early 1880 during one of his visits to Tiflis at Stepanos Palasani's home. After Patkanian's return to Nor Nakhijevan, Palasani corresponded with him. Palasani wrote that Raffi's writings inspired the youth, and that "he is that *khente* who has opened a new era of excitement for the youth,"<sup>270</sup> but many older people, among them Tserents, did not understand Raffi's novels. Ruben Berberian, who read Raffi's novels as a young man, confirmed Palasani's statement when years later he wrote, "Raffi had become the youth's idol."<sup>271</sup> Inspired by *Khente* and its main character's bravery, many young men, from as far away as Moscow and St. Petersburg, left their studies and careers, and they went to Western Armenia to help their fellow oppressed Armenians.

Attacks against the novel were expected. Supporters of *Meghu Hayastani*

in Alexandropol became angry when they read the description of Vardan's dream.<sup>272</sup> They envisioned Protestant preaching and proselytizing threats, and they prepared to inform the Russian government's religious affairs department to force *Mshak* to cease the publication.<sup>273</sup> Some readers expressed desire to see *Khente* published in book form. Others asked permission to translate it into Russian. Raffi responded to his readers with an article titled *Mi arajarkutiun* (A Proposal) in *Mshak*:

We received many letters expressing a desire to publish *Khente* as a separate book. To fulfill our respected readers' wishes is precious for me, but I must say that I am unable to do so. The reason is that I have neither the time nor the funds for its publication . . . If some people appreciate the book's contemporary significance and think that its publication would find a wider readership, I am ready to give my consent and accept most favorable terms to permit its first publication.<sup>274</sup>

Raffi's announcement to give permission for publishing *Khente* in book form prompted one of his Tavriz students Abel Apresian to ask Raffi for permission to publish it in Shushi. In September 1880 the typesetting started at the printing house of Hakob Mirzajan. In the same month, Raffi received a request from Gabriyel Mirzoian,<sup>275</sup> a student at the Moscow University, to publish the book, but Raffi had already committed to Abel Apresian. An announcement in the April 1, 1881, issue of *Mshak* informed the readers about the book's availability. Leo, who proofread the manuscript while at *Mshak*, described the unprecedented acceptance of the novel:

*Khente* came out soon after *Jalaleddin*, again about the Russo-Turkish War. The books became available and sold out in a few months. This was an unusual Armenian book. The novel left even deeper impressions on the readers than did *Jalaleddin*. People read *Khente* with rapture. Suddenly, Raffi stood at a level where no Armenian novelist had ever stood. No other Armenian book had ever had such widespread magical influence on the minds of Armenians. The youth were altogether enchanted. We were fascinated; no, we were enchanted. How many times did I read it, six or seven times, and I still was not sated.

The readers did not overlook any of the characters and events in the novel. The reading public's expressions and conversations revolved around the novel. I witnessed an unusual reader in a

regional town. On a cold winter night, the night watchman had lit a large fire in the marketplace and was reading *Khente* by the fire's light, while complaining that he was unable to stop reading and separate from the book to make his rounds and perform his duties. *Khente* came during a time when our people, filled with vigor, searched for its self-identity. The novel transported us into Western Armenian homes and acquainted us with the family members and their anguish and woes. We knew little about that wretched place. Raffi described all that with an enchanting force. His language and descriptions were magical. Raffi was a writer whose kind the Armenians have not seen since the sixth century.

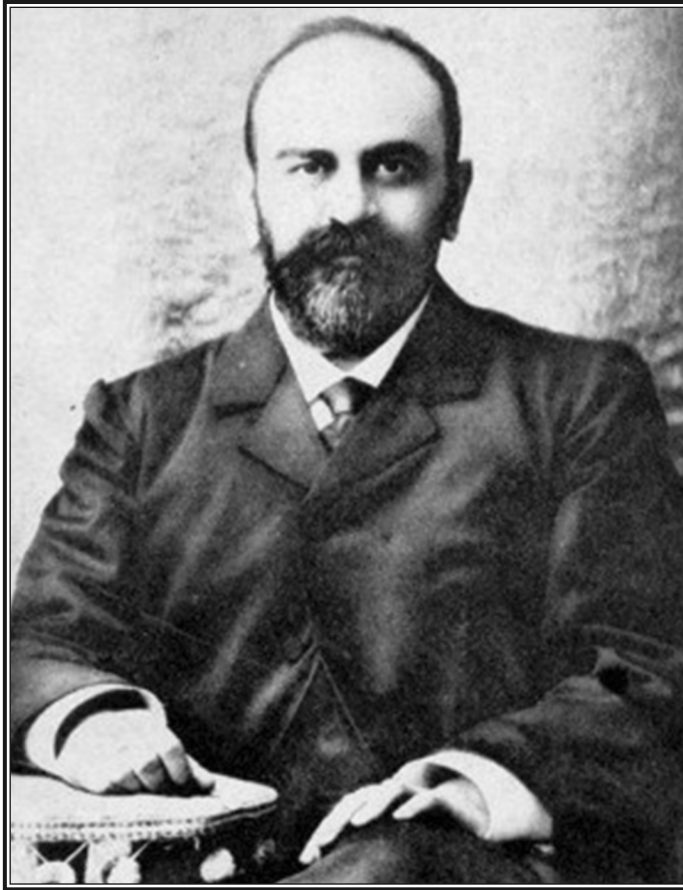
Never in our history has our literary prose been as splendid as in *Jalaleddin* and *Khente*. Raffi described the misfortunes and violations suffered by an entire race. Raffi did not just lament his people's misfortunes, but he also explained the state of affairs, preached for action, and wrote commentaries to emphasize his ideas. He was a preacher in every sentence and every paragraph. For him the reader was a student. With an amazing simplicity, Raffi juxtaposed the two neighbors—the oppressive Kurd and the victimized Armenian. The Kurd was savage and destructive since his birth; the Armenian was servile and docile, and he submitted to an unfortunate destiny. The two neighbors had become natural and dreadful eternal enemies—a wolf and a sheep.

The horrible realities described in *Jalaleddin* and *Khente* were not the only elements that made the two novels priceless and endearing to the Armenian people. Raffi went further and painted the realities with fictional characters and scenes. That quality gave his novels a unique splendor. If Raffi were satisfied with just recording the realities of events, his novels would not have enchanted the readers and dominated their minds.<sup>276</sup>

Several people from Petersburg, Moscow, and Tiflis requested to translate *Khente* into Russian. From Constantinople, [Tovmas] Terzian asked for permission to translate *Jalaleddin* and *Khente* into French. Raffi gave permission to all of them, but translated versions did not appear in either Russian or French while Raffi was alive. In a letter dated March 20, 1882, Raffi wrote to his friend Melkon Panian:<sup>277</sup>

I heard from P. Nikoghosian that someone from Constantinople by the name of Terzian, who is a young linguist with higher





*Leo (Arakel Babakhanian)*

education, has requested permission to translate *Jalaleddin* and *Khente* into French. Of course, I gave him permission with great willingness. His intentions are to introduce our literature and our culture to the Europeans.

Dr. Tamamshian of the Russian Embassy wrote to inform me that upon his suggestion, someone has converted *Khente* to a drama; Tamamshian intends to translate it into French and English and have it performed in several European cities. Although I do not benefit from it, at least this much is encouraging when I see my labor is not in vain.<sup>278</sup>

During one of his trips to Tiflis, Patkanian visited Petros Simoniants,

*Meghu's* editor and his friend from their university days in Dorpat. During their conversation about the hostility between *Meghu* and *Mshak*, Patkanian told his friend, "Petros, I am telling you that in Tiflis the people love Artsruni more than they respect him. When they love, they forgive. Artsruni told me that among his four full time assistants, Raffi . . . received fifty to sixty rubles a month. This is great progress and a big step for Armenian journalism and very generous of an editor, who covered the deficit from his personal funds."<sup>279</sup>

Raffi's popularity had not escaped the attention of Tserents,<sup>280</sup> another well-known literary figure. During Raffi's prolific years, he and novelist Tserents had serious philosophical and political differences. The enmity started when in 1876 Tserents published an article in *Arevelian Mamul*,<sup>281</sup> defending the position of several writers advocating the emigration of Armenians from Turkey to other countries to escape the Turkish oppression and find happiness and wealth. Raffi was in Tavriz at the Aramian School when he read the article. He considered the proposition extremely damaging and offensive to the Armenians in Turkey. During his travels through Van in 1857, Raffi had witnessed the awful results of emigration and the consequent depopulation of the ancestral lands. For that reason, Raffi responded harshly to Tserents with a bold article titled *Gzhadun*<sup>282</sup> (Mental Asylum) in *Mshak*. Raffi signed the article with one of his pseudonyms—Melikzade. He pointed out that the ancestral lands lay fallow, while its people were begging for food in foreign lands. He accused the community leaders of failing to teach the peasants the necessary trades to become self-reliant and to earn their bread on their ancestral lands; instead, the leaders were telling the peasants to emigrate. "If the Armenian wishes to survive and have a future, he must seek his livelihood from the Armenian lands—lands that have been sanctified and retained by the blood of our ancestors."<sup>283</sup> This article enraged Tserents. Years later Tserents moved from Constantinople to Tiflis. Raffi returned from Tavriz in 1877 and worked at *Mshak* for a month before leaving for Agulis. Shirvanzade described the story<sup>284</sup> of Tserents's encounter with Raffi, during which Tserents addressed Raffi with an offensive epithet using Raffi's Melikzade pseudonym. Visiting the *Mshak* office for the first time, Tserents met Raffi.

"Are you Melikzade?" Tserents asked.

"Yes," Raffi responded.

"You are not Melikzade, you are Haremzade,"<sup>285</sup> Tserents shouted angrily, and he left.

Raffi remained quiet. He liked to argue with people in writing and not in spoken words. Tserents never had kind words for Raffi. Stepanos Palasanian told to Rafayel Patkanian the story of another encounter between Tserents and Raffi. It happened one day when Palasanian and Raffi were taking a leisurely

walk on Golovinski Street.

“We greeted each other and passed, when suddenly Tserents turned around and told Raffi, ‘I read *Khente* and Vardan’s dream. You are khente,’ then he hurried off.”

“What did he mean by that?” Palasanian asked Raffi.

“Perhaps that which he had not comprehended,” Raffi replied. Palasanian noticed Raffi’s melancholy voice and demeanor.<sup>286</sup>

A story told by Tigran Nazarian about the contentious relationship between Tserents and Raffi demonstrated the severity of the enmity. Tserents, Raffi, Petros Adamian,<sup>287</sup> and other Armenian literati often dined at the Komercheski Restaurant near Artsruni’s theater, but the two adversaries did not sit at the same table. Once, the two giants got into an argument during which Tserents threatened to strike Raffi with a bottle.<sup>288</sup> One was preaching liberation with his *Khente* and *Kaytser*, the other was fanatically defending the Church and private enterprise.

Although Raffi was a calm, self-assured, and taciturn man, wherever he went a storm developed around him. In Salmast, people fought against him. In Tavriz, his career ended in a fight. In Agulis, his teaching position ended in conflict. In Tiflis, he brought upon himself the fury of the clergy and their backward supporters. Pseudo-intellectuals, with the leadership of *Meghu*’s editor Petros Simoniants, persecuted Raffi until his death. Wherever Raffi went, he stirred the stagnant populace and revived the struggle against regression, prejudice, and wicked morals. The fire of his soul was in his pen.





## Nationality and Religion

The Russian revolutionaries assassinated Tsar Alexander II in 1881. The government executed the three assassins, Timofei Mikhailov, Nikolai Kibalchich, and Andrei Zhelyabov.<sup>289</sup> Alexander III ascended the throne and pursued a policy of severe persecutions against minorities, especially the Armenians. Such sentiments had already existed in the 1870s among Russian officials. Raffi had commented about them indirectly in an editorial as early as 1880, forewarning the Armenian community of difficult times facing them. The editorial was in response to *Meghu's* denigrating editorial position that outside the Armenian Church an Armenian is no longer an Armenian. Raffi often wrote articles against *Meghu's* editor and his supporters' unfortunate and illogical perceptions of the relationship between church and nation. In his long article titled *Minchev yerb* (Until When), Raffi elaborated on his idea of national unity in relation to religion:

Modern demands instill in our national leaders new thinking and ideas, which are current necessities. New thinking and ideas may seem foreign, strange, and even harmful to those who do not follow current demands but remain convinced of old prejudices.

We will continually flog all those ill-minded people, whether they are Armenian Apostolic, Armenian Catholic, Armenian Protestant, or Armenian Muslim, who spread discord among our national unity efforts because of religion. We will lovingly embrace our brothers, without hurting their feelings, who endeavor for Armenia and protect the rights of Armenians.

The idea of nationality has been alien to Armenians for a long time. A few intellectuals revived the idea only now during the second half of this century; but they presented it in a confusing manner. The most zealous and sincere patriots were confusing the nation with religion, and religion with the Church. They looked upon those who left the Armenian Church as pagans and not Armenians anymore; thus, they considered the Nation and the Church as an inseparable unit.

This mentality could not last long; it was contrary to the natural progress of nations. The Armenian nation cannot belong to only one church. During the pre-Christian centuries, the Armenians belonged to different sects; despite them, the nationality did not lose its unity; it was stronger and more powerful than at later times. Our Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and even Muslim brothers are Armenians like us and belong to our nation. We cannot tell them, we do not even have the right to tell them, to change and once again join our Church, that only then will we consider them Armenians.

Who can deny that the Church has a historic relation with our nationality? Who can deny that the Church has rescued our nation many times from disappearing, and that the Church has harmed our nation many times? If the Armenians abandon their language and homeland, lose their national attributes, and find refuge only in the Church, then they cannot consider themselves a nation anymore. Such a nation will disintegrate, assimilate, and eventually disappear among other nationalities. Our faith in the Armenian nation is great. Article 16 and Article 61 of San Stefano and Berlin treaties imposed Turkey to introduce improvements in the Armenian provinces, recognizing the Armenians as a nation. Who are then the Armenians? The recognition meant that the Armenians are one nationality, among whom there can be many religious denominations.

We are the children of one nation and members of the same family. Over many centuries, religion separated us, but now love of the nation and fatherland must unite us. Catholicism, Protestantism, and even Islam do not prevent an Armenian from being an Armenian; neither does the Armenian Apostolicism make us Armenians. We were Armenian when we were pagan, and we will remain Armenian even if we change our religion a thousand times. Our nationality will not disappear if we preserve all the necessary and essential conditions for the existence of our nation.<sup>290</sup>

The subjects of religion and patriotism were popular in the Armenian press during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In another lengthy article titled *Inchov yenk mkhitarvum* (With What Are We Consoled?), Raffi tried to revive the ideas of progress and advancement among the Armenians. What he advocated then still holds true today. He pointed out that just because other nations are in the same stagnant or worse condition did not mean

Armenians should be satisfied with their own condition. He gave the example of a blind person finding solace in meeting another blind person, a pauper in someone even more destitute, and a bankrupt merchant in another bankrupt merchant. He pointed out that such behavior was also prevalent toward religion and nationality. Raffi tried to reason against such mentality when he asked rhetorically:

What is the thing that a human being finds in others as consolation for his loss, misfortune, and faults?

A people or a community tries to justify its bad behavior by that of other peoples or communities. We see such thinking and mentality among individuals and nations. I am not surprised that the public thinks that way because often even the intelligentsia makes the same mistake . . . I remember reading about several diatribes in the papers. When one speaks about a shortcoming or a fault among Armenians, opponents immediately search the globe and find several nations that have the same faults. Thus, they justify the Armenians' behavior by saying that the Armenians are not alone in behaving that way . . .

If we allow this type of mentality, it means that we must not speak against anything or complain against injustice. The false patriots deny the faults, and the nearsighted intelligentsia justifies the conditions by coming up with all sorts of excuses . . .

Again the issue of religion and nation has raised its head . . . We have always said, and we repeat that the idea of nationality is not contingent on religion, but on racial qualities. First among those qualities is the language, which will always be the foundation of the nation's preservation . . . A person may not belong to any church and may not even believe in religion, but that person will not be without a language. We do not accept national differences among different denominations.<sup>291</sup>

Just prior to this article, Raffi had written in *Hayere Kabuli mej* (Armenians in Kabul) about the content of an article by Mr. Hughes, an Englishman, who had published it in the Constantinople Armenian periodical *Manzume-i- Efkiar* (Range of Opinions), published in *Kipchak* (Turkish Kipchak language, but written with the Armenian alphabet). Mr. Hughes had written about the existence of a small Armenian community in Kabul that at one time had two hundred families and a church built in 1738; but now only four men, eight women, and two children lived there. Because the community

lacked an Armenian clergy for a long time, Protestant missionaries ministered to the community. Raffi blamed the community's deterioration on Ejmiatsin's disregard and neglect of such communities, and he exposed the existence of other communities with similar fates. He gave the example of the Dersim Armenians:

The Armenian people love their Church, and they have remained loyal to its traditions. Many communities waited a long time for their shepherds, who ignored and neglected to attend to the communities' spiritual needs. Left alone, the people were obliged to accept other religions. We—the representatives of the Armenian intellectuals—are disturbed to see all this. If some visionary person wants to unite the various Armenian denominations around the concept of nationality, saying that the Armenian Catholics, Armenian Protestants, and Armenian Muslims are our brethren, that person is called a disbeliever . . . The Armenians of Dersim gradually assimilated among the Kurds after remaining without priests for a long time. Dersim is not far from the Aghtamar and the Sis catholicosates, or from the Constantinople and the Jerusalem patriarchates. Now the Protestants are working among those people and teaching them to read the Bible in Armenian and to speak in their mother tongue. What shall we tell those preachers? Shall we tell them to go and preach to the pagans, and that they have no business with the Armenians?<sup>292</sup>

Raffi touched on the subject of assimilation when he wrote the article *Aghtamara vanke*. During his conversation with the abbot and in response to the abbot's complaint about Armenians who belonged to other Christian denominations, Hakob had asked, "What can I tell you, Vardapet? How far are the Norshen, Arinj, and Haghunk villages in the plains of Mush from Surb Hakob, Surb Hovnan, and Surb Galk monasteries, where many monks live? Is it not because of your disregard that Latin priests have nested in those villages? How far is the village of Khnus where American missionaries give sermons from their pulpits?"<sup>293</sup>

As Raffi defended all Armenians belonging to various religious denominations, he did not spare his criticism when it came to "the ill-minded, who inject discord into our national unity efforts." In the 1870s young Armenians of various religious denominations joined hands and founded several educational and benevolent societies to familiarize the Armenians of Constantinople with national awareness. The three well-known organizations



were *Ararat*, *Tprotsasirats–Arevelian* (Friends of Schools–Eastern), and *Kilikia*. In 1880 the three organizations united and formed the *Miatsyal Enkerutiun* (United Society). The renowned *Araratian Enkerutiun* (Ararat Society), established by Mkrtich Portugalian, succeeded to establish close ties between Armenians in Turkey and Armenians in Russia with the efforts of Grigor Artsruni, Mkrtich Portugalian, and Arpiar Arpiarian. In the 1870s the progressive young Armenians were tolerant of religious differences among various Armenian denominations. The Armenian Catholic Patriarch Andon Hasuni<sup>294</sup> found the cooperation of the young Armenian Catholics with Apostolic Armenians harmful to the Pope's and his interests. He created intrigues and informed the Turkish government, which curtailed the growth of such organizations.<sup>295</sup>

Raffi responded to Hasuni's disruptive activities with a commentary in *Mshak* titled *Hasuniannere yev yur kusaksutiune* (The Hasunians and Their Organization) where he stressed the importance of unity. Raffi criticized Patriarch Hasuni for spreading dissention. He wrote, "When many nations are trying to shed the pope's influence and gravitate toward more liberal religious ideologies, Hasuni's followers are derailing that movement among Armenians. Such opposition will inevitably set back progressive religious movements a few centuries and lead to religious oppression, preached in the name of salvation."

Raffi analyzed the motives behind Armenians' apostasies and stated, "When we look back at our past history, we see that conversions among the Armenians have taken place more for political reasons than for religious beliefs." Raffi presented historical details on Armenia's relations with other nations and the role various religions had played in the history and the lives of Armenians. As for Hasuni's campaign, Raffi attributed it to the Vatican's intentions to control all the community affairs of Armenian Catholics. He pointed out the harmful effects of Hasuni's actions:

Whereas, before the appointment of Hasuni in 1867 as catholicos [patriarch] of the Cilician and the Constantinople sees, the Armenian Catholics were autonomous in electing their own patriarchs and governing all their church affairs; thus, preserving their national character. Since his arrival in Constantinople, after completing his studies in 1833 at the Vatican's propaganda school, Hasuni became involved in a series of intrigues and agitations until he combined the two sees under his control. Thus, the Armenian Catholic community lost its religious independence and became directly subject to the Vatican. A segment of the community

resented the loss of its independence and opposed Hasuni. The anti-Hasuni group realized its mistake of expecting help from the West and chose to rely on themselves to defend their freedom and national rights. The rest supported the pope and his representative, Hasuni, relinquishing their independence and national sanctity.<sup>296</sup>

Raffi saw strength in the collective power of the Armenians. He marveled at the bravery of individual Armenians and liked to talk about it. He posited that by now the Armenians would have become one of the strongest nations had they used that bravery collectively:

Individual Armenians are lions when using their intelligence and judgment. The lack of unity, however, diminishes and weakens their bravery. Throw the Armenian into a dangerous arena and he will use his intelligence to survive. Bring several Armenians together, instead of defending themselves and attacking, they will forget the enemy and discuss, argue, and attack each other. Indeed, Armenian individuality, present among all levels of our society, is Armenians' worst enemy. Is it possible for our leaders to make the individual a little dumber and the masses a little smarter? If that is possible, we will have a bright future; otherwise, we are lost, or we will live a shameful life as we have until now.<sup>297</sup>

Father Malachia Ormanian, patriarch of Constantinople, had referred to the same attribute of Armenians in his well-known book *The Church of Armenia*:

In spite of hindrances, and the fetters whereby his progress has been clogged, he has known how to play an active part by the side of his rulers, and to raise himself to the highest positions in countries to which he has emigrated . . .

Many an Armenian has distinguished himself in civil employment and in military posts . . .

Unfortunately, circumstances alter the aspect of the case when the nation is considered as a whole, and when a close examination is made as to what it has accomplished, or what it has been in past times as a people. A distinguishing impression of despondency is produced by such an inquiry . . . Armenia . . . exposed on all sides to incursions of her neighbors . . . found herself at the mercy of every kind of annoyance at their hands. But could such

circumstances exculpate the nation from allowing itself to fall into decay? In vain will its history be ransacked for a trace of those brilliant qualities of which Armenians, as individuals, have given proof. These qualities have already been neutralized in the collective nation by passions of the moment, brought about by jealousies and by unbridled ambitions. Instances of these defects, always to be regretted, which have given rise to unjustifiable strifes and led her to positive ruin, are only of too frequent occurrence in her history.<sup>298</sup>

Raffi understood the purpose of the tsarist ethnic nationalities policy. He immediately turned his attention to writing historical novels. Whereas, in *Khente* he was placing the hopes for Armenia's emancipation on Russia's help, now his emphasis was on Armenians' own struggle for freedom, because of changing circumstances. Raffi revealed in the novels his sincere and uncompromising patriotism, infinite love for Armenia, and passionate hatred toward its tormenters.<sup>299</sup> It was not by chance that Raffi selected the name *Vardan* for the novel's hero. He wanted to remind the readers that centuries earlier, another Vardan—St. Vardan—defended his people's honor and fought to win their freedom of conscience. Raffi selected subjects from Armenian history and published his renowned historical novels one after another. His works were astonishing. Ruben Berberian, who read Raffi's novels when he was a young man in Nor Nakhijevan and Tiflis, analyzed Raffi's novels and found them to have both national and political significance. "Raffi's novels, with their national and political views, played a central role, which corresponded to Armenians' new psychology, as a consequence of the new environment of political realism. Raffi's novels contained clear perspective and vision, wherein lay their power, poignancy, and charm."<sup>300</sup>





## Travels in Gharabagh and Siunik

To awaken the Armenian people and to forge ahead the liberation struggle, Raffi considered it necessary to show the people that Armenians had a nation in not only the past but also just a few decades earlier. He said, “Search a nation’s antiquities and in a single night its dormant soul will awaken.”<sup>301</sup> He embarked on writing his historical novels to give impetus to the contemporary liberation movement. In a letter dated November 20, 1880, to his friend Melkon Panian, Raffi informed him of his first historical novel: “I have prepared a historical novel titled *Davit Bek*, which will be published soon in *Mshak*. The theme is the life of the Prince of Siunik—Davit Bek.”<sup>302</sup> In December 1880 Raffi published volumes one and two. In 1881 he published *Davit Bek* in book form. As with his other novels, Raffi tried to arouse the Armenians’ feelings against intolerable and tyrannical rule. In *Davit Bek*, Raffi evoked the readers’ rage by describing the horrible conditions about which the leaders in Siunik had written in the letter to Davit Bek, seeking his help:

They have not left a single drop of honor in us . . . They violate our wives and daughters in front of our eyes, and we remain quiet . . . They have turned our churches and monasteries into stables, and yet we tolerate . . . They snatch away the children from our hands and sell them, and we are unable to rescue them.<sup>303</sup>

Next, Raffi planned to research and write the history of the last Armenian princedoms—the *meliks* of Gharabagh. They had partly preserved their governance when the Russians occupied the Caucasus. To gather information, Raffi prepared to travel to Artsakh and Siunik. Before leaving, he announced to his readers that after his travels he intended to seclude himself at the Tatev Monastery to write the third volume of *Davit Bek*, but he was unable to go.<sup>304</sup> The announcement of his planned journey created interest among the readers. A few friends and acquaintances planned to collect funds for Raffi’s travel expenses. Before they collected any funds or determined the extent of his work, they argued about the research and the locations to be visited. The issue was debated in the local press and ended right there. After his journey, Raffi

commented about the well-wishers' efforts: "They tied all areas of study—architecture, handicraft, science—around the proposed expedition's neck that it suffocated."<sup>305</sup>

Witnessing the failure of the community, Raffi decided to undertake the journey with his own means. He left Tiflis on July 25, 1881, for Gandzak (Elizavetpol, later Kirovapat), then to Artsakh, visiting the domains of the five princedoms—Giulistan, Jraberd, Khachen, Varanda, and Tizak. In Giulistan, Melik-Beglarian's estate, Raffi visited the Ghara Chinar Village (the seat of the meliks) and the Horek Monastery. He left for Jraberd, Melik-Israyelians' estate, and visited the village of Getashen. Traveling along the Tartar River, he visited the Yeghishe and Yeretsmankants monasteries, Mokhratagh Village, Innmasants Hermitage, Mardakert and Ksapat villages, and Gyul Yatagh Fortress. He reached Khachen, Hassan-Jalalians' territory, and visited the Hassan Jalali or Tarkhana Fortress, Kachaghak Fortress, Saint Hakob Monastery, and famous Gandzasar Monastery and its nearby village. At a home in this village, Raffi found an old manuscript that contained information on the meliks' negotiations with Tsar Peter the Great to cooperate in fighting against the Persians. Traveling along the Khachen River, he went to the village of Khnzirstan, then to Shushi on September 10, 1881. Leaving Shushi, Raffi traveled to Varanda and visited the Chanakhchi or the Avetaranots Fortress, the seat of Melik-Shahnazarian's dynasty. He then went to the Togh Fortress in the Tizak region and on to the Amaranos Monastery. Besides Gharabagh, Raffi visited other nearby regions as time allowed. During these visits, Raffi researched the local records of fortresses, monasteries, and historically significant places. He collected information from the epitaphs of dynasty members, the manuscripts in monasteries, and the local people. The old people still remembered much from the last days of the meliks.

Just before crossing into Persia, Raffi visited Agulis to see acquaintances from his teaching days. He left Agulis on Sept 28, 1881, and went to Tavrız to visit friends. After three days, he headed for his ancestral village, where he found a warm reception by the villagers. His extended family had waited for him ever since he had left Agulis for Tiflis in 1879, and his wife and two sons had returned to Payajuk. After two weeks, he departed from Payajuk permanently on October 24, 1881, taking his wife and sons with him to Tiflis.<sup>306</sup> On the way he visited Ejmiatsin and researched manuscripts at the library. Unfortunately, he did not find any useful information for his research. Because of the apathy of successive catholicoses, a large number of manuscripts and memoirs had disappeared, partially due to a common practice by some catholicoses to destroy their predecessors' works. Raffi could not even find the unpublished eleven-volume history written by his acquaintance Bishop Abel

*Raffi (1883)*

Mkhitarian, who had died in abject poverty at his servant's home, after being driven away from Ejmiatsin.<sup>307</sup>

On October 31, 1881, Raffi was already in Tiflis. In December, he began to publish part three of *Davit Bek* in *Mshak*. He immersed himself in the information he had gathered during his travels and researched Russian official and non-official publications that dealt with the Russian occupation of the Caucasus. He classified, verified, and corrected all the information. His efforts resulted in the priceless work of *Khamsayi melikutunnere* (The Five Melikdoms). He published it in *Mshak* in early 1882, and later that year in book form. He spoke with special reverence about this work, considering it his crown jewel. He further elaborated on the entire trip in the Epilogue:

During my travels, I visited Gandzak, Gharabagh, Zangezur, Sisian, Bargiushat, Chavendur, Ghapan, Meghri, and Ordubad. I went to the old Nakhijevan region, then to Persia. Powerful melikdoms in those regions had participated in the resistance wars led by Davit Bek and the meliks of Gharabagh. As much as my time and means allowed, I collected information about the melikdoms, but the information was so scant that it was insufficient to write a complete history. In order to shed light on the melikdoms, which have remained in the dark, one must wait until additional material becomes available to write a history of these regions.<sup>308</sup>

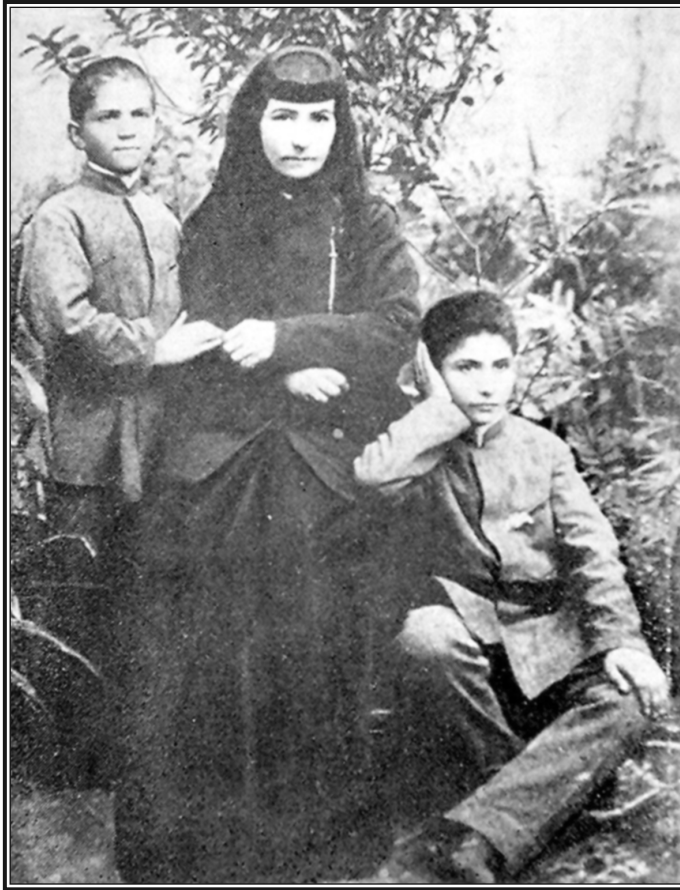
In addition to the history of the meliks, Raffi had planned to write about his travels through Gharabagh and Zangezur, but such work does not exist; Raffi did include information about his journey in the “Epilogue.” Some readers suspiciously questioned Raffi about the information in *Khamsayi melikutiunnere*. To put an end to annoying questions and dispel their doubts, Raffi responded to readers’ comments by writing the extensive “Epilogue,” listing the sources he had used to write the history:

When I began to publish *Khamsayi melikutiunnere*, every time I encountered my friends their first comments were, “The information is interesting, but where did you get it?” I sensed misgivings and disbelief in those frequent questions. Some of my friends have asked me, “Is it possible that we have had such melikdoms in Gharabagh, and if so, why have we not known about them?” I am amazed that these readers, who ignorantly conjecture about the cuneiform writings at Van and talk about events prior to the Deluge, look at what is in front of their eyes—factual events of only half a century ago—as fiction born out of fantasy.<sup>309</sup>

Bakur Karapetian set out in 1988 to retrace Raffi’s journey and traveled the road Raffi had traveled, starting in Tiflis. Karapetian documented his journey and described the locations Raffi had visited in a book titled *Haryur tarva yerkkhosutiun*<sup>310</sup> (Dialogue of One Hundred Years).

After visiting Siunik, Raffi’s wish was to visit Constantinople and travel throughout the Armenian provinces, areas he was unable to visit during his 1857 journey to Vaspurakan and Daron. Raffi wrote a letter dated May 26, 1881, to his friend Melkon Panian informing him of his desire and the purpose of the trip. He spoke with apprehension:





*Raffi's family, wife Anna, Aram and Arshak*

If I announce my travel to Armenia, I will undoubtedly attract the Turkish government's attention. The Turkish consul in Tiflis reports the smallest event to his government, let alone the desire of a well-known person, who wants to travel in Armenia. Although my travel is without political intents, nevertheless, the Turkish government has many reasons to be suspicious about someone going from Russia to Armenia.<sup>311</sup>

After publishing *Khamsayi melikutiunnere*, Raffi translated Bluton Zubov's historical novel and published it in *Mshak* under the title *Gharabaghi astghagete* (The Gharabagh Astronomer or the Establishment of the Shushi Fortress in 1752).<sup>312</sup> The Russian novel, published in 1834 in Moscow,<sup>313</sup> dealt with the

history of the Gharabagh meliks when the Turkish Jivanshir Panah Khan, helped by Armenian traitors, disunity between the people, and fighting among the meliks, constructed the Shushi Fortress and became the owner of Gharabagh. Raffi considered the two works mutually complementary. After translating the novel, Raffi expressed his impressions of the Russian novel:

Readers of *Gharabaghi astghagete* will notice the warm sympathy the author expresses in every line about the Armenian people and the meliks. The author touches on those wounds that in our history have often caused the fall and demise of our sovereignty. Those wounds are disunity and internal conflicts. This is the main purpose of this novel.<sup>314</sup>

In 1886 Bishop Makar Barkhutariants published a book titled *Gaghtnik Gharabaghi* (Gharabagh's Secret). He claimed he had transposed it into the vernacular from the grabar work of an obscure person named Abraham Beknazariants. The work raised Leo's suspicion that the book was a plagiarized version of *Khamsayi melikutiunnere*. Other writers also expressed disbelief and implied that similarities existed between the two works. As usual, Haykuni defended Barkhutariants. Raffi waited for the two sides to exhaust their arguments and promised to write his refutation. Late in 1886 Raffi began publishing his promised critique titled *Gaghtnikn Gharabaghi* (The Secret of Gharabagh) in *Ardzagank*,<sup>315</sup> exposing Barkhutariants' fraudulent work as full of historical errors and plagiarized segments from *Khamsayi melikutiunnere*. After the conclusion of the serially published work, Raffi published the lengthy critique in a 160-page booklet. V. Aharonian wrote the following about Zubov's novel and Barkhutariants's fraudulent *Gaghtnik Gharabaghi*:

Bluton Zubov's novel, not a major literary accomplishment, was the only one by the author. The entire theme was from Armenian life. The author had as much patriotic spirit as that of an Armenian writer. Was it possible that Raffi would miss such a work?

Four years after the publication of *Khamsayi melikutiunnere*, Father Makar Barkhutariants published *Gaghtnik Gharabaghi* in 1886 and claimed the work was from a historical manuscript. He came forth not as the author, but as the translator of the manuscript. According to Father Barkhutariants, someone named Abraham Beknazariants and his son, Apres, had written the manuscript in grabar. Supposedly, Apres Beknazariants, a senile old man, had visited Father Barkhutariants one night in 1881 and

given him the manuscript, requesting that he convert it to the vernacular and publish it. Apres had disappeared permanently. Father Barkhutariants had claimed that after translating the manuscript, the original was lost.

Raffi had noticed that Father Barkhutariants's *Gaghtnik Gharabaghi* contained partially altered passages from his novel and an outrageous story about false, fabricated, and imaginary historical characters.

Raffi could remain indifferent toward the attacks on his literary works and his person; but when someone tried to defraud a certain period of Armenian history, Raffi could not remain silent. Therefore, he responded to Father Barkhutariants with his inexorable pen.

"If *Gaghtnik Gharabaghi* had been a novel or a different work, it would not have been worth wasting time on it," Raffi had written. "It is written so poorly that it would have died on its own. The book, however, is a historical monument, as such, its literary value is not as important as the correctness of the evidence. False evidence is deceiving. With this in mind, if the fraud is not exposed immediately, years later the book will be forgotten, and it will remain in our literature as a spurious testimonial that will scandalize many."

To counter the fraudulent publication of Father Barkhutariants's work, Raffi dedicated practically a whole volume, consisting of 160 pages, in which he subjected the product of the miserable priest's perfidious mind to an overwhelming and shattering critique. Raffi was the editor of *Mshak's* literary pages and had written a large number of literary critiques over the years; but he had very seldom written a critique as that of *Gaghtnik Gharabaghi*—a testimonial to Raffi's analytical mind and exceptionally concise logic.<sup>316</sup>

Pavel A. Chobanian, in his introduction to a recently published book of Bishop Makar Barkhutariants, titled *Aghuanits yerkir yev dratsik: Artsakh* (The Country of the Aghuans and its Neighbors: Artsakh), has stated the following regarding Bishop Barkhutariants's work:

Having a thorough knowledge of Artsakh history, and finding it necessary to describe the state of the [Armenian] liberation movement, and perhaps encouraged by the deep impression left

on him by Raffi's *Khamsayi melikutiunnere*, published in *Mshak* in 1882, and even basing it on Raffi's writing, M. Barkhutariants published *Gaghtnik Gharabaghi* in 1886 under the pseudonym Apres Beknazariants. In this publication, M. Barkhutariants had attempted to present, in the words of a father and a son, a description of events in Artsakh during the second half of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. Raffi and Leo<sup>317</sup> criticized the publication and pointed out a series of inaccuracies. The two writers would not have come to their conclusions had they been contemporary eyewitnesses of and participants in the events described by Barkhutariants. Unaware of the facts, the critics concluded that the author of the publication was M. Barkhutariants, and that Apres Beknazariants was a fictional character.

In 1888 M. Barkhutariants published a booklet titled *Knnadatutiun knnadatutiants* (Criticism of Criticisms), in which he overlooked the issue of his book's author, and answered Leo's objections point by point. Thus, almost without bias, he defended the events described in *Gaghtnik Gharabaghi*. He attributed the few minor inaccuracies to either errors made during transposing from the original grabar or mistakes made during editing for publication. This explanation and the fact that M. Barkhutariants used *Gaghtnik Gharabaghi* in his future works, without reservation, as an indubitable historical source, oblige one to think that by rejecting the criticisms, M. Barkhutariants is thoroughly certain about the accuracy of the described events in his publication. Later, he included large segments from *Gaghtnik Gharabaghi* in his work *Patmutiun Aghuanits*.<sup>318</sup>

Bishop Makar Barkhutariants was born in 1832 in the village of Khnatsakh in Artsakh. He was a member of the order at Saint Hakob Monastery in Jerusalem, where he was ordained a vardapet in 1862. In 1876 he became the prelate of Smyrna and in 1880 a member of the Ejmiatsin Order. In 1881 the catholicos sent him to Shushi to teach religion at the Armenian schools. In 1888 he became the abbot of the Saghian Monastery, and in 1889 he was the head vardapet at the Mother Church of Shamakh. At the end of March 1890 he left his position and traveled to Daghestan to study the area and the Armenian antiquities. The result of his travels became his published volume *Aghuanits yerkir yev dratsik: Artsakh*. In 1894 he was ordained a bishop and appointed the prelate of Shamakh in 1895. In late 1896

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he returned to Ejmiatsin and became a member of the Synod. He resigned in 1904 because of poor health and became the abbot of Saint Tovma Monastery in Agulis, but he was unable to assume his position because of his illness. He died on February 6, 1906, in Ejmiatsin.<sup>319</sup>





## Arrest and Release

After the San Stefano and Berlin treaties, the Armenian students and intellectuals in Tiflis were hopeful and optimistic about liberation from Turkish rule, because of the Russian victories. Unfortunately, at the end of 1880, Russia's pretentious pro-Armenian policy shifted to an anti-Armenian policy, expressed by persecution of the Armenian press and literature. The Russian censure began to oppress patriotic writers and scrutinized journals, especially those like Raffi and *Mshak*. The increasing anti-Armenian policies of Turkey and Russia prompted Raffi to hasten *Kaytser*'s publication. Fortunately, the Russian censor had permitted the publication of *Kaytser*'s first volume. Raffi used some of his savings and moneys collected from the pre-publication orders and published *Kaytser* in early February 1883. He received numerous laudatory letters from reader who admired the novel and desired to see the publication of the second volume. *Khachagoghi hishatakarane* immediately followed *Kaytser* at the end of February. It was a new genre in the Armenian literary field. Raffi remains the first and the only person who undertook this new form wherein he wrote about that rotten and corrupt segment of society. Addressing the subject matter, Raffi wrote in his article *Vibagrutiune rusahayeri mej* (The Novel among the Russian Armenians): "No novelist before us had paid attention to the rotten and corrupt segment of society, which operated in the dark corners of humanity. We revealed the existence of this unfamiliar group when we wrote the *Khachagoghi hishatakarane* novel."<sup>320</sup> The cleric and wealthy community leaders severely castigated Raffi for his proclaimed ideas for national freedom. Haykuni criticized Raffi and accused him of destroying traditional family values and for depicting all Armenians as *khachagogs* (thieves). Raffi was unable to respond immediately because the government had begun investigating *Mshak* and its editors.

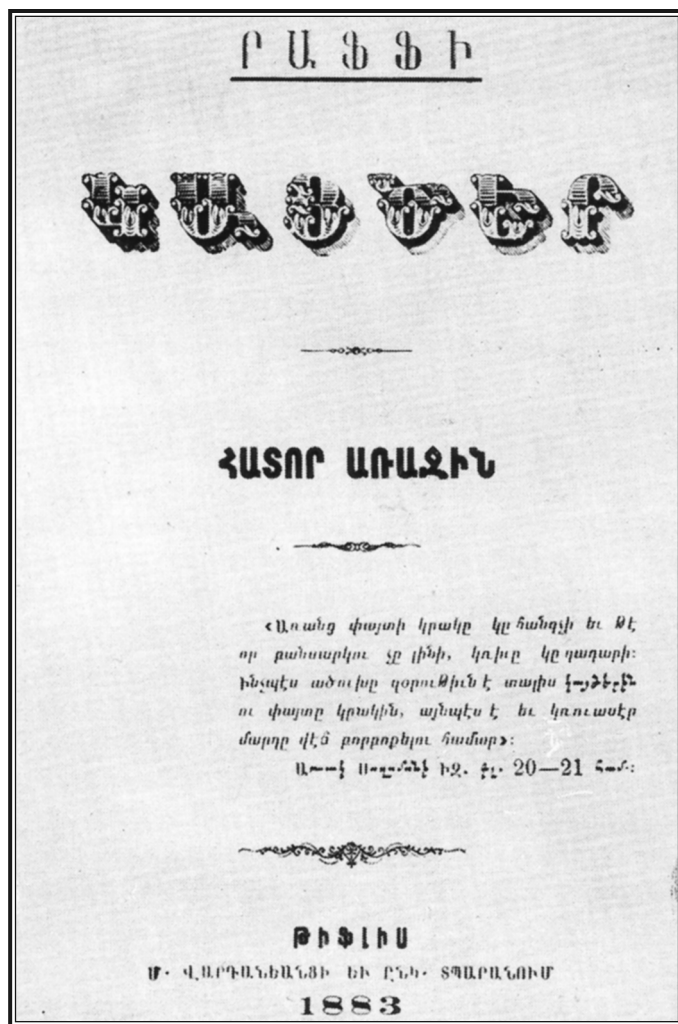
After Raffi's departure from Tavriz in 1877, his enemies in Tavriz and Tiflis had spread numerous lies about the events in Tavriz. In Tiflis, the conservative and regressive groups maliciously attacked Raffi with despicable editorials by *Meghu*'s editor and wicked articles by Haykuni. They accused Raffi as a *fraud*, a *plagiarizer*, a *thief* from Salmast, an *apostate*, and other

epithets. Simonian and Haykuni were no better than the Tavriz khans and aghas. When they attacked his character and honor and accused the family of claiming nobility, Raffi felt obliged to respond to the derogatory statements and dispel the malicious rumors. He did so in an article titled *Mamuli anbaroyakanutiune* (The Immorality of the Press), exposing the evil intentions of his Tavriz enemies. He also addressed Simonian's attacks on Abraham Amirkhanian, who was a Protestant and a contributor to *Mshak*. Below is the segment from the article where Raffi explained the circumstances of his departure from Tavriz:

The current Shah ordered the renewal of our rights to ancestral nobility with all its privileges. . .

In Tavriz, a few unscrupulous Armenians betrayed me to the government. Those malicious people translated into Persian most of my works, which I had written in Persia (and other works that were not my own), and presented them to the local government and the Muslim religious authorities. They accused me of being a political criminal against the government and a blasphemer of the Muslim religion. The religious leader issued a decree to kill me. With such an order, any Muslim who saw me on the street could kill me with impunity. The fanatic Muslims were enraged against me. At night, people stoned my house and fired shots at it. My life was in danger. Atrpatakan Governor Sahab Divan examined the accusations and found them to be the plot of a few Armenians, nothing else. To keep me safe from the enraged crowd, Sahab Divan kept me in his house for a week and advised me to leave Persia temporarily until the inflamed emotions subsided. I received identification papers from the Russian Embassy and the governor to leave Persia. With two government-provided bodyguards, I left Tavriz at night; in the morning of the second day, I was already on Russian soil. Everyone knew I was a victim of betrayal and persecution. I had not committed any dishonorable acts. I was amazed that they banished me from a country like Persia where arbitrary judgment ruled instead of the law. I am an insignificant writer of a small nation, but such persecutions have taken place among the largest nations and against great writers. France at one time exiled Victor Hugo, but now the French worship him. Prison, exile, and persecution were the fate of so many famous writers, and therein lay their glory.<sup>321</sup>





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Unable to stop the influence of Raffi's novels and the daily growth of his popularity, Simonian's paper attempted to paint Raffi as a questionable character to the Russian government. *Meghu* published a vitriolic critique of *Kaytser*, written by Haykuni, who compared the heroes of the novel to the three assassins of Tsar Alexander II. The malicious attack was nothing more than a vicious act to have Raffi arrested by the Russian authorities.<sup>322</sup> The state of affairs in Russia was favorable for *Meghu* in this villainous act. This was nothing new; Raffi had experienced treachery before. He had addressed the

trend within the Armenian nation in the novel *Kaytser*, where in Aslan's words, he explained: "Every time a treachery is plotted against Armenians, the hand of an Armenian is always present. That is a historical fact that has existed from ancient times and repeated often in our people's lives."<sup>323</sup> Raffi brought up the issue of disunity many times in his novels. Aslan addressed the issue: "The Armenians, by committing self-annihilation, have reduced their numbers. Wherever two Armenian families come together, you will find four opinions. Like a consuming maggot, disunity in our lives has been passed down to us for millennia and wasted the nation's physical being." Raffi did not mind the ignorance of his adversaries; but he agonized over their treachery and vicious manner in which they attacked him. He expressed his views about his enemies to Shirvanzade:

If those people were only nearsighted, reactionary, and mindless, I would not be so irritated; but they are also sly. What is disgusting is they do not write a single line without harmful intentions. They behave like the Jesuits but do not have their intelligence. They do not spare any means just to harm me. If you read Haykuni's articles carefully, you will even see treachery in them. Whoever wants to become a writer must first learn to endure jealousies and hateful persecutions. Every Armenian considers himself at least a Napoleon, but they must know that they should be simple soldiers. The subject of disunity has become a parrot's song for our writers, and the most jealous and wicked among us are midget journalists. The saddest thing is that even education and knowledge do not help the Armenians. Many university graduates have such convictions that would not bring honor even to lesser people. We must fight against them to defeat them; otherwise, ignorance has many excuses to justify itself. At least I have resolved to fight; let them curse me as much as they want. They easily persecute a person who believes in the sanctity of his ideology. Let them get enraged, they cannot do anything against the demands of the times.<sup>324</sup>

Raffi's resolve left a very deep impression on Shirvanzade, and it appeared to him that Raffi's enthusiasm, endurance, conviction, and self-confidence could breathe liveliness into the most skeptic person.

In 1879 Artsruni, Raffi, and either Gabriyel Mirzoian or Ruben Tokhmakhian formed the *Yereki Komite* (Committee of the Three) to arm the Armenians of Turkey for self-defense and to investigate conditions there.

Artsruni and Raffi had connections with the Yerevan *Hayaser–Azgaser* (Armenophile–Patriot) secret organization led by Ruben Hassan-Jalalian.<sup>325</sup> The articles in *Meghu* had aroused the Russian government's suspicion, as Haykuni and others had hoped. The government discovered the existence of liberation groups in Russia and Turkey. The Russian consul in Erzerum informed its government that leaders of *Pashtpan Hayrenyats* (Protectors of the Fatherland) had connections with people in Constantinople, Tiflis, Yerevan, and the Russian revolutionaries known as the nihilists. Consequently, the Russian government began searching in Tiflis and Yerevan for a secret organization suspected of having connections with its counterpart in Western Armenia. Right after the consul's report about the activities in Erzerum, the Russian police in Yerevan searched the homes of twenty-two well-known Armenian young men, imprisoned one of them, and placed the rest under surveillance. The police found suspicious material that indicated Raffi's active role in the patriotic organization. In the home of attorney Ruben Hassan-Jalalian, the police found a letter written by Raffi and addressed to Ruben instructing him to assist Shahnazarian—a member of the *Araratian Miutium* (Ararat Union) secret organization. Some of Raffi's activities aroused suspicion that he was a central member of a secret organization thought to be *Manuk Hayastan*<sup>326</sup> (Young Armenia), and that he and the Yerevan men had ties with *Pashtpan Hayrenyats* in Erzerum.<sup>327</sup>

On March 19, 1883, Tomas Mherovich, a gymnasium student, slapped the school director, Brazhnikov. The next day, the police arrested Mherovich and fined him five thousand rubles. The incident created an unusual excitement among the Yerevan Armenian intelligentsia, who, within an hour of Tomas's arrest, raised the fine and paid it on March 21. Mherovich was released, and his supporters greeted him with great honors. Members of *Hayaser–Azgaser* had secretly planned to insult Brazhnikov publicly because he was a staunch supporter of anti-Armenian policies, hoping the government authorities would remove him from his position. Among those accused were Dr. Levon Tigranyan, the official physician of Yerevan; Vasili Yeghiazaryan, a trustee of the Gayanyan School; Vasak Papajanyan, the editor of *Psak*<sup>328</sup> (Crown) newspaper; and Tomas Mherovich. The government charged the editor of *Psak* with the serious offense of inciting the people for active resistance against the government, and it shut down the paper. *Psak* had suggested that the catholicosate should relocate from Ejmiatsin to Aghtamar, reasoning that the catholicos was not free to play an effective political role to benefit the Armenians' liberation efforts. The government's move was the first political blow against the Armenians, considering them dangerous to the Russian government because of their national aspiration.<sup>329</sup>

On May 1, 1883, the Russian police searched *Mshak's* editorial offices and Grigor Artsruni's home and removed a large amount of papers.<sup>330</sup> The government suspected Artsruni and Raffi of participating in secret Armenian organizations. In a letter dated May 3, 1883, Raffi wrote to his friend Melkon Panian to inform him about *Mshak's* condition and the events in Yerevan:

I want to let you know of some sad news. For three days starting on May 1, the police entered and searched the *Mshak* offices and Artsruni's home. They confiscated whatever they found. We do not know why the search took place. Undoubtedly, it was the result of a betrayal and perhaps the work of an Armenian. I am certain that the police will not find anything suspicious about Artsruni; I know him well. I am sure that he does not have any relationship with questionable people. His work has been strictly along national efforts; even then, he has not gone beyond the boundaries set by the government. The government has known everything he has done concerning Western Armenia.

Now the police are watching the Armenians closely. The police in Yerevan have searched the homes of twenty-two young men and placed them under surveillance; one young man is imprisoned. The activities are minor, but they are making a camel out of a flea and handling the issue as a political crime. Mr. Artsruni is free yet, but we fear that the police will arrest him. Some people say that the police are going to search the homes of a few other Armenians. I do not know how these searches are going to end. We are in a hopeless state.<sup>331</sup>

On May 13, the police entered and searched Raffi's home, taking away all his published works and unpublished manuscripts. He sent a letter to Melkon Panian, written on May 17, 1883, informing his friend about Russia's anti-Armenian policies:

In my last letter, I informed you that [the police] searched the *Mshak* offices. I want to let you know that on the thirteenth of this month they searched my home. All my papers, including my unpublished manuscripts, were confiscated. Now I am under police surveillance and forbidden to leave Tiflis.

Neither my companions nor I have committed nor intend to commit any unlawful acts against the Russian government. We have never had any contact with Russian nihilists. After the

European powers made a sham of the Armenian Question, we did work to mitigate the sorrowful condition of the Western Armenians. We have worked to implement Article 61 of the Berlin Treaty, and our work was in the open; we have done nothing covertly.

Several informers have confused the government officials with lies that secret organizations, with other clandestine groups in the Caucasus and Western Armenia, are trying to reestablish an Armenian kingdom. We have never had such imaginary organizations and do not have any now. To demand the implementation of Article 61 does not mean that we need secret organizations.

I do not think the police will find anything in my papers to implicate me. The censor has approved all of my books published so far. How am I at fault when the government's position toward the Armenian Question has changed? Let them order me not to write. I would be happy if everything ends with what has happened so far; but I am afraid that they will expel me from Russia because I am a citizen of another country, for that reason, the government cannot imprison me.

Please be cautious in your letters. The chances are great that the police will open the letters addressed to me. Even though your letters have not contained anything that will cause suspicion, nevertheless, I have destroyed them.<sup>332</sup>

After the police searched Raffi's home and removed his manuscripts and other papers, they placed him under police surveillance. He again wrote a letter dated June 2, 1883, to Melkon Panian informing him about his condition:

The government has not yet shut down *Mshak*; we are hopeful that it will not, although it has imposed strict controls. The officials have ordered the editor to submit to the censor the names of all contributors to the paper. Until now, the editor kept all the names anonymous. This control will make the contributors reluctant to send articles or even news items; thus, the paper will suffer.

The government is still investigating Mr. Artsruni's and my papers. It is hoping to find something suspicious . . . but justice will prevail, and the informers will be embarrassed. We are living in bad times. Our condition is hopeless. We expect some

unpleasant news at any moment; we have lost all desire to work. I feel bad that at a time like this when we have two important national issues to resolve,<sup>333</sup> we are forced to keep quiet. Our opponents are talking and writing, but we are unable to answer.

Now, I am under police surveillance and unable to leave Tiflis. When they let me free, I intend to leave Tiflis for a while; but where can I go and by what means, I do not know.<sup>334</sup>

Raffi was fearful that he would be deported from Tiflis and be unable to write, or worse, earn a living. Raffi wrote about his condition in a letter dated June 20, 1883, to another friend Hambardzum Arakelian:

The investigators were a few minor government officials, who wanted to show their loyalty to the government. They created imaginary issues, claiming the existence of an organization named *Manuk Hayastan* that has ties with Western Armenia, and that the members are attempting to instigate a revolution there. There seem to be informers, but their identities are unknown. The people suspect the betrayal is the work of either the *Meghu* supporters or Bishop Makar; but more likely, the orders came from higher up. The government wants to know to what extent the youth is involved in the alleged activities. Meanwhile, it wants to placate the Turkish government by showing that it is preventing all attempts benefiting the Armenian Question, which Russians created in Article 16 of the San Stefano Treaty.<sup>335</sup>

On June 26, 1883, Raffi was confined to house arrest, during which two guards kept watch in front of his house. He was not allowed any visitors. He gave his letters covertly to others to mail. Although the inspectors did not find anything suspicious among his papers, nevertheless, they imposed stricter controls on Raffi. He was losing his desire to write. Unable to remain idle, he engaged in writing letters. In a letter, dated June 26, 1883, to Melkon Panian he wrote:

My case has become more serious. I am under house arrest for several days now. I cannot come out of the house, because police guards are stationed in front of my house. The investigators have found some insignificant items in my papers, and they are attaching a great importance to them. They have not returned my papers, but they have returned Artsruni's, except two pieces. They

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have searched the homes of many young people but have not found anything. The strange thing is that the searches are at the homes of *Mshak* contributors.<sup>336</sup>

After two weeks, the Persian government paid a three-thousand-rubles fine as bail to release Raffi from house arrest. He wrote about the release to his friend Hambardzum Arakelian in a letter dated July 11, 1883:

Your plans to establish a printing press in Tavrız and publish a monthly made me happy. As for your invitation to work with you, I regret that I am unable to do so because my condition is uncertain and has become more serious. I was under house arrest for two weeks, with two guards stationed in front of my house. Later, the Persian Embassy bailed me out by paying three thousand rubles; but I am not allowed to leave Tiflis.

The government is even looking at my published works, which the censor had already approved. They told me that a special commission is coming from St. Petersburg to inspect the Yerevan and the Tiflis events.<sup>337</sup>

Finally, the investigations ended, but Raffi and Artsruni remained under watch, waiting for the final decision from St. Petersburg. Raffi had already written a letter on July 12 to Panian informing him of his release. On September 27, 1883, he wrote another letter to Panian to give him further good news and to inform him about the fate of the Yerevan group:

I am in a better condition. Artsruni and I have been exonerated. We are still under surveillance because they have sent the case to St. Petersburg for the government to make the final decision. They have not yet returned my papers. Among the thirty-two accused in Yerevan, the government has punished only three with light sentences.<sup>338</sup>

Raffi had mentioned in his letter of June 2, 1883, to Melkon Panian that if permitted, he wished to leave Tiflis for a while after his release from house arrest. The long working hours and the stress from the investigations had exhausted him. His chance came when Grigor Artsruni's brother, Andreas, was going to Gandzak on business for a few days. Raffi asked to go with him. The trip rejuvenated Raffi, who started working vigorously again. His first work was to respond to Haykuni's critical articles about *Kaytser*. In a long

article, published in *Mshak* on September 30, 1883, using the pen name Pavstos, Raffi explained *Kaytser's* basic theme and purpose that the novel was neither a fable nor a plan, as Haykuni had proclaimed. He accused Haykuni of being an informer, based on the latter's comparing the *Kaytser* characters with the three assassins of Tsar Alexander II. Raffi commented: "If we do not consider the comparison a betrayal, then it is a perfect defamation and a malicious libel."<sup>339</sup> After his house arrest, Raffi became more cautious and prudent, although he remained unswerving in his ideology.

In 1883 Raffi lived in a house owned by Ter Grigoriants on Rtshchevskaya Street in the Armenian Sololak neighborhood. He lived alone because he could not support his family if they lived with him. He supported his extended family in Payajuk with the approximately one hundred rubles a month he earned from the sale of his books. In the autumn, Aleksandr Shirvanzade came to Tiflis and met Artsruni and Raffi. One evening, Shirvanzade went to visit Raffi at his home. He passed through a stone-covered courtyard, went up the wooden stairs to the second floor of the house, and entered a wonderful flower garden. Flowers covered the entire spacious terrace, and sweet fragrance filled the air. It was a true oasis in the middle of the hot and dry city. He found the door to Raffi's apartment open, and he entered. Finding no one in the foyer, he softly cleared his throat to announce his arrival.<sup>340</sup>

"Who is there," a weak voice asked from inside a room.

"May I come in?" Shirvanzade asked.

"Come in."

"I am sorry that I disturbed you," the visitor apologized.

"No need to apologize," Raffi said with a firm but weak voice. "I was not writing, I was reading. Nowadays, I write mostly at night."

Raffi pressed a button on his desk. Soon a house servant came into the room.

"Where have you been, Ghazar?" Raffi scolded the man with a fatherly tone. "Bring some tea for our guest."

Before coming to Tiflis, Shirvanzade had read Raffi's novels and admired him. He had just finished reading *Kaytser*. He expressed his admiration for the book to Raffi.

"You know, the second volume is giving me trouble," Raffi informed his guest.

"Why? Is it not ready?"

"No, it is ready, but I am afraid of the censor. That unfair Soghomon Khan Melik-Mihrabiants permitted the publication of the first volume with great difficulty. He would tell me, 'You are a propagandist and preach





*Shirvanzade (Aleksandr Movsesian)*

revolution.’ Brother, what is it to you? I am against Turkey and not Russia. What kind of a government is this? What kind of laws are these?”

The Russian censor had given special permission for the publication of *Khente*, but had removed the most beautiful passages.<sup>341</sup> Raffi was apprehensive about the approval of *Kaytser*’s second volume for the heavy censorship the Russian government imposed on writers who showed signs of nationalism. Preparing to submit the second volume to the censor, Raffi feared that the censor would either prevent the publication or remove many pages. Because the censor did not return pages he removed from manuscripts to authors, Raffi thought of making a second copy for himself.

Raffi rolled a thick cigarette and smoked it. Shirvanzade noticed that Raffi’s mustache had yellowed from the heavy smoking, and his eyes were ailing.

"That unfair censoring committee does not return the censored pages to the authors. I want to hide a copy of the manuscript," Raffi continued.

Raffi asked Shirvanzade to help him proof read the manuscript. He complained that his eyes hurt, so he could not proof read it three times.

After enjoying drinking tea together and the brief conversation, Shirvanzade got up to leave.

"Wait," Raffi said and pulled out a copy of *Kaytser*, autographed it, and gave it to his guest. "Visit me. I receive my guests around this time. Now I must water my flowers," he said, as he came out on the terrace with his guest and called out, "Ghazar, bring the watering can."

The guest expressed his admiration for the flowers and left.

Shirvanzade was impressed by the abundance of flowers in Raffi's apartment, but not by the dimness. "There were flower pots on the windowsills, in every corner of the rooms and outside on the balcony. The room was dark. On the table, two candles illuminated the stack of books; visible among them were the two volumes of the *Haykazian*<sup>342</sup> Dictionary."<sup>343</sup>

Since his first visit with Raffi, Shirvanzade and Raffi had become close friends. During their friendship, Shirvanzade learned about Raffi's personal life and his literary knowledge. Years later, Shirvanzade documented his impressions of Raffi, starting from his first encounter:

Sitting at the desk was Raffi himself. He looked more like a scientist than an artist with his large head, high and wide forehead, slightly gray, thick, and short beard, and ailing small eyes. This was the forty-two- or forty-three-year-old Raffi. In his sitting position, he seemed a tall person, but when he stood up, he seemed to become short. His legs, relative to the rest of his body, were short. He had a different appearance outdoors. His dark glasses and the semi-Persian fur hat rendered his face an unpleasant gloominess. No one could say the man was a writer, and a novelist at that. He always walked with the same measured and tranquil gate. With his walking stick held in front of him, he looked like a bishop with his staff.<sup>344</sup>

Raffi read very little. He had no spare time to read. In general, he did not have deep philosophical understanding. He had read all the translated works of the Mkhitarist priests and the works of Russian authors Tolstoy, Turgenev, and Fiodor Dostoevski. He was familiar with the French writers Victor Hugo and Eugène Sue. He worshiped Hugo, whose literary works greatly influenced Raffi; that influence was evident in Raffi's literary style. On the suggestion

*Raffi (1883)*

of friends, Raffi read some articles on fine arts and liked them.

He had read some of Shakespeare's writings. He had mastered Armenian history, and his most loved historian was Pavstos Biuzandatsi . . .

Raffi did not frequent the theater. No matter how much I tried to persuade him to go and see [Petros] Adamian, he did not care to go. "I have seen him once," he would say. "I did not care for him. Mnakian is better than he is. Generally, I do not like Adamian. Today he would tell someone that he has the ability of Shakespeare, and tomorrow someone else. He is a hypocrite."

Raffi did not have any knowledge of European music, and he was indifferent to Asiatic music, although he had heard it since his childhood.

He did not talk about his children at all; it seemed that he did not even think about them, but it was not so. He was an introvert and did not want to share his private thoughts with others . . . With all the European artists visiting Tiflis, I do not remember him going once to hear them. He had not seen an operatic performance. He would tell me: "Our ears are not used to European music; we cannot have satisfaction from operas." Generally, Raffi did not like worldly and noisy pleasures. He shied away from public life and did not attend any community events or visit any organizations. He had a few close friends but no relations with Tiflis families.<sup>345</sup>

The October 1883 issue of *Aghbiur* (Spring) children's monthly<sup>346</sup> published a proposal to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Raffi's literary career. The Tiflis Armenians and the press welcomed the suggestion and planned to celebrate the occasion, and readers sent letters to the paper from the regions in favor of the proposal. In the December 15, 1883, issue of *Mshak*, an announcement informed the public that a committee was formed to prepare Mr. Raffi's twenty-fifth anniversary celebration; the date was tentatively set for early 1884. The committee reminded the people about the exceptional contributions Raffi had made in advancing Armenian literature: "Who among us has tried to find out the bitter and inconsolable conditions that produced these volumes, which have so frequently warmed our hearts?" The committee wanted to honor Raffi and provide funds for his publications "to at least lighten a bit the financial privations endured by the esteemed novelist."<sup>347</sup>

*Mshak* received letters encouraging the readers to donate to Raffi. One such letter was from Abel Apresian, who appealed especially to the young Armenians and urged them, in addition to praising him, to help the novelist by giving him the means to write with enthusiasm. People, organizations, and readers from all occupations and different regions contributed, among them the renowned Russian novelist Turgenev.

The numerous physical and character attacks on Raffi represent one of the darkest pages in the history of Armenia's popular enlightenment. The coordinated and continual persecution of the great Armenian followed him from dark and backward Salmast to enlightened and civilized Tiflis. The malicious jealousy had infected Raffi's enemies who called him a *khachagogh*. Shirvanzade lamented the unjust attacks on Raffi's character. Years later he wrote, "This campaign must remain an indelible stain on the history of Armenian journalism, to which Raffi had contributed so much with his talent to prepare the way for the public's enlightenment."<sup>348</sup> The first person to attack

Raffi's writings was a priest, who did not find even a glimpse of talent in them and accused him of plagiarism and stealing works of other writers. Haykuni had even endangered the popular writer's life by informing the Russian authorities that the author of *Kaytser* was an agitator and a revolutionist. The investigations by the Russian police were very likely a result of Haykuni's inciting articles in *Meghu*. Among the criminal and hurtful acts against Raffi was the nighttime attack at his home. Shirvanzade described his recollection of the incident:

One night [December 11, 1883], an attempt was made on Raffi's life. Several villains attempted to break the window and enter Raffi's bedroom. Waking up, Raffi grabbed his pistol and fired several shots. The villains escaped. Later, when I found out about the incident, I went to congratulate him for being unharmed. He showed me the bullet holes in the windowpanes. *Mshak* published the news. On the following day, *Meghu* published a similar news item, claiming that several criminals had attacked Haykuni. Supporters of each side claimed the other's story was a lie. Raffi's enemies claimed that he had fabricated the news to gain popularity during the planning of his twenty-fifth anniversary celebration. The claims of both sides remained in the dark and forgotten.<sup>349</sup>

Raffi had described the unfortunate incident to Shirvanzade soon after the attack as follows:

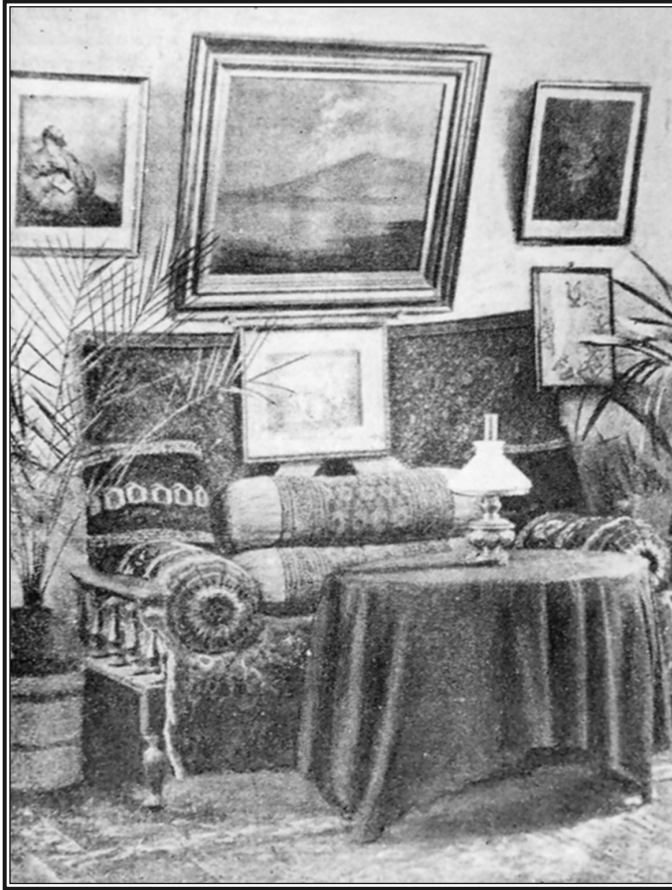
I was writing until the early morning hours, after which I put the candles out and went to bed. I suddenly heard whispers and woke up. I got up and reached for my revolver, which I kept under my pillow. The whispers came from my living room. I went to the adjacent room and heard a few men talking and trying to enter my bedroom. I pushed against the door to prevent them from entering, but they kept pushing. After a few minute or so, the men were able to force the door slightly open. I pointed my gun through the opening. The men retreated somewhat. Encouraged by their move, I flung the door open and fired. I must have missed. Two men were in my room, and a third one was at the window. They escaped through the window and disappeared. I yelled for help to capture the men. I do not think they had come to rob me because they did not take anything, not even the few rubles on my desk.<sup>350</sup>

Two days after the newspapers had printed the incident, Raffi received congratulatory telegrams and letters. Raffi himself had referred to the incident to his friend Nerses Abelian<sup>351</sup> in a letter dated January 14, 1884, expressing fear of becoming a victim. After the incident, a laborer, from a group whom Raffi had defended so much in his writings, volunteered and slept every night in Raffi's apartment to guard him. Raffi feared that other attacks might follow, so he expressed reluctance for the anniversary celebration. He wrote a letter dated January 14, 1884, to Nerses Abelian and informed him of the threat on his life:

I received your letter where you express joy for my escape from a life-threatening incident. I expected all kinds of nastiness from my opponents, but I did not expect this. I will be careful from now on. I do not go out after seven o'clock in the evenings. At night, a brave guard sleeps in my foyer. Now I have two revolvers; a gentleman gave me the second one as a gift. As for the anniversary, some people are enraged, and they are attempting all kinds of dirty tricks to prevent it, but a strong and positive support is present in the regions and everywhere else.

To tell you the truth, I am not in favor of the anniversary celebration this year. It is the work of a few friends. I do not want to aggravate my enemies at this bad time because they are capable of all kinds of dishonorable acts.<sup>352</sup>

Several months later, Raffi found out that his attackers were common hooligans. A few days before the incident, Raffi had given his young and naïve helper a twenty-ruble note to have it changed. The young man had gone to the nearby tavern, where several hooligans were drinking. One of the men had asked him whether the homeowner had plenty of money. The young man had told the hooligans that the homeowner had a trunk-full of similar notes hidden in his bedroom. The hooligans had found out that Raffi lived alone. When the young man told Raffi about his experience, Raffi suspected that hooligans were the intruders and told the young man to take him to the tavern. Raffi went to see the hooligans and asked the owner about the men. At first, the owner was reluctant to say anything. Raffi pleaded with the owner to show him the men and promised not to inform the police; he even promised to give them money. A couple of days later, the tavern owner brought two red-faced hooligans. Raffi was amazed that they came. He gave them each a ten-ruble coin and let them go, convincing them that besides not having a trunk-full of money, sometimes he needed to raid other people's trunks.



*Raffi's living room and office in Tiflis (1884-1885)*

On February 24, 1884, the jubilee committee announced that the celebration date would be in April after the Easter Holiday. Armenian communities in Russia and other countries made preliminary preparations. The youth in Van, Kars, Erzerum, Yerevan, and Vagharshapat sent telegrams congratulating Raffi for dedicating twenty-five years of life to enlighten his people. University students in Kharkov, Petersburg, and Moscow held meetings and sent donations to Raffi. Readers in various cities joined and contributed to the anniversary fund. Donations continued until June 1884, amounting to 1,225 rubles. Several sub-committees formed to handle various projects. A group of students in Tiflis published a collection of Raffi's works under the title *Psak*. In his modesty, Raffi considered the respect shown him untimely, but the public did not pay attention to him and tried to make the

celebration as grand as possible. All the preparations were ready when unexpectedly the Russian government, considering Raffi an undesirable person, banned the jubilee celebration. Raffi had to remain quiet, but the public continued to send their congratulations and contributions.<sup>353</sup> The jubilee committee gave the three thousand rubles it had collected to Raffi. This aroused the envy of Raffi's enemies, who were so jealous that they wanted to harm him morally and financially; thus, they publicly called him a *thief* and a *literary peddler*.

During a conversation with Raffi, Shirvanzade told him in jest that his enemies had spread rumors that he had at least twenty thousand rubles in the bank, amassed from his publications and money received from the jubilee committee.

"Is that right?" Raffi asked surprisingly. "I am very happy, but do not my enemies ask who holds the bankbook? The troubling thing is that even a few of my acquaintances believe that myth. Today I had a discussion with one of them. I am not going to deny it; I am keeping quiet. Let my enemies think I am rich; that will torture them even more than if they knew how poor I am now. The most distressing thing to those people is the knowledge of their enemies' wealth. My close friends know the truth; that is enough for me."<sup>354</sup>

Those close to Raffi knew the facts. Raffi was married and had two sons, who lived with their mother in Persia. He had two poor brothers, an old mother, and nine sisters, all of whom were destitute. Raffi could not have amassed such a large sum based on his meager compensation, part of which he used to support his extended family. According to Grigor Artsruni, Raffi received eight hundred rubles annually from *Mshak*. During his early years at *Mshak*, he sometimes ate his meals at Artsruni's home. During those years, Raffi contributed to the paper without monetary compensation. Raffi received a regular salary only after he returned from Agulis in 1879 to work full time at *Mshak*. His income from the published works was on average twelve hundred rubles annually. His income dropped to half of what he was earning at *Mshak* when he left there in 1884. Raffi confided to Shirvanzade about his indigent days in the early 1870s:

I lived with a poor family in one of the poor neighborhoods. I wrote with such enthusiasm that only an inspired writer could. Day and night, I was at my desk writing. I lived one day hungry, another day half-full. I scarcely had hot meals. My meals were mostly a piece of bread and cheese. I liked cigarettes and tea. Without smoking, I could not write, just as now. I smoked cheap cigarettes, which cost one kopek. I do not remember even once





*Aleksandr Kalantar*

throwing away a cigarette without smoking it to the end. I collected the half-smoked cigarettes in my desk's drawer and smoked them later. As for tea, it was pure luxury for me, and for long periods, I did not have any. Those were bitter but happy days. I endured all the hardships without complaint.<sup>355</sup>

Despite his regular income, Raffi lived an impoverished life. To illustrate the extent of Raffi's living condition, Varduhi Kalantar Nalbandian described one of the many stories her father, Aleksandr Kalantar (Hovhannes Kalantar's brother), had told her about his acquaintance with Raffi. In 1879 Aleksandr came to work for *Mshak* and met Raffi. One night he visited Raffi at his home and saw him writing at a desk in his poorly furnished apartment. The desk

had a broken leg. Sitting at the desk, Raffi was writing while propping up the desk with his one knee. "He was pallid and tired, but ardent with the passion of his work and ideas. He drank dark tea and smoked and wrote by a lamp's dim light."<sup>356</sup>

Raffi's short historical novella *Paruyr Haykazn* appeared in the early 1884 issues of *Aghbiur*. It indirectly condemned the Armenian cosmopolites and explained that a person's most noble duty was to dedicate himself to his people's freedom and enlightenment. In the same monthly in 1884 Raffi published translations of Turgenev's *Aghavninere* (The Pigeons), V. Ovsyannikov's *Fridovsi* (the Persian poet Firdusi) short stories, Heinrich Heine's *Firdusi* poem, and V. Hugo's *Yerg* (Song). In addition, he reprinted from *Mshak*, in book form, his translated short stories of Leopold von Sachar-Masoch's<sup>357</sup> *Kayeni ktake* (Cain's Bequest). Raffi completed many of his minor works and published them. He hastened to finish the second volume of *Kaytser* and publish it before a political or medical obstacle prevented him from doing so.

In 1884 Arpiar Arpiarian, a renowned writer from Constantinople, visited Raffi and was profoundly impressed by his extreme modesty. The people's outpouring love for Raffi moved Arpiarian when he saw the letters and gifts Raffi received from different people and places. One particular letter attracted Arpiarian's attention. It was a simple, but notable two-stanza poem:

Twenty-four years of my life had passed,  
And for so long I was a mute,  
Now I, too, know Armenian.

How do I know? Ask me readers,  
Who taught me Armenian?  
That man was Raffi. With his immortal pen  
And his sacred works, he enabled me to speak.<sup>358</sup>

Arpiarian stayed with Raffi when he was in Tiflis. He asked Raffi's permission to publish *Khachagoghi hishatakarane* and *Khamsayi melikutunnere*. Raffi happily gave his permission. When Arpiarian returned to Constantinople, friends, relatives, and readers kept asking him about Raffi. To inform the Armenians in Constantinople about Raffi and his works, Arpiarian wrote an extensive article in *Masis*:

Did you see Raffi and talk to him? What kind of a man is he? What does he do? Many wished they could have seen Raffi. Any person

who attracts the nation's admiration, we can confidently say that person has a powerful influence on the people. That kind of influence can only be achieved by being the true interpreter of the people's feelings and ideals. The criticisms against Raffi were nothing more than feelings of hatred.<sup>359</sup>

In the evenings, Raffi liked to stroll along Golovinski Prospekt (Boulevard). His two friends Nerses Abelian and Stepanos Zelinski<sup>360</sup> were usually with him. Zelinski was an Armenian with a Russian name. His father had an altercation with the Armenian clergy and had his son baptized by a Russian priest. Shirvanzade often accompanied the trio, whom Raffi invited for tea at his apartment after their promenade. A Russian-speaking Armenian saw the group together and wondered who the "Persian" man was.

"Who is that Persian, whom I see with you and Shirvanzade?" the man had asked Abelian.

"Raffi."

"Is that so? I thought he was a Persian merchant," the friend responded with amazement.

Raffi was amazingly restrained, balanced, and modest. Others did not easily trouble him. He was shy; so whenever people praised him, he became confused and did not know what to say. He liked praise, but he did not know how to hide his joy. He did not show his happiness in words, but he had certain expressions and demeanor that betrayed his joy.<sup>361</sup> It was difficult to exhaust his patience. Raffi owed four hundred rubles to Hovhannes Ter Sargsian, an irascible Armenian merchant, for paper Raffi had purchased to publish *Kaytser*. The store was on the same street where Raffi took his walks. He never felt uncomfortable to walk past the store, and he ignored the store owner's offensive stares. For months Raffi was unable to pay his debt.

"He will not pay. What can I do to that man?" the store owner would complain to Shirvanzade every time he saw him.

Finally, one day, unable to endure anymore, the store owner came out of the store, grabbed Raffi by the arm, and demanded the money.

"Are you going to give me my money or not?"

"What kind of a question is that? Of course I am going to give you your money," responded Raffi calmly and with a smile.

"But when?"

"When I have the money."

"When will you have the money?"

"I do not know."

"How is it that you do not know?"

"Well, I do not know."

"But I cannot wait any longer," said the enraged store owner.

"You must be patient. Patience is a good thing," Raffi answered in a calm manner.

"Man, I am furious."

"Completely useless; anger is not a good thing," Raffi advised.

"I am telling you I am furious, do you hear me or not?"

"Very well, what can I do?" Raffi responded.

"At least, you too can become somewhat angry; otherwise, I am going to burst."

Raffi smiled and departed, holding his walking stick in front of him.

The next time the store owner saw Shirvanzade, he told him, "That man is a piece of stone, not a human being. I am surprised at how he writes those fiery lines."<sup>362</sup>

One day at midnight, during his writing, Raffi ran out of cigarettes and felt hungry. He told Shirvanzade about his desperate condition: "One day while working late into the night, I suddenly became dizzy and my eyes dimmed. I realized that I had been hungry the whole day. I looked around the rooms for something to eat, but I could not find anything because I never had extra food."<sup>363</sup> He found only three kopeks in his pocket and wondered whether to buy bread or cigarettes. He decided to buy bread and went out to find an open bakery in the Armenian Havlabar neighborhood where he lived. He knocked on a closed bakery door; in response, he heard curses from inside. Raffi told the man that they both were Armenians, and that he should give him three kopek's worth of bread. Finally, the baker opened the door and gave him the bread.

Shirvanzade often lunched with Raffi at a restaurant where also several of their friends and acquaintances frequented. Shirvanzade described one of their visits:

Raffi ate lunch at the Mingrelia low-priced restaurant, owned by a Greek, where he paid twenty-five kopeks for the lunch that was his only meal of the day. The restaurant was a gathering place for unemployed workers and agitators. Once, Raffi and I entered the restaurant and saw Petros Simonian sitting at a corner table patting the owner's dog. Looking over his lowered glasses, Simonian noticed Raffi and pretended he saw him for the first time, but he wanted to hear what Raffi was saying. Raffi turned his face toward me and said, "The fox is here." They each sat at opposite corners and occasionally they would glance at each other and remark to

their companions. Raffi drank a small glass of *oghi* (similar to gin) before a meal and one or two glasses of wine during the meal. On rare occasions, he drank a small amount of beer. He longingly discussed eastern cuisines with Stepanos Zelinski and described the taste and the aroma of Armenian and Persian foods; they even argued about how to prepare the foods. Both had speaking talent, but when it came to eating, they were light eaters.<sup>364</sup>

According to Shirvanzade, Raffi had no idea about love. Raffi had told Shirvanzade that he had fallen in love when he was fifteen-years old in Persia; however, at that age Raffi was already in Tiflis. He might have referred to an earlier or a later time. Perhaps he was thinking about Sara?

"You know, when I was fifteen-years old, I was infatuated by a Persian girl?"

"And then?" Shirvanzade had asked.

"And then, I left Persia and forgot about her."<sup>365</sup>

Raffi's enemies had spread mendacious and vicious rumors that he had a romantic affair with the wife of an Armenian merchant. The woman lived elsewhere in Russia, and when she came to Tiflis, Shirvanzade never saw her with Raffi. The rumor was false, spread by Raffi's spiteful enemies, whose revilements toward Raffi had no limit.<sup>366</sup>

One day Shirvanzade and Ghazaros Aghayan decided to go on a picnic with some friends and have a good time. They persuaded Raffi to go with them. The group of twenty friends went to a beautiful wooded area along the banks of the Kur River. The weather was warm and sunny. They ate and drank, some sang, others danced, and a few got drunk. Raffi never drank more than one or two glasses of wine; he was the most moderate among his friends. During the entire time, Raffi remained seated in the same position, with his hat on and walking stick in his hand. He was constantly smiling and occasionally uttered witty words. The following day Raffi and Shirvanzade met in the street.

"My friend, yesterday we had such fun," Raffi told his friend.

"Yes, especially you, Mr. Raffi," Shirvanzade said in jest.

"Yes, I was in a very good mood yesterday," Raffi agreed.<sup>367</sup>

Raffi's time was very precious, and he did not want to waste any of it for enjoyment other than his work, which was his enjoyment. Raffi liked to joke, and his jokes were amusing. He was a perfect lamb when he was in a happy mood, but a lion when attacked.<sup>368</sup> Actor Petros Abelian had told Veratsin that Raffi was a pleasant conversationalist. During gatherings in restaurants, he would tell stories and anecdotes with eastern flavor and style, eliciting laughter



from the listeners.<sup>369</sup> He was witty and possessed great humor, but only in small circles. He had an inexhaustible source of eastern anecdotes. Despite experiencing so much bitterness and difficulties, he still had a youthful passion and freshness. Outside of his close circle, Raffi was quiet, serious, and sometimes cold. He behaved even more coldly with distant acquaintances during business transactions.

Soon, this coldness would replace the warm relationship between Raffi and Grigor Artsruni.



## Departure from *Mshak*

In 1884 the friendly relationship between Grigor Artsruni and Raffi ended, and Raffi left *Mshak* permanently. It was a heavy blow for both men, who together had contributed so much to Armenian journalism in just a decade. Raffi was losing a paper where he was one of the editors from the first day of its establishment, and he was leaving a paper that had greatly helped him launch his literary career. He was separating from a friend like Artsruni, who had valued the yet unknown Hakob Melik-Hakobian, made him his main assistant, and helped him to become Raffi. Artsruni and his *Mshak*, however, were losing a talented writer whose pen, more than all the rest of *Mshak's* writers, helped to popularize the paper and propagate ideas of liberation. In 1884 Raffi was already such a great literary personality that his association with any Armenian paper would have brought prestige to that paper.

What was the reason for the tragic separation? Grigor Artsruni had established and published *Mshak* mainly with the income from his father's, General Yeramia Artsruni, real estate properties. After his father's death, Grigor Artsruni inherited some of the properties (the rest by his sister Yeghisabet and brother Andreas), which were burdened with debt. The Artsruni brothers were unable to maintain the properties, and the debts increased. In July 1884 the bank auctioned off the valuable family properties. Deprived of all monetary sources, Grigor Artsruni terminated *Mshak's* publication on July 11, 1884.

One day during those difficult days, Artsruni invited Shirvanzade for dinner. He met Artsruni's wife, for the first time, who greeted him as she smoked a cigarette. Her maiden name was Mariam (Maro) Melik-Aghamaliants; she was the divorcee of doctor Kochariants of Tiflis. The Artsrunis had gone through only a civilian marriage. During the dinner, the subject of the severed relationship between Raffi and Artsruni came up. Shirvanzade was curious to know the reason for their separation.

"The reason is financial," said Mrs. Maro in a crude manner. "That man is greedy; he considered eight hundred rubles a year and free lunches insufficient and demanded more."

"And besides that, he was benefiting from the printing facilities to publish his books," Artsruni added.

Shirvanzade pointed out that he could not imagine *Mshak* without Raffi, and Raffi without *Mshak*.

“Yes,” Maro agreed, “except *Mshak* did not need Raffi as much as Raffi needed *Mshak*. Without *Mshak*, that man would have been deprived of his popularity.”

Shirvanzade realized that Artsruni was more modest, but he did not contradict his wife’s comments. Shirvanzade left the dinner with bad impressions of Artsruni’s wife, and he decided never to see the woman again. He remembered Raffi’s comment about Mr. Artsruni: “Grigor would not have married that Mrs. Maro, if he did not have opponents. They were the ones who helped them get together.”<sup>370</sup>

In his book titled *Grigor Artsruni*, Leo documented his experiences with Raffi while at *Mshak*. Raffi had written a letter, dated December 15, 1885, to Leo about severing his ties with Artsruni and departing from *Mshak*. Leo included the letter in his book:

*Mshak* will start publishing again in January, but I am not certain yet whether I am going to work for it because Mr. Artsruni and I have not reached an agreement.

Taking into consideration his present state, I proposed that we form a group in a friendly manner and publish the paper in such a way that we define each member’s rights and duties, with the editorial staff having independence and mutual responsibilities. He is having difficulty accepting my suggestions and wants to be the *owner* and the *administrator* as before [emphasis in the original]. In my opinion, by doing that he will be unable to satisfy the readers because he is going to need a large number of articles. He will publish empty and meaningless issues and disappoint the public as the other publications have done.

Someone without an essential and strong editorial staff is unable to publish an adequate paper, no matter how talented he is. It hurts me that I have to leave my beloved paper, and it hurts me even more that I do not see a good future for it.<sup>371</sup>

Concerning Raffi’s letter, Leo gave the following explanation:

Clearly, the disagreement between Artsruni and Raffi did not arise from questions about the direction of the paper or principles, but from private, organizational, and material issues. Raffi’s long letter,



*Grigor Artsruni*

in which he expresses his demands, is still among Artsruni's private papers. Artsruni was saving that letter to exonerate himself by showing that he was not at fault. The way Raffi presented his suggestions could not allow someone like Artsruni to agree to the suggestions. Raffi had written earlier that when Artsruni was rich and had money, he would yield to him; but since that condition did not exist anymore, Artsruni's right to dictate also ceased.<sup>372</sup>

Raffi's letter mentioned only organizational issues, which implied issues of direction and principles. In his letter, Raffi did not mention any issue of a monetary nature, to which Leo had alluded. Other sources shed a different light on the sad incident between Raffi and Artsruni. Simon Vratsian wrote

the following criticism of Leo's claim that a monetary issue came between Raffi and Artsruni:

We cannot possibly attribute such ungratefulness to Raffi, who remained respectful toward Artsruni until the end. As Artsruni's admirer, Leo had forgotten that to elevate a great Armenian public figure like Grigor Artsruni at the expense of disparaging another great Armenian like Raffi is neither forgivable nor justifiable. Leo had done that without any evidence.

Leo used the many letters he had received from Artsruni for his *Grigor Artsruni* volumes. Instead of telling us about the content of Raffi's critical letter, which Artsruni supposedly had saved as a document to vindicate himself, it would have been better if Leo had included the letter in his book. Leo did not do that. Instead, he attributed demeaning motives to Raffi. Continuing the comments on Raffi's letter, Leo exposed his fault by saying, "But anyway, Raffi's suggestions were sympathetic. He wanted to see an editorial staff like the one in *Mshak*'s early years."

Even if we accept Raffi's complaint, as Leo described, about Artsruni's attitude before and after he had lost his wealth, the statement was nothing more than an argument to show his desire for a quality editorial staff. It was not meant to imply monetary issues; it meant that the editorial group would comprise equal members without a head editor, as *Mshak* had been in the early years of its publication, and as Leo himself affirms.<sup>373</sup>

Simon Vratsian studied several of Raffi's letters, published by Hakob Ter Hakobian in the 1913 issues of *Ararat* monthly of Ejmiatsin, to refute Leo's partiality for Artsruni. Vratsian used excerpts from Raffi's letters written to Melkon Panian from February 18, 1884, to October 24, 1885, where Raffi explained his relation with Artsruni and *Mshak*:

Because of minor disagreements between Mr. Artsruni and me, I stopped writing in *Mshak*, but soon I will collaborate again and not leave him. If that man did not have such a difficult personality, although he has some good qualities, we would have succeeded in many projects.

You must have noticed that last year *Mshak*'s publication was irregular, and its content weak; therefore, the readers were dissatisfied. Those shortcomings were excusable because many

unexpected issues [police investigations] came up at the *Mshak* offices; we could not expect more. For *Mshak* to attain its past quality and strength, I suggested to Mr. Artsruni to change his editorial policy and, beginning with the New Year, adopt a new policy based on a completely different structure. He agreed with me; but when the New Year arrived, he reneged on his promise. What was the result? It was what I had predicted. He could not continue to publish daily, so he was compelled to publish only twice a week. If he continues to run the paper in this manner, he will probably have to stop publishing altogether. The importance of *Mshak* to the Armenian population is unnecessary for me to explain; you know that well; but what can we do when that stubborn person is ruining everything.

With his current personal business affairs as they are, he should have kept himself away from publishing worries until his personal affairs were in order. I had taken over all of *Mshak*'s responsibilities, but he put me in such a position that I could not endure it any longer.

Although I do not write at the present, I have not completely severed my relations with *Mshak*. I am working and will continue to work to resume publishing the paper because my name is associated with it. If *Mshak* receives a bad mark, it will also reflect on me. Let us see how it ends.<sup>374</sup>

Vratsian concluded his clarification of the unfortunate relation between Raffi and Artsruni:

We can see how much Raffi respected *Mshak* that he considered any negative reputation for *Mshak* also a negative reputation for him. Raffi worked hard to revive the paper. Someone like that could not have been driven by what Leo considers monetary issues. Raffi's letters dispute Leo's specious arguments about the discord between the two men.

After Raffi went to work for *Ardzagank*, he did not change his ideological position from that at *Mshak*. Abgar Hovhannisian had agreed that Raffi would write freely in *Ardzagank*, especially about the important current issues—the election of a new catholicos and the closing of the Armenian schools by the Russian government.

The breaking up of relations between Raffi and Artsruni remains a sad page in the lives of the two great men of the

nineteenth century. It caused bitter pain for both of them, but it did not have serious consequences, or sully their names. As an ethical person, Raffi was chivalrous and remained noble in the public's eye.<sup>375</sup>

In another letter, dated April 24, 1884, to Melkon Panian, Raffi reflected on *Mshak's* unenviable state and the relationship between him and Artsruni. Raffi gave new details about the reasons for the cold relationship by pointing out that one of the reasons, and an important one, was Artsruni's wife, Mariam Artsruni:

As someone observing from afar and who is unfamiliar with the details, I find your concern completely natural when you see *Mshak's* condition with its editor alone and helpless. But who is to blame? That is the question.

At the present, I cannot reveal all the familial secrets, which caused Mr. Artsruni's downfall and *Mshak's* deterioration. That is a long story that will perhaps become a rich source for Artsruni's biography in the future. I respect that man, and I have considered his work noble and beneficial; but he is an unfortunate victim of a mistake, which no one can remedy, and he suffered greatly because of it.

I share your kind advice that I should not abandon Mr. Artsruni in his present state. I did whatever I could and whatever was in my control. I suggested to Mr. Artsruni to leave all the editorial concerns to me, so he could have free time to put his financial problems in order. There were no monetary issues. I even suggested that starting with the New Year I would work without pay and not demand compensation from him, just so that we could continue publishing *Mshak*. All my efforts were in vain because in the middle was Satan, who stirred up everything. What could I do against a woman's intrigue?

Mr. Artsruni and I have had many serious disagreements. That woman has troubled me grately. She has insisted on selling everything, ruining everything, and going abroad to cover up their disgrace in foreign lands. What else could I do when there were such secrets in the business of the paper?

I proposed to Mr. Artsruni (Thank God there are witnesses among us.) that if he desired to go abroad, he should hand *Mshak* over to me, and I promised to send him 150 rubles each month.

At first, he agreed, but later he did not keep his promise. He said, "If I am going to die, let everything die with me." He has become that extreme.

I am still waiting; perhaps conditions will change, and I will find a way to restore *Mshak*. No one is at the editorial room now. Artsruni dismissed all the workers. If the business continues like this, he will be unable to continue, and in a few months, he will have to shut down the paper.

If I am unable to reconcile with Mr. Artsruni, my friends are advising me to publish a monthly, similar to *Pordz*, and a biweekly paper. I am still thinking about that. After I make all the preparations, I will apply for a permit. I am so used to writing editorials that it has become a demand; I cannot remain idle. My heart bleeds when I see the other editors spitting out all sorts of vile, and I have to remain a quiet eyewitness.<sup>376</sup>

Raffi wrote this letter when *Mshak* and Artsruni's businesses were deteriorating fast. On June 22, 1884, the bank holding the mortgage on Artsruni's properties put them up for auction. On the previous day, Raffi wrote about his concerns to Panian:

Mr. Artsruni's business affairs will be decided tomorrow, the day for auctioning his properties. Many people think no one will purchase the properties, and the bank will retain them. Tiflis is in financially difficult times because capitalists are short of money. It is painful to see these valuable properties taken over by the Georgians, who own the banks. The Armenian community wanted to raise funds and purchase the properties and donate them to the Ejmiatsin Academy, but they talked and talked and nothing materialized.

After the auction, Mr. Artsruni will become an unhappy person. He will lose all his properties; in addition, he will owe one hundred thousand rubles. What happens afterward to *Mshak* is very easy to predict.

Until today, I have not spoken with Mr. Artsruni. He is in such a disposition that speaking to him is impossible. When his affairs are finally resolved, I will offer my friendly service. After his misfortune, that man will be unable to stay here. He must go abroad, but he will lack living expenses.

I have formed a group of young people to take over *Mshak* and continue its publication. We will allocate a certain amount for Mr.

Artsruni's living expenses abroad. If he accepts our offer, *Mshak* will survive, and he will benefit from the agreement. If he refuses, it will be only his fault.<sup>377</sup>

What Raffi had predicted happened. The bank took away Artsruni's properties, and he became impoverished. Raffi fulfilled his promise to lend a hand, at least to save *Mshak*. On July 27, 1884, Raffi wrote to Panian to inform him about the fate of Artsruni's properties:

You may have already heard about the demise of Mr. Artsruni's business. No one purchased his properties during the auction. The bank will have to sell them at a much lower price than they are worth. Later, Armenians will own those properties.

Just as I had promised to you in my previous letter, I fulfilled my promise. When Mr. Artsruni lost everything and was in an insoluble hopelessness, I went to him and offered my friendship and services. He had offended me so much that I considered taking such a step a great sacrifice. I suppressed my ego and again extended a hand to him. Their misfortune compelled me to forgive and forget all the unpleasant arguments, which had taken place between us.

Finally, I mostly achieved my purpose to provide Mr. Artsruni with living expenses and to preserve *Mshak's* existence. I formed a group of young people, who took charge of *Mshak's* publication. We promised to pay Mr. Artsruni one hundred rubles each month, starting in 1885 for the next five years. The editor will be one of us, but not I; first, because I am not a Russian citizen; second, last year's workload is not finished yet.

We have decided to publish *Mshak* at the beginning of next year; however, starting in September, we will publish a few issues a week to retain our subscribers.<sup>378</sup>

In another letter to Panian written on October 3, 1884, Raffi explained what had happened subsequent to taking charge of *Mshak*:

After handing over *Mshak's* publication to us, Mr. Artsruni went abroad and now lives in Geneva, Switzerland. We do not know whether he will return to his homeland. If he finds some kind of work there, he will very possibly remain there. The sad thing is that he has taken his wife with him, who made him destitute here; with

her bad influence, she will not let him improve his condition and find work. That woman is a monster. To describe her true character requires a long letter.

We had hoped to publish *Mshak* by now; but the government has not yet given us permission, although we have submitted all the required papers. Now permissions for all publications must come from Petersburg. You cannot imagine my emotional condition and suffering for not having a paper and delaying *Mshak's* publication for so long.

The question of the catholicos<sup>379</sup> will come up again. If you only knew how much treachery and fraud will take place. Meanwhile, we will be quiet onlookers at such wicked behavior.<sup>380</sup>

Because *Mshak's* owner was Mr. Artsruni, the Russian government raised various objections and rejected the permit's transfer to Gabriyel Mirzorian; thus, Raffi was unable to publish *Mshak*. A year later Artsruni returned and again assumed *Mshak's* publication. On that occasion, Raffi wrote a letter dated October 24, 1885, to Panian:

Mr. Artsruni received permission to publish *Mshak*. This year, he will publish only occasionally; but starting next year, he will publish regularly. For now, I do not know whether I will work for the paper. A few young people and I are proposing that he form a group of permanent associates and publish the paper collectively rather than alone.

To satisfy the public's demands, he must organize the editorial staff in a way that each section of the paper will have its writer, and that the issues will not come out empty and sporadically. Mr. Artsruni always comes up with the excuse that he lacks the funds. The group is ready to work without pay, if only they can have certain rights along with their responsibilities. Mr. Artsruni does not want to give us any rights; he wants to be the sole editor as before. The interest of the newspaper requires that he compromise because his position has changed; he must now deal with completely new circumstances. Your friend Mr. Araskhantiants<sup>381</sup> will be in the same group. If our proposal is not accepted, I will resign because I do not expect *Mshak* to succeed if Artsruni publishes it irregularly. Everyone wants to help Mr. Artsruni, but he must realize that if he cannot support his associates monetarily, he should at least do so morally.<sup>382</sup>



These letters refute Leo's biased and incorrect explanation of the reasons that lead to Raffi's separation from *Mshak* and Artsruni.





## A New Direction

In March 1885 the edict of Tsar Alexander III forced the Armenian schools to close. Two of Raffi's friends Gabo (Gabriyel) Mirzoian and Nerses Abelian<sup>383</sup> placed protest leaflets on the walls in several major locations in Tiflis. The message denounced the tsar's tyrannical policy and accused him of destroying what the Armenians had developed over the centuries.<sup>384</sup> The notice urged every home to function as a school. The Russian government's discriminatory policy raised the Armenians' self-awareness. Raffi had predicted the true nature of the tsarist government almost thirty years earlier in a letter to his friend Hovhannes Avetisian: "Do you know what kind of negative influence the Russian Empire has on its Armenian population with the intention of depopulating Armenia of its Armenians? Russia is even contemplating to eliminate the catholicosate and leave the nation leaderless, so that the Armenians will easily become preys for the wolves." Reacting to the tsarist policy, Raffi embarked on creating historical novels to arouse patriotic feelings among the Armenians. Raffi's association with Russophile Artsruni gave the impression that also Raffi preferred Russian domination. Despite this close association, Raffi's article *Datark huyserov yenk khabvum* (see excerpt above), written in 1878, in which he had predicted Russian government's present policy, had displeased Artsruni. When in 1882 Raffi published *Khamsayi melikutiunnere*, his intentions were to caution the Armenians not to place their hopes on the Russian government.

Arshak Jamalian, in his extensive article *Raffi: Arevelian Hayots rusakan orientasioni masin* (Raffi: About Eastern Armenians' Russian Orientation), published in *Hairenik Amsagir*, pointed out Raffi's position on the Eastern Question by analyzing *Khamsayi melikutiunnere*. Jamalian explained why Raffi did not place much faith in the Russian government to liberate the Western Armenians. He stated that Raffi's national and political ideas guided the next two generations and had contemporary importance for future generations. The major part of Raffi's works dealt with issues concerning the Western Armenians; he wrote very little about the Eastern Armenian's political aspirations. The suppressive political conditions in Russia and Raffi's Persian citizenship prevented him to express his thoughts freely on the futility of

relying on Russia for emancipation. Raffi could not remain completely silent when the history of Eastern Armenians' reliance on the Russian government for self-rule or autonomy was repeating itself. Raffi chose to reveal his message through *Khamsayi melikutiunnere* by telling the history of the five largest autonomous Armenian regions in Gharabagh from 1600–1828. Jamalian's thesis pointed out Raffi's views on the political orientation of the Eastern Armenians. By publishing his novel, Raffi wanted to reveal the mistakes and damaging efforts that had adversely affected Eastern Armenians—"crushed under the Russian iron heel." Raffi achieved his purpose by intertwining historical events with popular traditions, and political events with cultural issues, to indirectly interject his political convictions. Jamalian pointed out that some people thought that the disorderly arrangement of events and their frequent repetition were because Raffi hastily submitted the novel's daily segments to *Mshak*, and that he did not have time to present the collected information systematically. According to Jamalian, this idea could partly be true. If that was the only explanation, however, why did Raffi not wait and make the necessary improvements before publishing the novel in book form in 1882? Raffi knew that if he presented the events clearly, his political inclinations would become obvious to the Russian government censors, who would have denied permission to publish the novel. Driven purely by profound patriotism, Raffi studied the Gharabagh melikdoms to inform his people about the good and the bad periods of their recent history. Raffi stated his purpose for writing the novel with the following agonizing words:

We have a certain history that we have not studied yet—that is the history of the meliks. During many centuries, whenever Armenia lost its independence, foreign rulers governed it. Our new history must present the history of those times. Our earlier writers were more diligent than us; they left us the history of their times. What are we, the children of the nineteenth century, going to leave to future generations? We are losing an entire segment of our history, yet we are not paying any attention to it. History is a learning center where future generations become educated to prevent the mistakes and follow the good examples of their predecessors.<sup>385</sup>

Jamalian believed that the Gharabagh meliks' supplication for Russian protection was erroneous. He did not find evidence that Persian rulers persecuted their Christian population during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, despite the intense fanaticism of Christians and Muslims. He gave ample examples of how favorably many of the Persian shahs regarded the

Armenian meliks by giving them full autonomy. Jamalian argued that the reasons for the meliks' adoption of Russian orientation were not the persecutions and forceful conversions of Armenians to Islam in Gharabagh, the occupation of the Shushi Fortress, the eventual occupation of all of Gharabagh and the downfall of the meliks, the forced conversions, and the displacement of the Armenian population. All these were the works of the Turkish Jivanshir tribesmen led by Panah Khan and later his son Ibrahim Khan. The Russian orientation had already existed one hundred years earlier, in the early 1700s, before Ibrahim Khan's brief period of persecutions. Religious adversaries did not play a role between the Persian government officials and the Gharabagh meliks. The benevolent attitude of Persian shahs started with Shah Abbas, who established the Gharabagh melikdoms for the Armenians' contributions to his wars with Ottoman Turkey. Despite the Armenians' obstinate inclination toward Russia, subsequent shahs treated their Armenian subjects with care, even after the Armenians supported the Russians during several minor Russo-Persian wars in the eighteenth century. Shah Agha Mahmad Khan did not seek revenge even after the Gharabagh Armenians joined their tormentor Ibrahim Khan and together fought against the Shah, who in 1795 had gone to eradicate Ibrahim Khan's domination of Gharabagh and to recapture lands lost to the Russians in previous wars. Only Melik-Israyelian Melik Mejlum was against the position of the meliks. In the novel, Raffi elucidated Melik Mejlum's position: "Melik Mejlum was an intelligent young man. He knew that the reason his ancestors were able to preserve autonomous Armenian principalities in the Gharabagh Mountains was because of the benevolence of Persian shahs and not because of a Christian nation. For that reason, when the rest of the meliks rejected the Shah's appeal to join him, only Melik Mejlum accepted."<sup>386</sup>

To further his message against the intransigent position of the Eastern Armenian leaders to support the Russians at any cost, Raffi brought the example of Melik Mejlum. When one of the latter's comrades braved to ask why the melik assisted the Shah in destroying Tiflis, the embittered young melik responded, "We have been deceived so many times. How long are we going to be enticed by dreams? Our friends send us to fight against their enemies, yet they are the ones who gain. We have more solid reasons to believe the shahs than to believe others. Shah Abbas established the melikdoms, Nadir Shah reestablished them, and Agha Mahmad Shah has promised more than his predecessors."<sup>387</sup> Also other leaders, such as Melik Shahnazar and several Ejmiatsin and Aghuan catholicoses, were against the meliks' Russophile orientation because they were either against the Russian orientation or doubtful of Russia's assistance. These leaders were ostracized as traitors.



*Abgar Hovhannisian*

convince the Russian tsar that he liberate the Armenians from Persian rule. The initial Russian encouragement and promises never materialized. Years later, again Armenians from India, led by the wealthy Joseph Emin, came to urge the meliks to continue their appeal for Russian help. The Indian Armenians' purpose was to help establish an independent Armenian state, first in Eastern Armenia, then on the entire Armenian lands. They were convinced that the intervention of Christian nations, especially Russia, could help liberate the Armenians. Thus, influenced by these outsiders, the meliks turned away from Persia, which had been so benevolent to the Armenians, and adopted a new Russophile policy, resulting in disappointments and the eventual destruction of the meliks.

Starting from those early days, Russian deceit spelled the downfall of the

meliks. Publishing *Khamsayi melikutiunnere* soon after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, Raffi indirectly cautioned the Armenians to avoid falling into the same trap by relying on Russia. Even during the somewhat favorable times of Catherine II (Catherine the Great), the Russians abandoned the Armenians in 1797 and quit the war they had started in 1795, reneging on their promises. Raffi pointed out that even under exceptionally favorable times, the Russophile policy of the Armenians brought only harm to them. Despite all the disappointments and losses, the Armenians again sided with Russia when the Persians invaded the Caucasus in 1826. The war ended in 1828 with the defeat of the Persians. After all the assistance the Armenians rendered to Russia's military victories, Raffi indirectly pointed out that the Russians did not change their policy and attitude toward the Armenians.<sup>388</sup>

After analyzing *Khamsayi melikutiunnere*, Jamalian concluded that Raffi attributed the downfall of the meliks to the Eastern Armenians' Russian orientation. By doing so, the meliks placed their entire material, military, and moral support under Russia's disposal. Thus, they brought upon themselves the wrath of the Persians, the Ottomans, and the Turkish tribes in the Caucasus. Jamalian showed how Raffi had described the perfidious, deceptive, and harsh behavior of the Russians. In *Khamsayi melikutiunnere*, Raffi presented the Russian policy toward the Armenians from 1700 to 1827 as a false, contemptible, irresponsible, ungrateful, and insulting policy. Raffi restrained from criticizing the Russian tsar and his policies. He restrained from blaming those Armenian leaders who were blindly supporting Russian policies of the late 1800s. Raffi pointed out three issues that deceived the Eastern Armenians and led them to their unwise Russophile orientation. The first was their Christian conviction. The second was that the Armenians "did not reverse their position and kept expecting protection from the Russians."<sup>389</sup> The third was the Armenian leaders' conviction that the more they supported and sacrificed for the Russians, the better chances they had to receive the support they wanted.

Raffi departed from *Mshak* at the end of 1885 on the advice of friends. After hesitating for a short time, he decided to accept the invitation from *Ardzagank*, edited by Abgar Hovhannisian with Shirvanzade as his assistant editor. The reason Raffi hesitated leaving *Mshak* was that Hovhannisian's earlier *Pordz* and the current *Ardzagank* publications were *Mshak's* rivals. Raffi did not want to work for a paper that was leading a vigorous campaign against *Mshak*, a publication so close to his heart and ideals. Abgar Hovhannisian, however, in deference to Raffi, did not impose any conditions or expect Raffi to attack *Mshak*. Hovhannisian's expectation of Raffi was that of a novelist.

Although deeply embittered by Grigor Artsruni, Raffi never wrote

anything against *Mshak* during his tenure at *Ardzagank*. Raffi was someone who would not sacrifice his ideals. On the contrary, after his departure, the great novelist defended *Mshak* against attacks by Artsruni's adversaries.

Hovhannisian asked Shirvanzade to persuade Raffi to abandon his chosen direction of writing historical novels and write simple novels, especially short stories. Shirvanzade conveyed the message to Raffi.

"You know that for a weekly paper long novels are somewhat improper," Shirvanzade told Raffi.

"Very well, I will first submit a few short stories, but later a large historical novel titled *Samvel*," Raffi promised. "Those who read *Samvel* will realize that an amazing relationship exists between past history and current events. I do not write historical novels for the sake of history, but for the contemporary movements that interest me."<sup>390</sup>

Raffi wrote *Gharib Mshetsin*, a story about the Armenian émigrés who worked as street porters in Constantinople. Shirvanzade thought the story would be for only two or three issues of the paper. He was wrong. Every Monday, Raffi brought the manuscript for the week and said that it would continue.

"Until when?" Hovhannisian asked Shirvanzade, who informed Raffi about the editor's impatience.

"Respected brother," Raffi responded sorrowfully, "is it not necessary to finish up the work?"

That "finishing up" lasted nine weeks. Raffi had written *Gharib Mshetsin* in 1879, but he could not publish it then, and now in 1886 he had the opportunity to do so. Shirvanzade suggested that Raffi write the entire novel first, edit it, and then publish it, instead of writing it in parts. To which Raffi responded, "I am aware of what you say, but when one is writing for a newspaper and his stomach is empty, to do so is impractical."<sup>391</sup>

Raffi knew Armenian history well; he knew that the written history up to his days was incomplete. He realized that the available history books did not have anything about the daily lives of the Armenian people—their behaviors, social interactions, and economic conditions. When he embarked on writing his great novel *Samvel*, he lamented the lack of information about the common people in the fourth century—*Samvel's* historical period. He elaborated on the paucity of such information in the novel's introduction:

What does Armenian history provide the Armenian novelist? We read in our history books the names of our kings and princes; we become familiar with their internal conflicts and external wars; we know how long they lived, and we know of their good and evil

deeds; we know all that. I can say that our history largely is silent about the structure of the royal families. What were the lives of their families like? In other words, I can say that our history, if not completely, then largely, is devoid of information about the people's familial and public behavior. Our historians did not notice that besides the kings and princes, clergy and military men, there were common people, who lived and had their own lives, holidays, feasts, and joys, and who expressed their spiritual and moral inclinations during various public celebrations. People do not exist in our history, only rulers. Our history forgot one major segment of society, that of the woman. We are familiar with the names of only a few women, but details of their lives are absent. What was the Armenian woman like as a spouse and a mother, what role did she play as a family member or a public figure? We do not know any of that . . . Thus, our history gives the novelist very little material to describe the true picture of the past with all its attributes

. . .

Archaeology may be able to reveal the unknowns of Armenia's written history; but our archaeology has performed an insignificant task. It has not yet emerged from its narrow and confined path, the same path along which our history has progressed. Archaeology also deals with kings, princes, and clergy. What does the poor Armenian novelist have? He must give strength to his imagination, but imagination alone is unable to produce a genuine historical novel. I wrote the novel because I was encouraged by the idea that historical novels have educational values for the readers, who will realize the great accomplishments of their ancestors and try to follow their examples; they will also see their ancestors' mistakes and avoid repeating them.<sup>392</sup>

Raffi hated writers who thought the more grabar they used, the better was their writing. The paucity of suitable Armenian words for certain terms frustrated him and prevented him to adequately express his feelings and thoughts. He expressed his opinions on these matters to Shirvanzade by giving several examples. He argued:

To use grabar words is easy, but one must have the skill to choose them well, and the ear for music to make them sound pleasant . . . They blame me for thinking in Russian when I write . . . If my writings show signs of Russian expressions, that does not mean I



have directly translated from Russian; it means that the Armenian language does not have the proper words to help me express my thoughts. I am surprised that even those who do not know one-fourth the Armenian I know criticize me for using Russian expressions. They are not ashamed of mixing German and Russian expressions and producing an ugly dialect. Yet, they blame me for being unfaithful to the Armenian language. I was born and nurtured among the true people. From a young age, I started memorizing the literature of the fifth century . . . I will show my language to the critics that also Raffi knows grabar and perhaps better than many. Those people do not know that I care about the clarity of language more than they do. They do not consider me an Armenologist, because I am not pompous. They do not understand that the modern author, especially the novelist, cannot write in the dialect of Movses Khorenatsi, even when writing in ashkharhabar. Those poor critics think that the current Armenian language can develop without a strong impetus, something that has influenced the progress of all other languages. They insist that instead of samovar we must use *inknayer*; cigarette, *glanak*; telephone, *herakhos*; phonograph, *dzaynakhos* . . .

The Armenian novelist must think about his ideas and writing style and break his head to improve a poor language. Enlightened nations have a word for each object, yet we are just now beginning to form new words. We hear that we have words for every object. Life at the present differs so much from the past that almost no similarities exist in foods, clothing, or household items. How can we apply those words to present objects? Writing a novel these days is hellish work. The journalist is able to manage with a few hundred words, but what can a novelist do when he is obliged to describe a thousand events and images? When I was translating Sachar-Masoch's *Kayeni ktake*, I faced such difficulties to find Armenian equivalents of certain words that I became furious.<sup>393</sup>

Raffi was always pressed for time. He wrote during all his spare hours to earn at least enough to feed his family, but he always welcomed visitors from all walks of life. Raffi's occasional visitors were young men, students, and common laborers. Among those visitors was a very old man, who labored up the stairs, greeted Raffi by his first name, and sat down, sometimes in Raffi's chair. That was Karapet Belakhian, his teacher, who visited Raffi every Sunday to ask about his health. Raffi received him with respect and gratitude, and

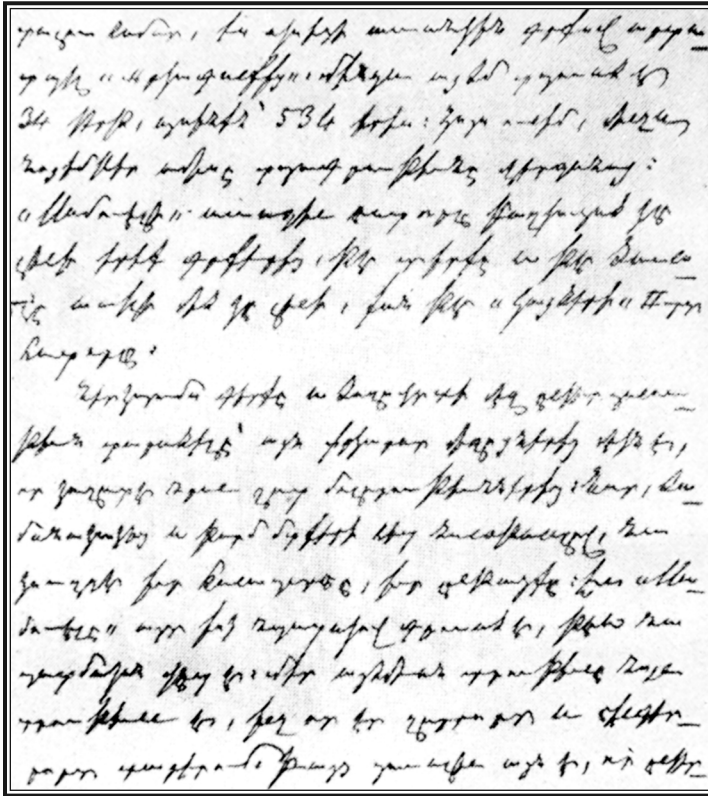
during each visit, he placed a small sum of money in his teacher's hand.<sup>394</sup>

Months went by and he had not yet started writing the promised *Samvel*. He was researching historical books and developing his main character. He was completely engrossed in thought about his new novel. He constantly talked about it with excitement and enthusiasm. Raffi stressed that *Samvel* would be his greatest work.

In February 1886 the novel *Samvel* began to appear in *Ardzagank*. Hovhannisian agreed to publish the long novel because he realized that historical novels were inherently long. The full novel was not ready. Raffi wrote each week's section and gave it to the paper. Weeks went by. "That man is going to bankrupt me having to pay him for each line," Hovhannisian would complain. A few weeks later, he discontinued the publication of the novel after the June 8, 1886, issue. Raffi was furious and agonized over the deteriorating condition of the submitted manuscripts. *Samvel* was to be his greatest novel. He went to Hovhannisian and suggested that he pay him two kopeks for each printed line instead of the four he was receiving. At the end, Hovhannisian did not even fully pay those two kopeks.<sup>395</sup> The readers were angry and demanded the rest. Hovhannisian resumed the publication, which concluded in December 1887.

*Samvel* was Raffi's swan song. It dealt with a crucial event in fifth-century Armenian history when the fate of Armenia was at stake. Byzantium and Sassanian Persia were ready to swallow Armenia, already divided between the two great powers of the time. The country's forces had disintegrated and destabilized because of internal disunity and division among the noble families. Samvel, the hero of the novel, joined with his supporters, succeeded in preventing his father, Vahan Mamikonian, and his uncle Meruzhan Artsruni from helping the Persians destroy Armenia and incorporate it within the Persian Empire. Samvel succeeded in his mission that ended with the murder of his mother and father. The subject was ancient, but its implications were modern at a time when other subjugated nations were gaining their liberties. With this novel, Raffi wanted to instill in the Armenians' psyche the ideas of self-reliance, love of nation, and freedom. He considered the liberation of the nation a most sacred endeavor.

In November 1886 the censoring authorities finally gave Raffi permission to publish the second volume of *Kaytser*. "That day," Shirvanzade wrote, "was a true feast day for Raffi; his joy was boundless, although it was hard to notice it on his somber face. Colonel Aleksandr Tovmayan Melik-Haykaziants had sponsored the publication of the first volume. Raffi was eager to learn whether Melik-Haykaziants was going to sponsor the second volume. He went to Batum to ask Melik-Haykaziants, who agreed to provide the funds Raffi



*A page from a letter Raffi wrote to Aleksandr Abelian*

requested. He returned from Batum rejoicing. He wanted Shirvanzade to edit *Kaytser*. Shirvanzade told Raffi that he had not edited a book before, and that he might make mistakes. Raffi told him that it did not matter because he would do the final editing. He explained that his eyes hurt, and therefore he could not edit the necessary three times. Shirvanzade agreed. In February 1887 Raffi published volume two of *Kaytser* that represented the most impassioned manifestation of the Armenian people's intense desire for liberation. Raffiologist S. Sarinyan had written, "*Kaytser* represents the literary annals of the nineteenth century Armenian liberation movement. It was Raffi's book of life, his artistic and ideological essence. The novel was the continuation of the Armenian people's history written to reflect contemporary life."<sup>396</sup>

Despite his literary success, Raffi's financial condition deteriorated. He wrote a letter on July 28, 1887, to Aleksandr Abelian and asked him to sell twenty copies of *Kaytser* and distribute the fliers for the upcoming publication

of *Samvel*. He said, "If my current condition continues, I will have to leave the field that is sacred and holy to me. After working all these years, dying in poverty is not a very pleasant thing, especially when my health has completely deteriorated. Please send the collected money to me soon because I need it for *Samvel's* printing expenses."<sup>397</sup>

After *Kaytser's* publication, Raffi had time to breathe freely and thought about his plans to complete his unfinished works. In November he began to translate Fizuli's long poem *Leyli and Mejnun*, but he could not finish it because he worked on and published *Samvel* in book form in February 1888. The book found an exceptional reception. The masterpiece marveled the readers. Raffi received a laudatory letter from Rafayel Patkanian, who wrote, "Bravo, Raffi!" Encouraged by the exceptional reception, Raffi wanted to go to Vienna and research the Armenian history of the last few centuries, in which he had become interested. He fervently undertook writing an extensive novel dealing with the struggle between Christianity and Paganism in Armenia. Aleksandr Kalantar, a contributor to and later editor of *Mshak*, attested that Raffi planned to write a series of historical novels.<sup>398</sup> Unfortunately, his wish to go to Vienna and write such novels remained unfulfilled.

Raffi's love for writing was amazing. On average, he worked sixteen hours a day, and sometimes even more. He was able to sit at his desk and write six to eight hours at a time. An old woman across the street from Raffi's residence often noticed very late at night the mysterious man laboring by a lamp's dim light.

"Today I went to bed at dawn," he once said joyously to Shirvanzade. "I sat at my desk at nine o'clock at night and got up at five in the morning."

"You can ruin your health this way," Shirvanzade cautioned him.

"Eh~, what can I do? I have lots of work. I have to hurry. I have decided to complete all my incomplete works, after which I will go on a short trip."

"Where?" Shirvanzade asked.

"Either Persia or Western Armenia," he said longingly. "I want to see Constantinople once, but in such a way that no one finds out. Thank God, I am relieved that the censor allowed me to publish *Kaytser*. Now I must complete *Davit Bek* and *Harem*, edit *Salpi*, and publish them. I must hurry to submit my works to the papers; who knows what might happen? What will happen to my novels if I die tomorrow?"<sup>399</sup> Unfortunately, he never realized his dream to visit Constantinople.

Among the pleasurable things in life, Raffi had only three: dark tea, tobacco, and flowers. Tea and tobacco, especially tobacco, were his inseparable companions during his work. Practically all night, he continually drank tea and smoked. He smoked so much that his mustache had turned yellow from

the smoke. Anna Raffi described her husband's habit to Veratsin:

Raffi withdrew to his room and engrossed himself in writing. I did not let anyone disturb him at that time. Even I did not make a sound when I entered the room. He smoked incessantly, and the room filled with smoke. Engulfed in smoke, he imagined his ideas and wrote them down. I did not accept any visitors at that time.<sup>400</sup>

The dark tea and tobacco, although enjoyable, were poison to his already poor health. Noticing the gradual deterioration, his friends urged him to take a break and rest for a few months. "I am unable to rest. The day I put down my pen, my family will starve to death," he would say. They forced him to go and see the renowned Doctor Gaspariants, a boorish man who was very inconsiderate of his patients. He examined Raffi and told him, "If you do not stop smoking and drinking dark tea, you will soon go to Khojivank." The latter is the Armenian cemetery in Tiflis. Raffi took the doctor's advice and for one month stopped smoking and drank only light tea. He worked less, but was unhappy. "I cannot abstain anymore. Without cigarettes my brain does not work. I feel worse," he told Shirvanzade. He resumed smoking and drinking dark tea.<sup>401</sup>

The necessity to provide for his family forced him to submit his works for printing without the essential editing. He had spent many years editing and perfecting his earlier works, particularly *Khachagoghi hishatakarane* and the second volume of *Kaytser*. He would often wearily tell his friends how much he labored and how exhausted he was from working on his novels; he would add, "You do not know; these pieces of paper will be worth their weight in gold forty years from now." How prophetic were his words! Those pieces of paper became invaluable and gave rise to a great liberation movement, which became a major part of Armenian history; they became the strong foundation of Armenian literature.

Raffi was a modest man and felt awkward when readers praised him. He appreciated the public's respect for him. Every kind word or letter of praise encouraged him and made him happy, but he tried to hide his joy. These praises did not inflate his ego. He could discern between genuine and false flattery. Some people flattered him but later criticized him behind his back. He listened to their flattery, then feigned a smile and wondered why they flattered him when they realized he was aware of their insincerity. The personal tragedies and constant attacks against his person had not hardened Raffi's heart; quite the opposite, they had strengthened his compassion for others, in his public and private lives. During one of the frequent walks with

Shirvanzade, Raffi pointed out a distinguished looking man.

“Do you know that man?” he asked.

“No,” Shirvanzade answered.

“What do you think is his profession?”

“Externally he looks either like a middle class land owner or a merchant.”

A sad smile appeared on Raffi’s face.

“Most of the time a person’s appearance is deceiving. That man is a beggar. Tiflis is full of people like him. Yesterday evening he was at my place. He knows me, and he has read my novels. He had been a wealthy man but had faced failure and lost everything. Now he is a beggar, but his pride prevents him from letting others know. He came to my house yesterday and wept about his condition. He said that only someone who describes the misfortunes of others can understand his condition. I felt bad that I did not have more to give him, but I gave him what I could.”<sup>402</sup>

Raffi’s enemies vilified him throughout his adult life, and when he became a renowned writer, they called him arrogant and greedy. As if these accusations were not enough, even some eighty years later, the Soviet era author Hrand Kh. Hakobyan, proclaimed in his poorly documented book that Raffi was an atheist. Although his contemporary enemies accused Raffi of being an atheist, Hakobyan’s purpose was not to disparage Raffi, but to attack and denigrate religion using out-of-context passages from Raffi’s writings. The author claimed that no one had written about Raffi’s atheism perhaps because Raffi had not written anything specifically against religion.<sup>403</sup> Why would he have? Raffi was a devout Christian. With one such example, Hakobyan tried to prove his point:

[I heard songs coming from several rooftops, mostly religious songs. The villagers knew a few secular songs, and whatever songs they knew were sad and melancholy . . .] “That is the simplest indication of hopeless joy when one, not finding earthly pleasures in mind and soul, and is deprived of happiness, seeks the spiritual and the heavenly . . .”<sup>404</sup>

. . . One cannot say that Raffi had completely turned against religion. In his early works, Raffi had criticized superstition, sorcery, frivolous miracles, prejudice, and predestination; he had shown their harmful consequences to peoples’ lives. Later on, by investigating social issues and becoming familiar with modern thought trends, he was able to elucidate the historical origins of religion from the Marxist-atheist point of view.<sup>405</sup>

*Ghazaros Aghayan*

Hakobyan used a passage from Raffi's novel *Samvel* as a feeble example—a description of the conflict between the Christian ruling class, led by Grigor Lusavorich (illuminator), and the pagan leaders, resulting in Grigor's victory over the latter—as evidence that Raffi had proved religion's spread by force. Hakobyan's book amounted to a poor attempt to refute religion in favor of atheism. He misrepresented Raffi's criticism of the Armenian people's servility caused by improperly teaching religion, which Raffi believed instilled fear and submission in children.<sup>406</sup> Raffi's intentions were to advise the readers, hence the Armenian people, to fight and resist the oppression of Turks, Kurds, and Persians. Raffi's purpose in pointing out the submissive nature of Christianity was not to preach against religion, but to emphasize that Armenians should not “turn the other cheek.”

The author claimed falsely or intentionally that “in all of Raffi’s works, religion was criticized as a social evil, and that Raffi had advocated atheism and included it in all of his significant works, which revealed his philosophical views.”<sup>407</sup> The author should have realized that Raffi did not criticize Christianity or any other religion, but only those dishonest and corrupt clerics, who were exploiting the masses for their own gains and preaching undue obedience. In addition, Hakobyan claimed that Raffi, as an atheist, did not believe in the hereafter. This was not true. Raffi was not an atheist. Readers of his novels know how much he loved the Church. Hakobyan also claimed that Raffi was a materialist. To support his claim, he referred to Raffi’s statement that “above all, material means are essential for peoples’ well being.” Furthermore, Hakobyan argued out of context that Raffi left no doubt of being a materialist when he stated in his letter, dated October 18, 1885, to Artsruni: “I fully confirm your opinion about me that now I have become a materialist; poverty taught me that. I learned from bitter life experiences that one is unable to do anything when his stomach is empty; but the day I have a ruble in my pocket to have lunch, my writing becomes more beautiful. After your many financial difficulties, did you not learn that money is a good thing?”<sup>408</sup>

For a long time, Raffi and Ghazaros Aghayan were close friends. They appeared as an odd couple. Raffi was a short and frail man and walked with a slow pace; Aghayan was a tall and stout man and walked with a heavy gait. Passersby often looked curiously at the two, who were always engrossed in some sort of heated discussion. Raffi spoke softly; Aghayan, boisterously. After an intense argument, the two writers would calm down and engage in cheerful conversation. Although Aghayan had praised volume one of *Kaytser*, he had written unfavorable comments about volume two; thus, their relationship soured, and they became adversaries. After that, Raffi disliked Aghayan and despised his writings. Raffi countered Aghayan’s comments with two articles in *Mshak*.<sup>409</sup> Raffi would say, “That man is the booklet writer from Ashtarak. He has everything in his booklets but good language. Even Nersisian Academy students can write those types of booklets. We must demand more from such writers. He is not a novelist, but a children’s story writer.”<sup>410</sup>

Raffi liked to debate with his critics, not verbally but with his pen. Once in the presence of Perch Proshian and Shirvanzade, Raffi and Ghazaros Aghayan began arguing.

“Do you want to debate in the press?” Aghayan challenged Raffi.

“Yes, let us debate,” Raffi agreed.

Shirvanzade was the editor of *Ardzagank* at that time because Hovhannisian had gone to Germany.



“Would you let us debate in your paper?” Aghayan asked Shirvanzade.

“With pleasure, but with one condition that you debate on principle issues and not attack each other’s person,” Shirvanzade agreed.

The debate went on for three weeks; it then became heated and personal. Shirvanzade discontinued printing it. Every time Aghayan met Shirvanzade, he would complain and ask why Shirvanzade decided to discontinue printing the debate, and then he would add that he could have destroyed Raffi. According to Shirvanzade, Aghayan could destroy Raffi physically, but not intellectually. Raffi could defeat Aghayan, as David defeated Goliath.





## At the Zenith of His Life

At this late stage in his life, destitute and in failing health, Raffi became despondent. His friends did not frequent his home as before, but they met him on the streets every day. During one such meeting, Shirvanzade noticed Raffi in a depressed mood. It was unusual to see a strong-willed person like Raffi in such a condition.

“What has happened?” Shirvanzade asked.

“I am tired of living,” Raffi sighed.

“You are tired, Mr. Raffi,” Shirvanzade agreed, and he tried to cheer him up. “If you take a short trip, you will again love life.”

“Yes, travel. I too am thinking about that, but with what means?” Raffi replied with a deeper sigh. “To say it is easy; a wife, two children, an old mother, my poor brothers, nine sisters, nine poor sisters—”

Raffi’s family worries weighed too heavily on him, although he had seen even worse days in the early years of his career in the 1870s. He kept receiving letters from home pleading for help. He would agonize over his inability to adequately help his family, whom he had sent back to Payajuk in 1881 because he was unable to provide for them. He often commented that it was miserable to see the desperate need of his closest family members and be unable to help. In 1887 when Raffi was already renowned and permanently settled in Tiflis, he brought his family to Tiflis at the end of the year, especially now that his sons were older, and he had to think about their education. He rented an apartment on the third floor of a house on Novo Orlovskaya (Orlovskaya) Street<sup>411</sup> in the Armenian Sololak neighborhood.

Raffi’s enemies continued their jealous and vicious attacks; but he ignored them all. Instead of getting agitated, he scorned them. The more he scorned his enemies, the more enraged they became. “Let them write what they want; I do not read their writings anymore,”<sup>412</sup> he would often say.

Makar Chmshkian, who had years earlier met Hakob—the clerk at the Nasibian store—further reminisced about his relation with Raffi during the last few weeks of the author’s life:

Years later in the 1880s, I had opened my own bookstore.

Practically every day from two to three o'clock in the afternoon, Raffi came in, asked about the daily news, and discussed them for a few minutes. After smoking a few cigarettes and giving me a few instructions, he left to continue his walk. His instructions related to his books. He gave me a larger commission than to the other bookstore owners, and he advised me on how to manage my store better than how the others managed theirs.

One day Raffi asked me to stop by his apartment to pick up our large, ancestral, hand-written, parchment prayer book he had borrowed six months earlier. He had asked to borrow it for a few days to read about our family history written inside. He was living on the third floor of a large house, near the former Catholic rest home, in the Sololak neighborhood.

"Makar, are you here?" Raffi called out when he heard me coming up the stairs.

"Yes. What a beautiful place you have," I answered.

"Yes, it is a nice place, but I have difficulty going up the stairs. If I find a good apartment, I will move. You move around the city a lot, see if you can find a place for me," Raffi asked.

"In this neighborhood or elsewhere?" I asked. "I think having it close to the marketplace is better because the stores here do not have everything; but this place is quiet, and the air is cleaner," I suggested.

"I do not start working before midnight; by then the place is quiet, and no one bothers me," he said.

"Mr. Hakob, what has happened that lately you do not visit the bookstore?" I asked. "The boys are asking about you."

"I must tell the truth, I am a little weak and quite busy. I am writing new works," he explained.

Raffi invited me into his study, asked me to sit down, and started to role a cigarette.

"Sit down, drink a cup of tea, and then go."

"Thank you, I have work to do," I replied.

Raffi wrapped the large prayer book in a newspaper and said, "The writing on your family history is worn off and is illegible, and many sheets are missing. Thank you, I kept it too long."

"It does not matter; if you want, keep it longer," I suggested and left with the book.

Three or four weeks before Raffi passed away, he came to my bookstore.

"If you have addresses of bookstores in regional towns, give them to me," he said.

I immediately gave him a list of addresses and said, "What else is your wish?"

"If you know a good bookbinder, send him to me. I have many books that need binding."

"Very well, I will send a bookbinder and tell him to charge you what he charges me," I promised.

"That will be good. Only tell him not to come after mid-day, he will not find me at home," he instructed.

As he walked out, he turned around and said, "Makar, do not forget, I will be waiting, make sure to send him."

That was the last time he visited my bookstore, and those were the last words he said to me.<sup>413</sup>

Raffi's association with *Ardzagank* did not last long, just over two years from the beginning of 1886 to the last week in April of 1888. On April 3, Raffi fell ill with a high fever. He did not pay attention to his worsening condition. After three days, the family called Dr. Ter Grigorian, who diagnosed Raffi with a serious infection in his right lung. Ter Grigorian consulted Dr. Gaspariants, and both doctors confirmed Raffi's serious condition. They ordered Raffi to bed rest.

On April 7, 1888, an announcement in *Nor Dar* informed the public that on April 10 Ter Davtian and Sargsian were going to present *Samvel* in the form of "living pictures," produced by Gevorg Bashinjaghian,<sup>414</sup> at the theater formerly owned by Grigor Artsruni. In his presence, the public was going to honor Raffi during the presentation. As announced, the presentation took place on April 10; unfortunately, Raffi was unable to attend because of his worsening illness. *Samvel's* performance was a theatrical presentation rather than a play because the Russian censor would not allow it for its highly nationalistic theme. The presentation was mesmerizing and exciting. The entire theater shook from the applause and the thumping of feet. The audience shouted and demanded Raffi's presence.<sup>415</sup> The news of the magnificent reception of *Samvel's* presentation as "living pictures" reached the bedridden Raffi. *Samvel's* ascent to a theatrical form was Raffi's ultimate happiness and richly deserved comfort.

After ten days, Raffi felt better and started to walk around the house and water his beloved flowers. Shirvanzade visited Raffi frequently during his illness. He described Raffi's last days:

We thought it was a minor illness; but Dr. Ter Grigoriants informed us that the patient had a lung infection. When we asked Dr. Gaspariants, he confirmed the diagnosis. Raffi's condition became serious; for three days, we waited anxiously. Every morning and evening, I used to go and ask his wife about his condition.

The doctors had ordered that no one was to disturb the patient. On Thursday evening of Easter Week, I went to Raffi's home and was overjoyed. He was on his feet, watering the flowers with a sprinkling can. "What are you doing?" I called out, "you will get sick again."

"No," Raffi said in his usual quiet manner. "I have been saved for now. My enemies were rejoicing that I was going to die, now let them suffer. I still have another twenty years to live."

A dark premonition came over me. During my leave, I remembered the following incident. On the day of Tserents' internment, we had gathered at the church courtyard when Raffi told Perch Proshiants, "Perch, get ready, your turn is next." Proshiants bit his lips and said, "My friend, many large water jugs survive, but little ones break."<sup>416</sup> Proshiants was fifteen years older than Raffi.<sup>417</sup>

The doctors decided that Raffi was well enough that they did not need to examine him daily. They were to visit Raffi on Monday after Easter Day.<sup>418</sup> Contrary to their appointment, one of the doctors went to visit Raffi on Easter Day to wish him a Happy Easter. The doctor was surprised and alarmed to see Raffi in bed with a high fever and in a weakened condition. Raffi could not speak other than utter incoherent words. Fifty-three-year-old Raffi had suffered a stroke on Easter eve; his right side had become paralyzed. The two doctors consulted with each other, but all their efforts were in vain. Raffi died just ten minutes past midnight on April 25.<sup>419</sup>

On Monday morning, Shirvanzade went to visit Raffi, confident that he was well, but he was stunned to learn Raffi had died:

Two days later, on Sunday [*sic*], I went to visit Raffi. In the street at the entrance, I saw Stepanos Zelinski, a man in his forties, crying like a child.

"He is dead," he said sobbing.

"But when, how—? Only two days ago he was on his feet," I asked surprised.

"He died at 12:00 midnight. Go and see his body."



*Gevorg Bashinjaghian*

Raffi was no more. His sensitive heart that had suffered so much from his people's misfortunes had stopped beating.<sup>420</sup>

The heavy smoking, the stress caused by his vicious enemies, the loss of his wealth, the constant concern to provide for his extended family, and the sleepless nights had taken their toll on this indefatigable giant.

Patkanian heard the sad news in Nakhijevan from his two friends Abgar Hovhannisian and Stepanos Palasanian, who had written that Raffi died in such extreme poverty that the family did not even have a clean shirt in the house to dress the body. Patkanian went to give the news to his friend Dr. Berberian. Patkanian was angry at the community for allowing Raffi to live such a hard life, and he cursed them for their hypocrisy.

"Oh~, ungrateful Armenian community, sons of dogs! Eulogies? Oh~, you suckers of dog's milk! Hypocrites! You deprived him of a white shirt when he was alive, and now that he is dead, you prepare to bury him with fanfare and with the high clergy's participation. Oh~, you wise brother, this is the fate of Armenian writers and activists—a poor soul with a piece of dry bread and a dirty shirt."

Patkanian drank a cup of tea, caught his breath, and criticized the

Armenians of Tiflis. When Dr. Berberian asked him whether Raffi was always persecuted, Patkanian continued.

"I have visited Tiflis many times in the last ten years, and each time I stayed for several months. I saw many people, observed their behavior, and heard a lot. Every time I visited Tiflis, I saw Raffi at Palasanian's home, Abgar's home, or at the hotel where Panian resided. You know that Panian was Raffi's good friend, and occasionally he helped Raffi financially. You know that at the beginning, Raffi published his novels in *Mshak* and received fifty rubles each month. Certain people in Tiflis hated *Mshak's* publisher Grigor Artsruni; therefore, they directed their hatred toward his coworkers. *Meghu Hayastani* was the mouthpiece of those people, and its publisher ridiculed Raffi's *Khente* and *Kaytser*, saying that the age of fairy tales had past, and that the liberal and cultural *Mshak* was feeding its readers fairy tales; but do not think that only *Meghu* was ridiculing Raffi. I can tell you there were intellectuals who could not stomach Raffi's novels. I can tell you that people of Raffi's age understood him less than the younger generation. Palasanian told me about an incident that showed how the adults did not comprehend Raffi's novels. *Mshak* had just concluded publishing *Khente*, ending with 'Vardan's dream.' One day soon after, Palasanian and Raffi were walking on Golovinski Street when they came face to face with Tserents. After greeting each other, they parted. Suddenly, Tserents turned around and addressed Raffi angrily, 'I read *Khente* and Vardan's dream; you are the khent.' Tserents' attack saddened Raffi. When Palasanian asked Raffi what the old man had meant by what he had said, Raffi had replied that apparently Tserents had not understood the novel or Vardan's dream.' When I was in Tiflis, I asked *Meghu's* editor, 'Petros, when are you going to stop attacking Raffi?' Do you know what Petros answered? He said, 'Our attack on Raffi has an indirect meaning because he has become Artsruni's weapon.' I was astounded by his reply. However, when Raffi left *Mshak* and joined *Ardzagank*, the conservative elements did not leave Raffi alone. The poor man lived a miserable life."<sup>421</sup>

The community leaders formed a committee to arrange Raffi's funeral. The committee appointed Shirvanzade to go and persuade Artsruni to attend the funeral. Shirvanzade went to see Artsruni at his office in his home, where also Maro and Khachatur Malumian (E. Aknuni) were present. At first, Artsruni absolutely refused to attend the funeral. Maro went even further with her vicious hatred and did not spare the deceased's coffin. She criticized the man so much that Malumian became uneasy. Finally, though, Shirvanzade persuaded Artsruni to attend by insisting that his absence would leave a bad impression on the public and hurt *Mshak*. The next day, Artsruni came to the funeral along with his opponents Abgar Hovhannisian, Petros Simonian, and





*Raffi (1887)*

*Nor Dar* editor Spandar Spandarian. Artsruni was one of those who carried the coffin out of the house.<sup>422</sup>

The day was gloomy and cold; and it had been raining heavily since early morning.

H. Haykazuni was an eyewitness to the funeral and described it in his booklet, published soon after Raffi's internment and dedicated to Raffi:

At nine in the morning of April 29, the entire clergy of Tiflis, led by Prelate Hovhannes Shiraguni, visited the deceased at his home on Novo Orlovskaya Street. The Nersisian Academy choir headed the procession. Dignitaries carried the coffin from Raffi's home to Vanats Church for the Requiem. The crowd was so large and dense

that Raffi's open coffin was carried shoulder high all the way to the cemetery. Following the coffin were two carriages loaded with flower wreaths. All the Armenian institutions and businesses and all the banks were closed. Even some non-Armenian shopkeepers closed their doors and followed the procession.

After the Requiem, Father Stepanos Ter Stepanian gave a short but moving sermon and eulogized Raffi. Afterward, the dignitaries brought the coffin outside and placed it at the church portal. Several speakers eulogized the deceased, and then the procession headed for the cemetery. After crossing the bridge, it reached the fruit market where Armenian merchants had spanned an arch, over the street, constructed of flower wreaths with the letter *R* in its middle. Under a canopy, they had set up tables covered with white linen. The crowd placed the coffin on a table to give the people in the market a chance to pay their respect to their beloved author. Burning candles decorated the surrounding tables, and the sweet fragrance of burning incense filled the air.

Despite the heavy rain, the crowd grew larger as the procession advanced toward the cemetery. When they reached the metal gates, the representatives of each organization removed their respective wreaths from the carriages, went in pairs to the head of the procession, and proceeded toward the gravesite. A canopy of wreaths had been erected adjacent to the gravesite, with the title of each novel placed within each wreath.<sup>423</sup>

Community leaders eulogized and gave speeches of gratitude. E. Aknuni delivered the eulogy of the Armenian artisans and laborers. Raffi's close friend and admirer Gamar Katipa read his eulogy that included an elegy he had written to honor the person who had moved him "to tears after reading *Harem*":

For as long as you were full of life among us  
You were always pursued and hated;  
But when you suddenly left and went away  
You became our national genius.

We Armenians, who have been spiritually dead,  
Have always loved corpses during our lives.  
The words of our ancestors are not lies:  
"Go and die, then come back for me to love you."

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The rain falling on the open casket had not altered Raffi's gentle face; he seemed to be asleep. He appeared as if his thoughts glowed on his finely furrowed wide forehead. At the end of the internment services when the priest uttered the bidding prayer, the crowd spontaneously cried out, "**He lives! He lives!**"<sup>424</sup>





## Posthumous Events

Shirvanzade described Raffi's funeral as an enormous manifestation of the national awareness awakened by Raffi's fiery and patriotic writings:

Raffi's funeral was the first popular funeral of an Armenian national leader attended by the entire Armenian community of Tiflis. From that day on, non-Armenians began to say, "*The Armenians know how to bury their leaders well, but not to help them live well.*" [Emphasis added.]

No one expected such a majestic funeral. Raffi's neighbors were astonished and asked each other, "Vin Aris (Who is he?)" in amazement.

Who was that man, that writer, that weaver of tales, that prophet?

In a modest neighborhood, lived a short-statured man with ordinary features, and who wore simple clothes. Everyday, he came out of his house with lowered head and a thick walking stick in his hand, and he returned with a bagful of fruits in his arm. No sign of greatness or fame showed on this modest citizen.

Suddenly he died, and almost the entire city arose to pay homage. The artisans of Tiflis came with their large and colorful silken banners. Students and their teachers gathered in front of their schools. All the clergy participated at the Requiem. The editors of all the non-Armenian papers came to pay their respect, along with all the literati of Tiflis. Despite the heavy rain, also countless girls and women came.

Never before had the heavens wept so much as on that day; never before had the spirits mourned as much as on that day; and never before had the young Armenian women and men shed so many tears as on that day.<sup>425</sup>

Raffi's unexpected and untimely death at fifty-three stunned the public. The Armenian, Georgian, and Russian press published laudatory articles about

his literary greatness and his life's story. *Ardzagank* published the following editorial:

That great man, whose name has been reverberating for three decades in the Armenian literary world, has died. He was an unequalled giant, who worked for us in the nascent literary field.

From the first half of the nineteenth century until now, no one has thrust such an impetus into our literature as Raffi has. Our literature's pride is no more.

Who has not heard Raffi's enchanting name, and who has not been enthralled by his masterful poetic writings?

Starting in 1857 until now, this heavenly name has caused the hearts of the Armenians to throb, and he will do so for a long time.

The loss is heavy; the moment, mournful.

Raffi was the first writer who wrote in the modern vernacular with confidence.

Today, practically the entire reading public speaks in the language he wrote and cultivated. His language bridges the classical form with the new literary demands of the public. Raffi is the one who created a reading public with his novels. He is the one who gave the Armenians their present and their past.<sup>426</sup>

The Georgian press participated in praising Raffi's works and his selfless and ultimate dedication in advancing Armenian literature. The Georgian poet Ilia Javjevadze published a eulogy in his paper, *Iveria*, as a tribute to the great writer, pointing out Raffi's unique and unprecedented place in Armenian literature:

The Armenian literary world lost a venerable, noble, and talented writer. Today, the entire Armenian nation feels the sudden death of the writer, who during his lifetime declared his graceful and effective message, inspiring noble feelings and thoughts. A nation will find it hard to forget such a man because that kind of a man carries in his heart the nation's sorrow and joy.

The funeral demonstrated that your kind of a man does not die with death. You vanquished the invincible death, and you yourself slew death because your efforts and works left a true memory in every Armenian's heart; and in those hearts, your name will live on, as does the pearl in the sea.<sup>427</sup>



*Mrs. Anna Raffi*

As an individual often is unaware and unable to appreciate fully what he has until he loses it, the same is true with people. Raffi was a popular figure and an admired novelist when he was alive, but the public's love and respect multiplied the moment Raffi closed his eyes forever. Right after the great novelist's death, Armenians realized their great loss. Raffi's death jarred everyone—friends who loved him, and implacable opponents who hated him. Grudges and hatreds were silenced. Friends and admirers, opponents and enemies, lowered their heads in awe at the great Armenian's coffin.

Describing the *Mshak's* beginning editorial meetings participated by a group of enthusiastic and spirited young men, Raffi had written: "Most of us did not have clean shirts to wear and came with badly worn out shoes." That was 1872 when Raffi entered the literary arena without a clean shirt and with

worn out shoes. Some people had said, “When Raffi died and his body was being prepared for burial, the family did not have a clean shirt in the home to dress the deceased. Indeed, the great novelist and the great patriot entered the literary field without a clean shirt and departed this world without a clean shirt. Instead of a shirt, however, Raffi weaved and draped the Armenian literature with a royal cloak that will not get old and will not wear out as long as someone on this planet reads in the Armenian language.”<sup>428</sup>

Forty days later on June 2, the community attended a glorious requiem service. On the same day at ten o'clock, the public attended a Holy Mass at the chapel in the Khojivank Cemetery. After the church services, the clergy and the people went to Raffi's gravesite, where Father Mushegh Ter Ghevondian delivered a heartfelt speech and praised the writer's unique talents. A young man recited a poem, and a Georgian man delivered a panegyric in Russian.<sup>429</sup> Hovhannes Kajaznuni<sup>430</sup> read the Armenian translation<sup>431</sup> of the poem written by Yevgeni Stalinski,<sup>432</sup> dedicated to Raffi.<sup>433</sup>

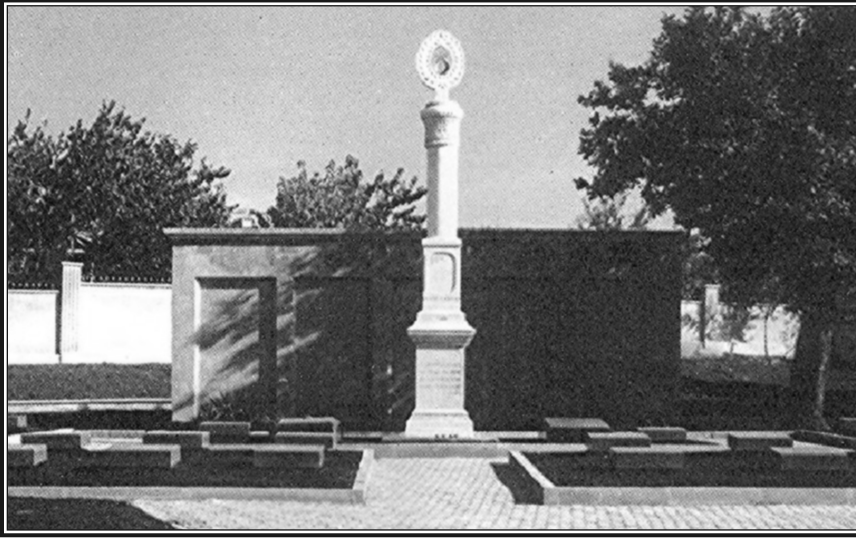
Ten days after Raffi's death, in a special meeting with the presence of police officials, the Persian Ambassador's secretary, members of the internment committee, and Mrs. Anna Raffi, the government seals were broken and a list was made of Raffi's belongings and papers. Among the papers were some unpublished manuscripts. No manuscripts of the novels he had planned to write were among his belongings. As for any currency, none existed.

Despite massive emotional outpouring, praise, and recognition of Armenia's greatest novelist, the Armenian community in the Caucasus was unable to raise sufficient funds for the burial expenses, despite the large number of wealthy Tiflis Armenian merchants, whose dissolute lifestyle Raffi had often lamented. The committee in charge of the funeral had to use income from the sale of *Samvel* for the expenses. In the words of Mkrtich Parsamian:

A group of Iranian Armenians in Tiflis wanted to pay for the funeral expenses; however, Anna Raffi refused and insisted that the funeral expenses of an Armenian writer must be paid from moneys earned from his literary works . . . Colonel Aleksandr Melik-Haykazian paid the living expenses of one of Raffi's sons, and Aleksandr Mantashian paid the expenses of the other son. The Nersisian Academy trustees provided scholarships for the two students.

The total expenses were 495 rubles. The funeral expenses were 301 rubles, and other expenses amounted to 194 rubles. The funerary committee borrowed 450 rubles, and 45 rubles came from Baku Armenians. The 300 rubles out of the 450-ruble debt were





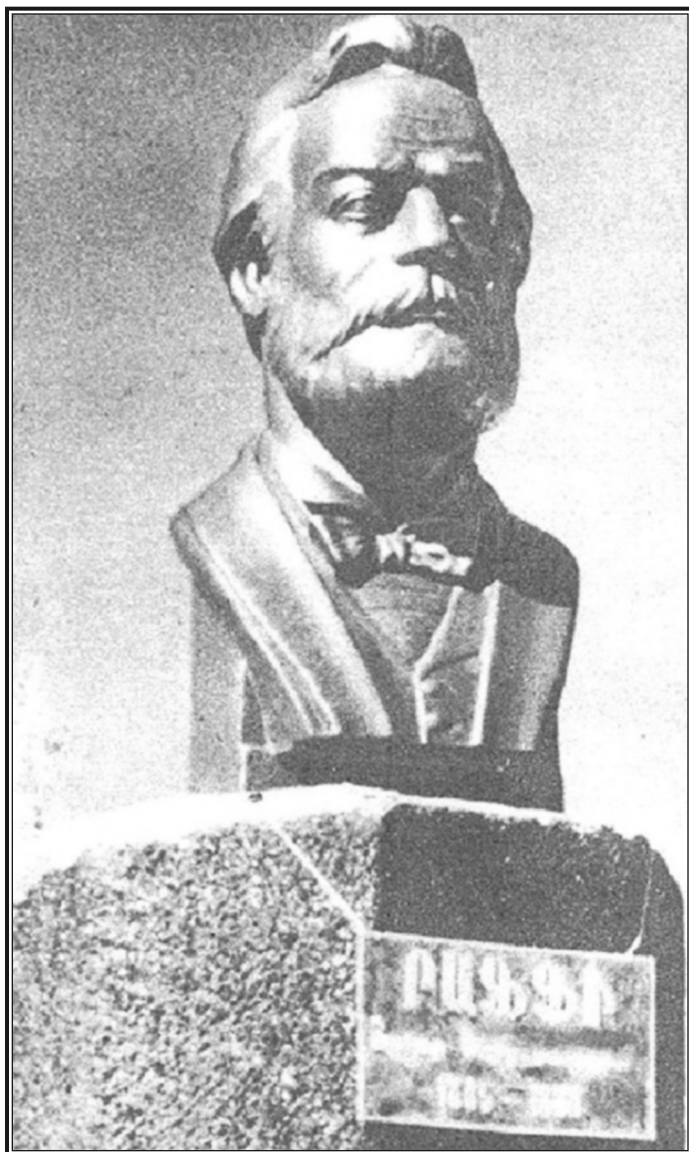
*Raffi's Tomb and Monument in Tiflis (Tbilisi), Georgia*

paid out of the collected moneys from the sale of *Samvel*. The sale of Raffi's photos, each for a ruble, raised 150 rubles. Khrimian *Hayrik* sent one hundred copies of his various books to the main bookstore in Tiflis, instructing the owner to contribute the income from it to the committee in charge of erecting Raffi's monument at the gravesite.<sup>434</sup>

On September 27, 1898, on the tenth anniversary of Raffi's death, the Armenian community erected a large gravestone on Raffi's gravesite, and in 1907 they erected a tall white marble monument. Gevorg Bashinjaghian designed both monuments. Inscribed on the pedestal is the following epitaph, from Raffi's renowned poem—*Vana tsovak*,<sup>435</sup> addressed to the moon shining upon the wavy waters of Lake Van:

Your heart is stone and your conscience is dead.  
 You saw so much blood and so many massacres,  
 And you kept silent; yet still so bright,  
 Over Armenian lands you have placed an arch.





*Raffi's Monument was erected by the Armenians of Iran. It was originally kept at the Armenian church in the village of Haftvan. To prevent vandalism, it was moved to the Armenian Prelacy in Tavriz.*

## Raffi Remembered

**Vahan Tekeyan** (1878–1945) was born in Constantinople. He was a renowned poet and writer. In 1905 he published *Shirak* literary periodical in Alexandria, Egypt. In 1909 he moved it to Constantinople. He passed away in Cairo.

### RAFFI

His name gushes forth and froths  
Pure, bright as the sun;  
Long ago lost, escaped to the bosom of the earth  
Like a spring.

He still moves the earth around him,  
And becomes a river,  
In it, the world collapses,  
Stars swim.

Where are you channels,  
So that the fields may grow abundant;  
Embankments, so that boulders  
Will fall on their own?

They've dried up . . . But no, they shine  
In their wide banks,  
A little murky—new hope filled with an old memory,  
Only a little murky.<sup>436</sup>

July 1937

**Avetis Aharonian** (1866–1948) was born in Igdir, Armenia. He was author, famed patriot, teacher, ARF leader, diplomat, journalist, and poet. He headed the Armenian Republic's delegation to the Paris Congress. He signed the Treaty of Sevres in 1920. Aharonian also participated at the Treaty of Lausanne negotiations.

A seductive aura had spun around Raffi's name, works, and ideas. It had captured the reading new generation, who felt that Raffi, with the mighty force of his magical pen, day by day and step by step, was drawing us toward the Big Ideology. We sensed the urgency of reforming and reviving the lives of the Armenians. The idea of the "national freedom" was tightly woven with his name. Inspired by Raffi's vision and message, serious thoughts and strong wills dominated our proud souls. It spurred our best efforts and gave form to our desires. That was Raffi's spirit.

One must not search for Raffi's great influence in the literary value of his works or in his masterful and enthralling creations, but in the clear, simple, and perspicuous language, which the readers could comprehend. That influence and its unparalleled charm are found in his ideology. Beyond being a novelist, Raffi was a visionary with a clear and penetrating insight. With his pensive and calmly impassioned struggle, without an uproar, almost instinctively, Raffi was able to assess the depth of suffering of the Armenian people and show the true way to salvation.

Among the entire nineteenth century activists who strived to liberate the Armenian people with their writings, Raffi's place was unique, and the role he played was extraordinary. Raffi was the first writer who abandoned allegories, obscure presentations, and prudent and often timid sermons; from the start, he adopted simple and decisive writing. After exposing the wound, he offered the cure—the path toward struggle.

Other than Raffi, no one was able to condense, clearly shape, and manifest Armenia's scattered and irresolute wishes, its uncertain path, its awakening, and its unclear national awareness. His message, which echoed forcefully and decisively in all his works without reservations, was "To know how to live, one must know how to die." His characters espoused national awakening and the desire to live free and unbound, achieved only through struggle.

The purpose of Raffi's literature was to arouse the youth's fury, stir their thirst for higher glory, sanctify the fighting spirit, and to raise the readers' consciousness above the decaying environment of centuries-old wretchedness, abject submission, and humiliating obedience to religion and the clergy. Raffi's call for struggle and resistance, with his daring message for rebellion, faced vigorous opposition. Supporters of clericalism—the obsequious, apathetic, and traditionally submissive—openly fought against Raffi's sound and vital movement; but the opposition was unable to convince the people that Raffi's directed path was futile. His heroes stopped being imaginary characters; they incarnated into living people. The movement spread and deepened; it evolved from individuals to the populace; and the youth thrust itself toward that movement.

Raffi was a poet-novelist and a visionary prophet, who felt what was elusive to thousands and saw what was invisible to mortal eyes. Raffi appeared to the readers like a giant literary figure, a true poet, and a great master. I said a poet because neither before nor after him have I found a single Armenian writer whose prose contains so many poetic jewels.

Raffi, with his poetic prose, will remain an extraordinary writer in our literature with his masterful description of nature, but he was no less capable of developing a character's spiritual anguish. Raffi knew how to analyze the human soul, expose the secrets from its depths, and describe them with sweet naiveté.

Raffi developed his novel *Samvel* from only a few lines, almost a few words, from Pavstos Buzand's *Patmutiun Hayots* [History of the Armenians], written in the fifth century. Only Raffi's great talent, his amazingly rich imagination, and fine literary sense could produce such a masterpiece. With his unique perspicacity, and as a true prophet, he put his finger right on the wound.

Raffi understood the woman's role in public and political life. After Yeghishe, he was the only writer who was able to retrieve from the darkness of the ages the bright picture of the Armenian woman.

That Raffi lacked philosophical and analytical thinking is true, but I do not know any other writer in our literature with the capability to elucidate a similar condition as Samvel's difficult psychological state.

Raffi's incisive insight had seen and then described in his fine works, with a master's pen, the wretchedness of his fatherland. He selected humanity's strongest passions as subjects for his works—the indomitable desire for freedom and the related valor, chivalry, virtue, and self-sacrifice.

Raffi became a prophet, just as every true poet. A half century ago, he visualized our present wretchedness and described it with his unequalled pen. He saw with the eyes of a prophet the coming stormy events and described them with astonishing reality.

Raffi is the oak tree of our literature's glory.<sup>437</sup>

### Avak Khan Aftandilian

Raffi was a powerful literary combatant. Although he grew tired of the constant attacks, he did not succumb to them. He would say, "Those are bullets made of hay." He then would write with greater zeal. Raffi had immense faith in his ideas and principles. On one of my frequent visits, I found Raffi melancholy and engrossed in writing with his usual somberness.

"Let me see," I asked him, "what have you written yesterday and today? Let me read the product of your magical pen, which leaves unforgettable

impressions on me.”

“Sometimes, I myself am surprised by my writing,” Raffi replied, “that is the reason why I write so fervently. Neither hunger and thirst nor the world’s problems are able to affect me.”

With his voluminous novels and his rich language, Raffi was able to attract and educate the young generation. The youth voraciously and insatiably read his writings and demanded even more. He had faced insurmountable difficulties and conquered them to have his massive works published. He was so meticulous about his works that during their printing he spent a few hours a day with the typesetters to give necessary instructions so that the printing would proceed flawlessly. Stressed under such conditions and financially strapped, this man of steel conceived new ideas and wrote for the future. Despite his contributions, here too, he had malicious adversaries, who unjustly condemned his novels as “inquisitions.”

At the end, Raffi’s adversaries were the ones condemned, when the Armenian populace erected his statue in the Khojivank Cemetery as a symbol of acknowledgment and gratitude. Meanwhile, this gesture was a reproving slap by the intellectual community to Raffi’s tormenters. Raffi was an undaunted writer, who did not pay much attention to the attacks of his critics; but when he found the time, he threw appropriate answers at their faces.

A resolute novelist to the end of his life, Raffi published his works with great sacrifices, and in turn, he sacrificed himself to his novels. With his new novels, he created new styles of writing Armenian novels. Therein lies Raffi’s glory. Raffi was the first novelist who traveled among the Armenians in Western Armenia and described in simple terms the people’s daily sufferings, privations, weariness, and tribulations. He explained in his own picturesque style and with passionate patriotism his observations of the country’s condition. Raffi was the one who brought to the attention of the Armenians the true nature of Ottoman Turkey as the tormentor of its Armenian population.

Raffi made great efforts to sketch a host of characters—traitors and patriots, scoundrels and philanthropists, clergy and laity. With his poetic talent, he created realistic heroes and characters. His compelling and diverse chapters condense the essence of his sublime feelings and ideals addressed to the people. For example, he described the festivities in the surroundings of a monastery, the multitude of pilgrims, the minstrels, the lovers, and the sick so realistically that the reader feels a part of all. He speaks of the wonders of the mountains, the land, and the waters as if they were paintings. Therein lies the power of Raffi’s creative mind.

Raffi wrote at the level of the public’s understanding, with a simple and

lively style and with an impassioned heart. Some critics have trivialized Raffi's development of his characters—that they lack depth and complexity. Raffi's purpose was to awaken the public's lethargic mind and to portray the oppressive sufferings endured by the Armenians in Turkey. He carried out this audacious undertaking with his own hand and achieved his purpose, shattering every impediment that rose against him.

Raffi did not ascend to the imaginary world to find subjects for his works, as did earlier novelists. He toppled the old with his noble and contemporary concepts, resorting to new and changing ideas. He dedicated his pen to significant events in real life where innumerable abuses were taking place, and where the poor, the meek, and the oppressed shocked the observers. In one word, he described real human characters and not ones with ethereal faces.<sup>438</sup>

### Ghazaros Aghayan

On our way to Ejmiatsin, Movses Vardanian and I had to stay overnight in Yerevan [on January 5, 1869] due to inclement weather. Raffi happened to be in Yerevan, and he ran into my friend. Raffi asked Vardanian to introduce him to me, so Vardanian brought him to meet me. After the introductory exchanges, Raffi invited Vardanian and me to dinner at his relative's home, and we accepted the invitation. During our conversation, Raffi stated that he followed Nalbandian's ideology and that it was the only true path. I agreed and said that to succeed in great endeavors one must follow several paths and fight the battle on many fronts. Raffi concurred with my idea and said that first the people had to be educated and abandon prejudices. From that day on, we became friends.

I could not imagine that early during my acquaintance with Raffi that he would become a famous writer. He did not have a literary education or the maturity then, but he had a vivid imagination and extensive life experiences.<sup>439</sup>

### Shirvanzade

In my opinion, Raffi was the most ardent and zealous interpreter of Armenians' bitter and anguished experiences and the most talented expounder of the nation's ideals. Raffi did not realize that he was the only person whose powerful pen had contributed to the improvement and progress of Armenians' social spirit. His motivating pen had left a deep impression on me. For me, his name was unequalled.<sup>440</sup>

Raffi's subjects were born under the influence of important current events. For example, the Russo-Turkish War and the Armenian Question urged Raffi to write *Khente* and *Davit Bek*; the persecutions of Armenians by the Kurds and Turks, *Jalaleddin* and *Kaytser*; the closing of the Armenian diocesan schools

by the Russian government, *Samvel*. Even the argument between the merchant classes in the newspapers urged him to write *Minen aysbes, myuse aynbes* [One Like This, the Other Like That]. If the Armenian community had kept its previous eagerness and enthusiasm toward Raffi, he would not have delayed publishing the second volume of *Kaytser*. This did not mean that Raffi waited for an issue to arise so he could write about it. Raffi did not create issues. He always suggested solutions to existing problems concerning the Armenians. He was the barometer of the people's moral and intellectual curiosities. Therein lay his immense popularity. Whenever an issue preoccupied the public, Raffi became interested in it and the plan for a novel was ready in his mind. It was enough that the idea was there, the rest was secondary. He wrote the first few chapters of a novel and immediately submitted them for publication, thinking the rest would not contradict the beginning. That is how he wrote the novels that he first published in newspapers.

Raffi sometimes harshly criticized his contemporary writers, but it did not mean that he disrespected them. It showed that he demanded more from the Armenian writers. Whenever he was obliged to defend himself in the press, it did not mean that he wanted to praise himself.

From his appearance, the public had formed a wrong impression of Raffi. They thought he was selfish, arrogant, mean-spirited, greedy, and disdainful. Whoever knew Raffi well had a completely different opinion of him. I have not seen an Armenian writer who was as modest as Raffi; meanwhile, I have not seen a literary man who deserved to be as proud as Raffi. When people came to know him closely, they realized that hidden under that stoic demeanor was the warm and humanitarian soul of a popular figure. Whoever visited his modest living quarters could see how compassionately he received the poorly clad *Mshetsi* laborers, how hospitable he was toward them, and how for hours he attentively listened to their conversations, consoling and encouraging them. Yes, Raffi was arrogant, but only with those who did not seriously deal with the nation's problems and those who denounced their race, language, and origin. That was not arrogance, but the insult of a zealous patriot in defense of his people's honor. He was morally proud, and he hated the obsequiousness of those toward people of high status and the disdain of those toward the lower classes. He was especially critical of such writers. He was mistaken for being greedy because he avoided public entertainment and was frugal with his meager earnings. Who was to support his family, educate his children, and save for his old age? How many unemployed teachers had sought his help; how many meek beggars had come to him for help; and how many homesick Western Armenians had asked him for help to return home. He did all these quietly. Those who judged Raffi with their eyes did not know the man's soul



and private life.

Raffi wrote for the public. He realized the necessity to awaken vapid minds and arouse certain feelings, no matter if the psychological quality and the artistry of his works suffered. Raffi often said, “No one in all of Armenian literature has produced as many novels as I have.” Generally, Raffi’s literary works were not sophisticated, especially his esthetic style. Engrossed in his ideas, Raffi was not interested in works that could have developed his literary talent.

Raffi is the real founder of the Eastern Armenian modern language. Abovian’s style was a mixture of the common people’s vulgar dialect and the literary language; Proshian’s was likewise a mixture; Artsruni’s dialect was extremely poor; Rafayel Patkanian’s poems could not provide a large enough subject matter for the Armenian language. Raffi set the foundations of Armenian literary prose. He was not a novelist. He was a propagandist, a preacher, a commentator, but not a fine artist. He was the true pioneering theorist of the Armenian revolutionary movement. He was the most influential teacher of the Armenian youth—that youth who set the foundation for the Armenian Revolutionary Federation.<sup>441</sup>

### Shirvanzade’s Letters

Note: From the time he met Raffi in 1883 until after Raffi’s death in 1888, Shirvanzade had written many letters to his friends and cousins describing his meetings and conversations with Raffi at his home, at *Mshak*’s editorial offices, and at social gatherings. Shirvanzade had written several articles about Raffi in various publications, but none of the letters was included in any of the articles. Below are excerpts from those letters, most of which are to Aleksandr and Nerses Abelian, who were Shirvanzade’s cousins. See Madoyan, “Shirvanzadei namaknere Raffu masin.”

February 27, 1884

To Aleksandr Abelian

Last Sunday we were invited at Aghayants’s where an incident prevented us from talking to those present. Aghayants had also invited Haykuni. When I entered and saw him, I remained frozen. What could I do? For Aghayants’s sake I stayed. Meanwhile, Gabo came with Ter Mkrtichian. When Gabo saw Haykuni, he too was surprised. A few minutes later he became angry with Aghayants, turned around and left, slamming the door behind him.

Now, that incident has become an issue between the *Mshakists* [pro *Mshak*] and the *Meghuists* [pro *Meghu*]. They are at each other’s throat. Raffi said that Aghayants had invited Haykuni to reconcile him with the *Mshakists*.

... Raffi and Artsruni have argued, I believe. Raffi does not want to work for *Mshak* anymore.

... In my opinion, no matter how justified Raffi is, he is as much at fault. Poor Artsruni is enraged during this difficult [financial] time and does not want to help [for Raffi's twenty-fifth anniversary preparations because of the hard feelings between him and Raffi].

March 9, 1884

Here are a few words about our people. The reason for the hard feelings between Raffi and Artsruni has been that devilish woman. At the end of last year, just as the other day, Raffi himself told me that he had suggested to Artsruni to decrease the number of workers, reduce the compensation of some, distribute the savings to increase the compensation of others, such as Nerses, and give me the position of bookkeeper, translator, and office manager. Artsruni had agreed, but he had reneged in the New Year. For that reason, Raffi has resigned. Now [Hovhannes] Ter Markosian manages the editorial office. I went there one day and saw the place in disarray; I almost cried. Raffi said that he would try to persuade Artsruni to meet his conditions and revive *Mshak*, but if it became impossible, he would publish his own newspaper . . .

Raffi's anniversary commemoration will take place during the Easter Holidays. What are the Baku wealthy people saying? We sent an announcement to Baghirian [a Baku oil producer].

July 18, 1884

Nerses, Gabo, and Raffi now form *Mshak's* editorial group as the full-time employees. For now, I do not have any desire to work for *Mshak*. I will continue my work independently.

July 31, 1884

After my morning tea, I tutor a student for one hour. Afterward, I write or read for an hour or two, and then go to visit Nerses and have lunch together. We leave and meet again in the evening and go for a walk. If we happen to see Raffi, we walk some more with him. He is fortunate; he has resolved all the issues and writes and writes. For now, I waver like the drunkard Sasha.

Raffi came, so I must stop writing.

September 4, 1884

Raffi's situation is back to normal now. The government has dismissed the Yerevan governor from his position. That was very good.

October 3, 1884

When candor does not exist among a group of like-minded people, to stay away from them is better. I do not have anything against Gabo, Raffi, or anyone else. They are the ones who have turned up their noses. The only person I can have as a friend and be like-minded with is Nerses. Now I am mostly with him. The other day, we were discussing the economic progress of the Caucasus, when Raffi expressed an idea that simply showed how far he is from understanding our basic demands. I will not say much, perhaps Nerses will write to you . . .

. . . Last week there was a meeting at Abgar's [Hovhannisian] home . . . Our friend [a German-educated acquaintance] left a bad impression on Raffi and me. Abgar favors him. Raffi was quietly smoking.

January 5, 1885

Raffi has finished *Kaytser*; he is going to read the manuscript to us.

May 9, 1885

To Nerses Abelian

I have not seen Raffi yet. Friends told me the day I came back [May 1] that he has gone on a trip to research for information.

June 28, 1885

To Aleksandr and Nerses Abelian

I was with Raffi yesterday. He is well and writes. The other day Abgar explained, with a mischievous smile, that Raffi had gone to Batum and Poti to ask Melik-Haykazian's help to sponsor the publication of *Kaytser*. [Abgar's mischievous smile was to convey that Raffi was unable to see Haykazian.]

August 4, 1885

To Nerses Abelian

I seldom see Raffi. Every two weeks I go to see him.

January 18, 1886

To Aleksandr Abelian

Yesterday I saw Raffi. He has finished *Kaytser*; the second volume is twice as long as the first. He will soon submit it to the censor. Now he is writing a historical novel.

November 11, 1887

To Nerses Abelian

Zelinski and Raffi congratulate you. Raffi's family has already arrived. I was at his home the other day; he introduced me to his son (twelve-years old), who appeared a product of the Protestant missionaries. Raffi is busy with his family. One day I am going to invite them to my house. Now that I mentioned Raffi, I remembered that in a month, Aghayants is going to marry a widow—I do not know who she is.

The publication of *Samvel*, part three, will end soon. Raffi has not yet written part four.

December 17, 1887

We [Shirvanzade and Raffi] finished *Khaz Push*. We will give it to Abgar, but his father passed away the other day, so he is preoccupied.

February 25, 1888

Did you hear about Tserents's death? His funeral was ceremonious; we placed a wreath on his coffin. The participants were Raffi, Artsruni, Proshian, Sundukian, Aghayants and I . . . I see Raffi very seldom, except in these last two days we have met often. For Tserents' wreath, primarily he [Raffi] worked on it.

March 21, 1888

I see Raffi every day. He is busy selling his books. I do not know why he seldom receives guests. (Let me tell you to your ear—his wife is very ugly.)

April 19, 1888

Raffi's health is improving. He is moving around the house since yesterday, but he is not allowed to go out.

Someone has spread the rumor that he has died. I asked around and found out that it was *Aghbiur's* editor Nikoghos Ter Avetikian. I cursed him and spat on him, but he was not ashamed. . . I have many things to write, but I do not have the time today. Tomorrow I will write a detailed letter and tell you everything.

April 21, 1888

Raffi's health is improving and he is able to move around the house. He will be unable to work for quite some time, perhaps for a year. The doctor told him that he has damaged his lungs by smoking for so long, and he ordered absolute rest. Yesterday I was with him. He told me in a feeble voice: "Two people will be happy by my death; one is Aghayants, the other Proshian." He was not lying. He was angry at Abgar for mentioning his name in the paper

when writing about Hakimian. I am trying to reconcile him with Abgar. If I had known, I would not have let Raffi be elected as an auditor at the representatives' meeting. Lowering oneself to that level is not worth being elected.<sup>442</sup>

May 8, 1888

To Nerses and Aleksandr Abelian

I received your letters. I have much to write about Raffi's death; not in a letter to you, but I will write my recollections of his life in the newspapers.

The funeral was glorious. There had not been such a funeral in Tiflis. You will read the details in *Ardzagank*. Perhaps among those in Tiflis, Raffi's death had not affected anyone more than, Zelinski, Gabo, and me. I reconciled with Gabo, and with great joy. He was constantly crying. The first time I heard about it was at eight o'clock in the morning. I immediately went to Raffi's home to find out. I could not believe it when I found out it was true. I went in, looked apprehensively into the bedroom, and saw Raffi on the bed covered with a white sheet. His wife was sitting near him and mourning quietly, and his younger son was hugging her.

I came out onto the terrace and saw Zelinski and Gabo; I could not hold back my tears. To me Raffi was a decent human being and a friend. In the last few days, we had talked so much about our nation's woes. I was crying for him, who was a friend and a person with a family with children, an elderly mother, indigent brothers, and nine sisters; but the public was mourning only the literary loss. It is painful.

We immediately formed a committee. I openly resigned when I saw so many people whom Raffi disliked were in the committee; however, we made sure that Gabo would manage all the work. The work he did was admirable. The committee members appointed Abgar and Artsruni to select the people who would give the eulogies. I volunteered to talk about Raffi's character, but they refused me. Refused by whom? By Grigor Artsruni. This time, that man showed that he is the embodiment of jealousy. Abgar himself informed him [Artsruni] that I was to speak about Raffi's clean reputation, so that his enemies would not have a chance to attack him. I went to *Mshak's* office to get Mantrik's [Aleksandr Abelian] letter from Malumian. Grigor, his wife, and Markosian attacked me, asking what right I had to idealize Raffi because he was a such and such; they attached all kinds of dirt to his name. I reminded them that the man's coffin was still in his home, and that human decency would not allow accusing the deceased. It did not help; I argued and left.

The next day Artsruni published his article where he insisted that Raffi was receiving provisions from *Mshak* for his talent. This was a shameful

statement, especially about Raffi. Artsruni's article troubled me, so I wrote in *Ardzagank* refuting the credibility of Artsruni's rash statement, and I am going to continue refuting him. After writing that article, was Artsruni going to enjoy the same respect from his admirers? I do not think so. That means he must decorate his nothingness with other people . . .

I will leave *Mshak* and Artsruni alone. I am convinced that from now on he will not dare to disparage Raffi; otherwise, he will fall into an abyss. Let his friends help him understand that.

I happily fulfilled the responsibility assigned to me by the laborers' group. I prepared the inscriptions for half the number of wreaths and the one from the Baku youth group. I was so busy and had so much to think about that I could not inscribe each one as beautifully and elegantly as I wanted.

Imagine, I prepared the article for *Ardzagank* in thirty hours; the holidays [Easter] disrupted the work. Starting on Wednesday morning until Thursday, I had to complete everything . . . I could not think too much about the inscriptions? During the whole week and even now, I stop writing only when I eat and go to sleep.

The laborers' unhappiness for using fresh-flower wreaths is useless. It was not possible to purchase a thirty-ruble metal wreath, and a small one would have been ridiculous. People were laughing at *Mshak's* wreath, which was not even the size of a hat. The laborers should be happy that their wreath was made of fresh flowers, which are dearer to their feelings and Raffi's dignity. Also the writers' wreath was made of fresh flowers; the metal ones were not more than five. The Baku youths' and oil field workers' wreaths were not made of silver, as we reported, but silver-plated paper, which got ruined by the rain sooner than the fresh flowers. As for the cost of your and Ghara Mirza's [musician and choir director] wreaths, I cannot tell you exactly yet. The reason is that all the requests made through us were ordered as a single order from Charkhchian. We know the total amount, but we have not yet determined the cost for each group because we have not received the money from the Baku oil producers, the merchants, and the students. When I get the final cost, I will let you know; there will be more or less a two-ruble difference, nothing else.

I am hurrying to finish my letter; excuse me. Ruben [Shirvanzade's older son] is sick. This much is enough for the time being. In addition, I just received my manuscript to publish in *Ardzagank*.

We are thinking of forming a committee to publish Raffi's books; we will announce it in the newspapers. Make an effort to raise funds, since the funeral impressions are still fresh in the people's minds. The cost of the publication will be at least ten thousand rubles, perhaps fifteen thousand. It is not an easy

task, and it will take several years. It will be necessary to edit the books, write a biography, and describe Raffi's personality. To do all that requires people and money.

June 5, 1888

To Nerses Abelian

You [Baku youth group] have done very well to form a committee for the monument. Try to collect large sums.

June 21, 1888

To Nerses and Aleksandr Abelian

I informed the monument committee about what you had written. Tomorrow evening we have a meeting; I will let you know of the decision.

July 27, 1888

To Nerses Abelian

I forgot to write about the monument. I informed the committee members about the Baku committee's request to have all our committee members' names on the announcements, not just Gabo's name. We had a meeting, but only Zelinski, Gabo, and I were present. I read your letter, which seemed to offend Gabo. He said, "Do they not trust me?" We postponed the project. Although Gabo had told me a month ago to write to you about what he had said, I did not write until now because we all agreed to sign the announcements. Gabo has not worked in that capacity (he does not know about fund raising methods). He brought up the issue of honor. Soon we will call a meeting and try to fulfill your request.

October 7, 1888

To Yekaterina Nekrasova [Russian philologist]

Up to now, Raffi's works translated into Russian are *Khaz Push*, *Bibi Sharabani*, parts of *Harem* and *Jalaleddin*, and *Khente*; the last is a novel, which was published in a Tiflis newspaper sometime ago. A Russian paper published *Khaz Push* and *Bibi Sharabani* this year. I think *Harem* and *Jalaleddin* were published ten years ago in the capital's [St. Petersburg] secondary paper; thus, they are long forgotten.

You are asking whether there were obituaries in the Tiflis papers. Of course. Extensive obituaries were published in many local papers and in the capital's newspapers—*Novosti*, *Rodnik*, and others. I am sorry that I cannot find copies of those papers. Perhaps you may easily be able to find copies in *Rodnik's* April, May, or June 1888 issues. Raffi passed away this year on April

25 at midnight at age fifty-five [53]. He was a Persian citizen and was educated at the Russian gymnasium in Tiflis.

You will find all this information in detail in the above-mentioned issues of *Rodnik*. His life has been fascinating. Just to say that he was condemned to death by the Persian government for his political convictions and that he saved himself by escaping to Russia (Caucasus) is enough.

January 17, 1890

I shall start by saying that I am preparing Raffi's biography, including his personal and literary accomplishments. As you can see, the work is difficult, requiring accountability.

I will publish the biography first in one of the Armenian periodicals (*Murch*), and later as a separate booklet. Raffi was a very remarkable person, and his life story will provide research material for the Armenian youth. I will send the biography when it is ready because you are very much interested in Raffi.

I eagerly await (as many others) for your article in *Vestnik*. We are announcing in the Armenian papers the publication of your upcoming article.

January 4, 1889

To Arshak Chobanian

I forgot to mention something about your letter. Artsruni influenced Raffi, yes; but Raffi would have been Raffi even if he had not met any Artsrunies. Raffi, too, influenced Artsruni and taught him to write Armenian, introduced him to Armenian life, and protected him from making mistakes. Artsruni had influenced Raffi through European literature, and with his intellect and talent Raffi influenced Artsruni. They complemented each other; therefore, they are not indebted to each other. It is necessary to know this in order to be impartial.

**Ghevond kahana Atanasian** (1839–1919) was an actor, a teacher, and a literary and community activist prior to becoming a priest. His baptismal name was Nahapet.

I was a subscriber to *Hiusisapayl* when I read Hakob Melik-Hakobian's very interesting *Aghtamara vanke* article. The immensely tender style, lively expressions, and poetically inspiring article left such a deep and moving impression on me that I hurried to mention it to one of my close friends. We memorized the poem and sang it during social gatherings. From that day on, I had the desire to meet Hakob Melik-Hakobian someday and be worthy of seeing that precious author and noble man, who was concerned with our



nation's woes with such love and seriousness.

In late 1861 I learned that two of Khrimian's students Garegin Sruandztian and Haji Mikayel were in Yerevan.<sup>443</sup> They had come from Gharabagh through Gandzak and Tiflis on their way to Van through Nakhijevan, Julfa, Tavriz, and Salmast.

I hurried to see the two itinerants, especially when I had already been accepted to continue my education at Khrimian's Varag Seminary. I looked for and found the two young men at the shabby inn owned by the Buniatians, worse yet, in one of the shabbier rooms. My first job was to get them out of that deplorable place and take them to my house. In a few days, we left Yerevan for Tavriz, where the clergy warmly received us. We traveled along the shores of Lake Urmia and reached Salmast. We stayed in the Haftvan or Kohna-Shahar [in Persian] village and heard that Hakob Melik-Hakobian's store was in the nearby village [Dilman]. I could not contain my joy knowing that I was finally going to meet the author of *Aghtamara vanke* and *Dzayn tur ov tsovak*. We went to Raffi's store and saw him occupied with customers. His business dealt with leather, wool, and cotton goods. I introduced Sruandztian as one of Khrimian's students, and Sruandztian introduced me as one of Khachatur Abovian's students. Despite being occupied, when he heard Khrimian's and Abovian's names, he dropped everything, greeted us with excitement, and invited us to his family home in Payajuk.

Because the caravan taking the pilgrims from Salmast to Van was leaving that night, unfortunately we were unable to accept Hakob Melik-Hakobian's invitation and regretfully separated. How precious it would have been to spend at least one night in Payajuk with our beloved poet and novelist, Raffi.

Sixteen years had passed since that encounter when at the end of August 1877 I was fortunate to see Raffi again, this time at the Aleksandrovski Park. We embraced and were so happy to see each other. The people around us were surprised that this usually sad and pensive man suddenly expressed such joy and liveliness. We walked for a long time, and then we went to a restaurant and drank beer and lemonade. Raffi regretfully said that he was leaving Tiflis soon to go to Verin Agulis. He chided me and said that the young people leave the regions and go to the big cities; whereas, he was tired of the big city and was leaving for a small town in the regions. He added, "Let us see who will be more productive."<sup>444</sup>

### Grigor Artsruni

The man, who did not have a systematic formal education—a self-educated erudite, had an innate talent to predict the demands of the time. Influenced by contemporary issues, he expressed his ideas and proposed

directions in his novels. As I have said often, two types of literary writing predominate: one type describes such characters that already exist; the other creates characters that do not exist but are desirable. Raffi's writings belong to the second literary type. Raffi's best works—*Jalaleddin*, *Khente*, *Davit Bek*, *Kaytser*—describe in extremely realistic manner the lives of the people, their behavior, and their character. The main purpose of Raffi's writings is to present a lifestyle that does not exist, but must exist, and persons who unfortunately do not exist, but whose existence is desirable, such as Vardan's character.

Raffi's desirable and idealistic characters undoubtedly have had great importance in our lives, which are devoid of high and noble ideals. Those selfless and noble, albeit fictional, characters influenced and educated the idealistic youth, who did not and could not analyze how realistically Raffi presented his ideas; they were only aware of those concepts that agreed with their ideals. Raffi has performed a great service to our public by spreading noble ideals, which Armenian literature has always lacked. Raffi's fictional characters who educated the readers will perhaps someday become real and incarnate.

Raffi's despicable characters are real and exist among us. His noble characters do not meet the rigid and serious psychological tests because they are fictional. They do not exist in real life; they are the creations of the author's rich imagination solely with the intention of educating the public.<sup>445</sup>

**Gevorg Chmshkian** (1837–1915) was the founder of the Armenian Realist Theater, a renowned actor, and a journalist. He met Raffi in 1871 during the early days of *Mshak's* editorial meetings. He was one of the university-educated members who left Artsruni.

When Raffi started attending *Mshak's* editorial meetings, he always came with a thick notebook under his arm. At first, he did not participate in the editorial issues. He read his *Parskastani namakner*, which he had signed as Raffi, handed the article to Artsruni, and left quietly. Eventually he became influential in Artsruni's decisions. Within a short time, we noticed that Artsruni gradually started to work independently from us and paid more attention to Raffi's opinions than to ours. In a few months, the number of subscribers increased, and *Mshak's* financial affairs improved. Artsruni had already favored Raffi.<sup>446</sup>

**Hovhannes Ter Grigorian** (1851–1931), nicknamed Vano, was an actor, a journalist, and a cultural activist who worked at *Mshak*. He and Raffi became close friends in 1873 working together at *Mshak*. When Raffi taught in Tavriz

and Agulis, Ter Grigorian corresponded with him. Ter Grigorian sent his recollections to *Mshak* in 1913 on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Raffi's death.

I met Raffi in 1872 when Artsruni began publishing *Mshak*. At that time, Artsruni's father, Yeramia Artsruni, handed over the management of his inn to Grigor. Artsruni invited Raffi to live at the inn.<sup>447</sup> He recognized Raffi's talent and asked him to work for *Mshak*. Artsruni had previously decided and planned a certain orientation for his paper, which was to instill ideas of solidarity among the Armenians of Russia, Turkey, and Persia, and to eliminate religious arguments. He intended to have close relations with all the Armenian communities, and he gladly printed articles received from those communities. Raffi's letters occupied a large space in *Mshak*.

On a Monday editorial board meeting, M. Amerikian and I entered the *Mshak* offices and saw the other members—Pavel Izmayilian, V. Shahverdian, G. Chmshkian, Stepanos Palasarian, and Nerses Melikian—had already gathered. Raffi and the editor, Sergey Meskhi, of *Droyba* were sitting near the window. On a round table, Raffi had the *Khamsayi melikutiunnere* manuscript, parts of which he read to the group after the meetings. The manuscript was quite different from the printed version, which revealed Raffi's boundless talent for analyzing current issues.

After the meeting, Raffi began reading his novel. I could not stop looking at his glasses, which touched his brows and covered his eyes completely. Only a few people had seen him without his glasses. Raffi studied people and quickly perceived what kind of people they were, yet he remained a mystery. Raffi behaved differently with different people according to how he wanted them to perceive him. With a natural insight, he understood the importance of events and the meaning behind conversations.

I was very happy when Raffi invited me one day to eat *plav* [cooked rice], which his servant, Grigor, prepared so well. Raffi told me that Hambardzum [Arakelian] was going to be there. I went to Raffi's apartment, which was in a house owned by a Georgian princess. Sitting on the balcony overlooking the river, we ate the delicious *plav*. Hambardzum talked continually about the writers and their articles in *Mshak*, only pausing briefly when his mouth was full. Raffi was eating quietly and looking through his blue glasses. He appeared to be listening, but he seemed preoccupied with completely different thoughts.<sup>448</sup>

### Arshak Khan Goroiants

My remembrance of Raffi goes back to 1875–1876. At that time, we knew Raffi as the humble teacher, Hakob Melik-Hakobian, at the Aramian School

in Tavrız. He taught us history and Armenian language. The school trustees paid him ten *tumans* monthly, which was a meager salary. Hakob Melik-Hakobian corresponded with *Mshak*. He had written an article in 1879 [1877] against the Tavrız archpriest, Father Hovsep, exposing his religious ignorance. The article irritated some people because Father Hovsep was a respected clergyman. Tsatur Khan Setkhanian, who worked at the government's foreign relations office, appealed to the crown prince [Valieddin] claiming that Melik-Hakobian was an agitator and a liar. The crown prince authorized Tsatur Khan to expel Melik-Hakobian from the school and from Tavrız. Tsatur Khan and a few other people went to the school to remove Melik-Hakobian and force him to leave Tavrız. The angry group, led by Tsatur Khan, goldsmith Rostom Patmagrian, and Anton Khan, came to the school, forced the door open, and entered the classroom, where Melik-Hakobian was teaching us Armenian. Tsatur Khan approached Melik-Hakobian, informed him of the crown prince's order, and demanded that Raffi leave the school and Tavrız immediately.

Melik-Hakobian asked to see the written order; but because the group did not have one, Melik-Hakobian refused to leave the room and continued with his lesson. To force Raffi out, Patmagrian told Tsatur Khan to grab Melik-Hakobian and pull him out. Tsatur Khan replied that if he pulled so would Melik-Hakobian. Unable to force Melik-Hakobian out of the classroom, the crowd departed. The classroom incident became a memorable event, and Tsatur Khan's words, "If I pull, he will pull too," became the subject of ridicule among the Tavrız folks.

Melik-Hakobian continued teaching for several more weeks; but the community atmosphere was poisoned, and passions were inflamed against the poor teacher, who hurriedly left Tavrız.<sup>449</sup>

**Arpiar Arpiarian** (Haykak) was an author, the publisher of *Masis* weekly, and a Hinchakian political activist. In 1884 he came from Constantinople to Ejmiatsin as a delegate for the election of a new catholicos. He met Raffi and was fascinated by the novelist. Raffi later used Arpiarian's person as the character of Arpiar in *Kaytser*.

Naturally, when I arrived in Tiflis, I took the opportunity to fulfill my curiosity of seeing Raffi. Assuming that those in Constantinople who liked Raffi's works would be interested to know about his personal life, I decided to go and see him. On Thursday afternoon, April 26, the day after my arrival, while I was walking on the main street, I saw a man with blue glasses a short distance away. I went to greet him.

"*Parev* (Greeting) Mister Raffi, how are you?" I said, extending my hand

as I approached him.

“But Sir—” he said, looking at me surprised, wondering who this stranger was greeting him. I introduced myself, but stayed only a short time because I was with a friend.

The following day when I went to see Raffi, he said that he was surprised and asked me how I recognized him when I had seen neither him nor his photograph, nor had my friend told me anything. Together we went to his apartment at Svechnik’s house in the Sololak neighborhood. The door was open and we entered. After taking a few steps on a dirt courtyard, we went up a wooden staircase and entered a room full of plants. I thought we were in a garden. In the small room was a small desk without a speck of dust on it. Next to the desk was a large bookcase with a copy of his novels and other books. The books were bound with velvet cloth, and they had gilded edges. Adjacent to the living room was another room filled with more books. Raffi had furnished the apartment modestly but tastefully with a few pictures, a Persian sofa, and a few chairs.

This scene was unusual to me. I could not imagine how a writer could write without extending his elbows at a large desk, without having a pile of books around him, and without a chaotic room. In his neat and simple room, Raffi thought and gave flight to his imagination.

If an author in Tiflis does not practice caution when writing, Mr. Manastriants is ready to censor. At *Mshak* I saw articles heavily marked with red ink ready for publishing. One is surprised to see at the end of the civilized nineteenth century a newspaper subject to government censorship; thus, forcing a great talent to sacrifice his best lines to someone’s idiotic thinking. Such barbarism is intolerable at the end of the nineteenth century. Why does such an immense empire fear a small, peaceful, and loyal people whom it has suppressed so severely?<sup>450</sup>

Raffi’s quiet personality, somewhat mystical appearance, and movements exuded an aura of a man born to be a novelist. When someone saw Raffi with his hat and his exposed beautiful forehead—a noble forehead—that person was urged to think that a person having such a forehead must be an admirable poet and a novelist, regardless of his appearance.

Those who will someday want to write about the psychology of the Armenian people in the second half of the nineteenth century are going to refer to Raffi’s novels as essential sources. Raffi is the novelist of the entire Armenian history. He is not a local or partisan writer. Raffi was ahead of his time. He was a visionary writer, who anticipated future events. Before the mid-1800s Armenians used biblical and non-Armenian baptismal names, but with the influence of Raffi’s novels, they began using names from our pre-Christian

history. Yesterday's novel became today's life.<sup>451</sup>

**Aleksandr Kalantar[ian]** (1834–1913) was an agriculturist, a literary figure, and journalist. He was the editor of *Mshak* from 1893–1913.

I met Raffi in December 1879 at the *Mshak* office. After Artsruni introduced me to Raffi, he informed me that Raffi had completed a new novel, but before its publication, he wanted it read to the editors. He invited me to attend the meeting that evening. The *Mshak* office was on Dvortsova Street in a building owned by Artsruni, and the office windows looked out onto the street. I went at the specified time and joined Artsruni and his wife, Ter Markosian, H. Ter Grigorian, A. Mamian, and M. Saghatelian. Just as the reading was to begin, suddenly we heard shouts and strange commotion in the street. We ran to the window and saw fire engulfing a store across the street. "It is the Salambekian's store!" everyone exclaimed.

The fire grew larger as more material burned; after a short while, we heard explosions. Artsruni ran out to use his fire fighting equipment to prevent damage to his building. Raffi and I stood in front of the window and watched the fire. We watched the flames rising ever higher, and we kept pointing to the fire as it consumed the building. Some of us tried to comfort Mrs. Artsruni, assuring her that the fire would not spread to her building; however, everyone was apprehensive. Artsruni was spraying water on the building to prevent the walls from getting hot. Soon the firefighters came and put out the fire. After the excitement subsided, we were not disposed to hear Raffi read his new novel, and we decided to return the next day. When we met again, Raffi told me before the reading, "The fire helped me to use proper words and to better describe the conflagration scenes of Bayazet." The novel was *Khente*. Raffi read in a monotonous voice, but he was enthusiastic and engrossed in his material. Artsruni and the others occasionally bantered Raffi about some of the descriptions. Raffi looked askance at the listeners and smiled. The reading took a long time. We all agreed that the novel was an impressive work. I visited the *Mshak* offices several times during the few days I was in Tiflis. One day Raffi and I took a walk on Golovinski Street and talked about organizing literary evenings.

I saw Raffi again when I returned to Tiflis in 1887. This time we did not meet at the *Mshak* office, but coincidentally on the street. I remember he was excited about writing historical novels, and he was planning to write a series of them. I saw Raffi for the last time at his funeral. The public's response to the news of his death showed the extent of his popularity; and the large crowd at the funeral revealed the respect they had for him. I was in Baku when he

passed away. The news shocked the readers, and the youth mourned his death. I hurried to Tiflis, as a delegate from the Baku Armenians, to place a wreath on his coffin. The day of his internment was rainy and cold. Despite the bad weather, the funeral was solemn until the end. Many fell sick. I came down with bronchitis and was bedridden for two weeks. I was unable to write an article about Raffi as I had intended to do. After the funeral, a few of Raffi's friends discussed publishing all of his works, published and unpublished. Some believed that he had a large number of unpublished works.<sup>452</sup>

**Pilipos Vardanian** (1842–1916) was a translator, teacher, literary and public figure, and journalist.

I met Raffi in 1872 in Tiflis. It was not until 1884 when we saw each other again. Raffi's talent showed even more during conversations. By the time Raffi died, his talent had fully matured and become devoid of foreign influences. Raffi was so talented that he could not remain under the influence of foreign ideas. When he was writing *Samvel*, he read the works of Armenian historical writers Khorenatsi, Yeghishe, Yeznik, Parpetsi, and Pavstos, who had fired his imagination and helped him conceive the idea of writing historical novels. He had planned to write an extensive work dealing with the conflict between Christianity and Paganism in Armenia. When he passionately spoke about the future novel, his powerful imagination astonished me. When he died, the nation lost its Raffi and with him his beautiful ideas, numerous subjects, and golden hopes. To lose all that is painful, but we must be thankful for the inheritance he left to our young literature.<sup>453</sup>

**Petros Zakarian** (1867–1922) was a journalist, translator, and literary personality. He published his works in *Mshak*, *Murch*, *Ankakh Mamul*, and *Nork*.

In 1887 on my way to St. Petersburg to attend the university, I had to stop in Tiflis for two days. I went to the main bookstore to purchase the latest copy of *Armenische Bibliothek*. I was excited to see the second volume of *Kaytser* on display. The bookstore owner told me that he had just received it, and that Raffi had just left the store. I instantly decided to take advantage of the opportunity to see the author, whom I adored. I hurriedly left the store and headed for Baryadinskaya Street. At the corner of Golovinski, I saw a short man, whom I recognized to be Raffi from pictures published by the Armenian students in St. Petersburg for his twenty-fifth anniversary jubilee. I approached and greeted him meekly. Raffi asked me to have tea with him, since he was

free for the evening, and we headed for his home. On our way, he asked me to wait a few minutes and entered a house on Yerevanian Street. [Colonel Alexander] Melik-Haykazian, Raffi's patron, had come to Tiflis, and Raffi wanted to see him. Soon, Raffi came out and we went to his apartment.

That summer Raffi lived alone. We settled in his living room, and Raffi began to talk about interesting and unrelated subjects. His room was that of a busy person. Books, brochures, and periodicals weighed down the large desk, next to which was a bookcase. A few pictures hung on the wall. To satisfy my youthful curiosity, I asked him many questions, and he happily answered. He told me that he knew Persian, Russian, and enough French to read books in French. When he spoke Russian, his Armenian accent was obvious.

He told me that he wanted to go to Vienna and research the Armenian history of recent centuries. He said, "Besides *khamseyi melikutiunnere*, we have had many autonomous principalities until recently. *Khamseyi melikutiunnere* was an effort to show that history." He showed me a large trunk full of books he had researched for his novel *Samvel*. I understood from his statements that he was through writing novels. He said, "Aghayan, Proshian, young Shirvanzade, and Leo can contribute to such works; the study of our history must be strengthened because the Armenians in Russia have neglected it."

The servant came in and informed us the tea was ready. We went out onto the balcony that was full of meticulously nurtured flowering plants. Raffi said that he loved flowers and loved taking care of them. He added, "I do not have the means to rent a house with a garden; living alone, this is my entire joy." The servant was a young orphan, whom Raffi had raised. He attended a trade school and came to help Raffi in the summers.

"My strength," he said, "is in understanding the demands of the times more than other writers. Under the existing social conditions, to be occupied with fairy tales is unforgivable. The time for such works will come, and perhaps soon. We have to give different subjects to our newly awakened people. Let everyone be shaken by the *khent's* dream."<sup>454</sup>

**Aleksandr Stepanian** was also known as Sev Sandro. He met Raffi in Tiflis during the Russo-Turkish War. Stepanian published articles in *Mshak*. In 1898 he was arrested along with Aghayan and exiled to Nor Nakhijevan.

I often visited Raffi in the evenings, and always saw him sitting at his desk with a stack of books, his inseparable pack of cigarettes, a bowl full of very small sugar chunks, and a full cup of strong and very sweet tea. He drank the tea and smoked thickly-rolled cigarettes.



One day I asked him why he cut the sugar pieces so small. He answered, "So that they will dissolve fast." He always had the picture of his two sons in front of him. Once I asked him why he did not have his children living with him, and I added that what he spent alone would be enough for the whole family. He told me that he was thinking of bringing his family soon.

Raffi once mentioned that he had received a letter from Mkhitarist Father Alishan asking him to write the history of the Armenians in ashkharhabar. He said that because of many visitors, he had difficulty writing such a book. He intended to seclude himself in a small village and write without interruptions. Unfortunately, his wish did not materialize.<sup>455</sup>

#### A. M——ian

In the spring of 1886 while I was walking aimlessly and alone in one of the beautiful parks in Tiflis, I was contemplating the future of the carefree youth enjoying the beautiful sunny weather. Suddenly someone called my name. I turned around and saw Hakob Melik-Hakobian. He was sitting alone on a bench under a tree. After greeting each other, we started talking about the daily issues he liked to discuss. Commenting about his impressions of the people around him, he wistfully said, "Rebuilding a destroyed building with its pieces is not easy; especially when internal and external natural forces have changed the pieces and deprived them of all the indispensable qualities necessary for building a good quality building." Then with a positive tone he exclaimed, "Yes, the old is useless, everything must be new, which is not easy to obtain under the present circumstances."

"But Mr. Hakob," I pointed out, "there are so many young people with new ideas and high ideals, so many schools for boys and girls, so many students spread around the world receiving higher education, are they not all new, are they all useless?"

"Hm, my friend," Raffi responded, "observing from a distance we see a more cheerful picture, which could entirely dispel my doubts; but knowing from up close and through the eyes of an artist, you see that all are illusions. Our families do not have the educational principles that are indispensable for the young generation's early education. We do not have elementary schools for the children of indigent families. Inexperienced people, who run our primary schools arbitrarily, are unable to provide proper educational direction. The state schools are unavailable to the majority and are foreign to us. The students who come out of these schools are the ones who go to different places for higher education. Why? When they are students, they dream of helping their country and nation; but when they graduate from the universities, they forget their country, people, and earlier idealism. They remain in either foreign

countries or settle in large cities; they marry wealthy ladies; and they increase the number of jobless university students, who do not benefit either their country or the people.” Realizing that I had become somewhat depressed, he added, “Although the majority is like that, we can place our hopes on other students who are the exceptions.”

I changed the subject to the contemporary writers. His opinion about them was hopeful. “The main comfort,” he said, “is that the prevailing literary language became ashkharhabar, which the people understand. Linguistically, our language needs great improvement. The Araratian dialect has many advantages in forming the ashkharhabar language; but it cannot become a perfect and dominant language, if it does not incorporate essential words, phrases, and idioms from the Western and Persian Armenian dialects. The fusion of these three dialects is imperative to develop a culturally rich language for the future. Let us turn to our literature’s spirit. We do not have literary spirit, or more simply, our literature does not have spirit, not because we are unable or unwilling, but because life is unable to provide rich and clear materials for the writer.”

“Why is that?” I asked intentionally so that Raffi would continue. “Are our lives devoid of substance?”

“No,” he answered, “life is not without substance and cannot be; only that life’s different conditions and characteristics have not been professionally studied. They are unknown and incomprehensible to us, for that reason they appear without substance. For example, when I start writing and want to describe life’s psychological and legal attributes, my pen stops for a moment. How can it go forth when I am neither a psychologist nor a lawyer? I get a strange feeling because the study of our people’s various qualities was neglected. We do not have studies such as those benefiting European writers and readers. This is the main reason for our literature’s stagnation. The second reason is that our specialists seek lucrative professions and want to marry into wealthy families. They do not care enough to study our people’s various qualities and mores. Thus, the obligation falls on the writer whose work, instead of being a simple novel, digresses and becomes a mixture of a novel and a study, absent of both characteristics.”<sup>456</sup>

**Arthur Leist** contributed his article about Raffi to *Mshak* on the paper’s fortieth anniversary in 1912.

I befriended Raffi in the 1880s, but our acquaintance did not last long because of his premature death; however, my memories of him have not disappeared from my mind. Raffi was not a flamboyant person; he dressed

modestly, and he was modest. He did not hide what he was—a man of the people. He lacked formal education, but he was a well read and a learned man, a true erudite, knowledgeable about the people and the nature of the Armenians, Persians, Turks, and Kurds. He had traveled wide with his father, meticulously observing his surroundings and documenting what he saw. He had a large collection of subjects that he skillfully used in his novels and opened new worlds for the majority of Armenians. To arouse compassion for the Western Armenians was his novels' main theme, which was the source of his popularity. Many of his works were very interesting, but some were poorly developed. Raffi's writing style reminds the reader of his personality. Because of literary deficiencies, his novels will lose their significance over time. Even now they are not widely read.<sup>457</sup>

Raffi's funeral was grand. Thousands of people followed his coffin, mainly laborers. I think there were only a few wealthy people in the procession.<sup>458</sup>

#### A. Sarukhan

It took a long time for the Armenian community in Constantinople to become familiar with Raffi and his writings because of the Turkish government's oppression of its Armenian population. Only a few people knew about his patriotic writings by secretly reading his works. The majority of the reading public had not even heard Raffi's name.

After Raffi's death in 1888 I sent an article from Tiflis to *Arevelk* in Constantinople to inform the readers about his death. I used my penname, K. Tiurian. I was later surprised to find out that the Armenian papers in Constantinople had not been interested in either Raffi's life or death. I had criticized the Constantinople papers for their negligence of our beloved writer. Someone there sent me a paper that contained an article mocking my criticism and sarcastically and arrogantly stated, "Who is this man called Raffi? To us he is equal to a zero, even to the left of a decimal point." Those words have weighed on my mind like a heavy piece of lead.<sup>459</sup>

**Tigran Nazarian** (1858–1926) was the editor of *Aghbiur* and then *Taraz* periodicals. From *Aghbiur*'s inception, Raffi contributed to the paper, first the poem *Mshak*, then the novella *Paruyr Haykazn*, the "Varag" chapter of *Kaytser*, and the translations from Turgenev, Hugo, and Heine.

When Artsruni went to Switzerland, Raffi, Gabriyel Mirzoian, and Nerses Abelian assumed the responsibility of publishing *Mshak*. If Raffi had the financial means and received good medical care, he would have lived longer. While the Armenian community could not find the necessary funds to provide

Raffi with the proper medical help, they were able, however, to find a large amount of rubles to place funeral wreaths on his coffin and shed crocodile tears. The wealthy competed to underwrite his children's educational expenses. No one attempted at least to pay for living expenses, so that the children could devote themselves to their education and not to have to work for fear of starvation.<sup>460</sup>

### A. Abeghian

Raffi was a teacher who educated two generations. He was a publicist and the father of the Armenian novel. His works form an entire literature, unprecedented in its quality and size. He is the greatest writer of the Armenian new literature. The reality of life, past history, opinions, and ideology equally became materials and subjects of his prolific and talented pen, with which he revived ancient events and realistically described current ideological characters. The preacher and the prophet harmoniously resided in him. This is why Raffi's influence on future generations has been so great.

Raffi is the master of the modern Armenian literary language, without which the literature after him would have been incomprehensible. He explained, "We have been the first to have the confidence to develop our poor and uncultivated literary language into the language of the novel." He considered language the most important factor in preserving the nation. The concept of the fatherland was Raffi's highest ideal—to create a fatherland, know its history well, love it unconditionally, and be dedicated to it. The blood-soaked lands of our ancestors give life to the people and assure the nation's preservation. This is why the concept of the fatherland is a central theme in Raffi's writings.

Raffi's influence was great because he provided his people, especially the new generation, with high ideals and taught them to live and die for those ideals. Avetis Aharonian, Vahan Papazian, Muratsan, and even Shirvanzade reveal Raffi's influence in their writings. Raffi taught future generations to worship the ideal of the fatherland, and he showed the path to accomplish that ideal by liberating the nation and the fatherland. Raffi became the greatest spokesman for the new Armenians. Raffi's name is eternally preserved in Armenian literature and history. He is the chosen son of his nation.<sup>461</sup>

### Ruben Berberian

Many writers have opined that Raffi was not a product of his contemporary environment or mystical atmosphere, but that he was an extraordinary person who revealed a new world to our people, pointed out a new path, and conquered old mentalities. Others have stated that life's realities

engender conditions that influence the writer, and if a writer expresses new ideas, they seem new only because the information was not widely known until the writer revealed them. This does not mean that a writer cannot influence his readers and unleash a general movement; Raffi's novels did have such an influence and a profound effect upon the youth.

The awareness of liberty and the means to achieve it were already realities during the revival and maturation of Armenian cultural life. A unifying force was necessary to see and comprehend the troubling thoughts among Armenians, particularly the youth. That force was Raffi. In his novels, he revived all the issues that formed the bases for the systematic development of spiritual and physical attributes of Armenian culture. Raffi identified and was able to emphasize the issues of national importance, which existed before the 1880s.

Raffi's novels were enthralling because the readers identified with the characters, who were idealistic apostles and messengers of thoughts and feelings. Thus, the ideas expressed in his writings had profound effects on the readers; but Raffi would not have been that force if the atmosphere was not filled and ready with the existing receptive mood. Raffi himself was influenced by the ideas of those who preceded him. Endowed with keen observation, unusual memory, and exceptional ability to visualize and describe, Raffi based his characters on people he had known and seen during his travels and his surroundings. He was able to retrieve from darkness into light issues that most did not see, and by doing so, he showed the path and the course of Armenian history. To say that Raffi created the Armenian revolutionary movement and set its course is incorrect because the movement had already taken birth in the mid-1800s.

Raffi was the true and skillful interpreter and conveyor of the national thoughts and emotions of a certain historical period. He became the one who clearly expressed the mentality of the impatient Armenians, whose desire was to put words into action. That is Raffi's historical significance.<sup>462</sup>

I heard Gamar Katipa express his feelings about Raffi when our nation's great novelist died. Rafayel Patkanian was very close to Raffi and sincerely loved him. Patkanian had befriended Raffi in 1872 when Raffi arrived in Tiflis.

In 1888 Patkanian was a teacher at the trade school in Nor Nakhijevan. He was 58–59 years old then. After the lessons ended at five o'clock, he used to stop at our house on his way home and visit my father. If my father was not at home, he went to the Merchants' Club to drink tea and spend a couple of hours. One day in late April, while I was studying for my final examinations, I saw from the window Patkanian hurriedly approaching our house. He

approached the window and asked whether my father was home and alone or seeing a patient. My father had already heard his loud voice from the next room.

"I am home, Rafayel Gavrilovich, come in, the samovar is waiting for us," my father called out. Patkanian came in to inform my father that Raffi had died. He quickly drank his tea and took out a notebook from his pocket.

"Here is what I wrote this morning and sent to *Ardzagank*," he said.

The article was not long, and I do not remember its content, but the impression I got was that he was praising Raffi's novels and their educational value. Then, he concluded with a few critical words about the Armenian community.

A few days later, Patkanian came again carrying several Armenian and Russian newspapers under his arm. He showed my father all the eulogies and panegyrics read during Raffi's funeral and the description of the funeral. After reading the articles, he folded the papers and said, "No, we need to give the Armenian wealthy some laxatives to morally cleanse them and bring them to their senses, the rascals!"

Seeing Patkanian's troubled state, my father told him that he thought Patkanian did not consider Raffi a talented writer, because once Patkanian had told my father that Raffi's language was weak. Patkanian took off his glasses and began to clean them.

"True, I have had that impression from his earlier compositions. His style and language are better now; that happens with great and lesser writers; but Raffi is great, if not our greatest novelist. You are right. I do not like his plots with frequent unexpected events. In every desperate situation, Raffi's characters always find a way out. Of course, the readers do not pay attention to them because they are engrossed in the novel. I have not always liked his language. Signs of Russian inclinations are numerous in his writings; it may have been Artsruni's strong influence over the years. Then he has the *arets* word. Brother, what is this *arets*? Can you not write *arav*? Take this Russian style sentence: *Vardani srtum tsaghkets ezgatsumnneri mi sastik paterazm*. Write *nerkin kriv*! I have noticed that after he left *Mshak*, in the last four or five years, his language became smoother and richer. Last month, he sent me his new novel, *Samvel*, written in a wonderfully rich, simple, and beautiful ashkharhabar. Bravo Raffi! A week later, in reply to mine, he wrote a four-page letter in which he said, 'I am truly happy that you, one of the founders of ashkharhabar, liked the language of *Samvel*. I also worked according to your advice to have the characters speak according to their education and environment. I have published one thousand and five hundred copies, but do you think Armenians are ready to read a serious and weighty writing?'

“The year before last, I was talking to Raffi at Abgar Hovhannisian’s home and I told him, ‘You have studied the living conditions in Western Armenia well, but I do not agree that our future, as you say, is in Western Armenia. Others have said that it is Kilikia. No, we must create our center from our former provinces, including Ararat. In my opinion, we must first start with the areas surrounding lakes Sevan, Van, and Urmia. Armenia’s political freedom will save our nation. The true Armenians are those who truly help Armenia’s independence. The rest are worthless Armenians, and worthless people.’ Raffi replied, ‘You demand too much from Armenians. It will be enough when the young generation follows this dream.’ I said, ‘No. If the nation’s redemption is in Armenia’s freedom, it means that all the Armenians must strive to help by various means and according to their abilities, sometimes with arms, sometimes with financial help, and sometimes with the help of foreigners.’”<sup>463</sup>

### Simon Gabamajian

Destiny spread failure for Raffi, so that he had to leave his despised business and go after his calling, which took him to the summit of his glory. Raffi created simple but fluent and adaptable language of the novel, at once emotional, enlivening, and exciting. The style, nuances, and words were unique discoveries. With *Jalaleddin*, Raffi created a new direction for the Armenian novel. Some writers have claimed that Raffi did not develop his characters with depth and serious analysis; Raffi, however, created fascinating descriptions of nature that no other writer has equaled. He was a preacher in every sentence and every line of his novels.

The terrible living conditions of the Armenians troubled Raffi. The suffering of his people engulfed and consumed his whole being. Raffi instilled patriotic ideas in his readers and aroused their national pride and bravery. Raffi described the spirit of his time and pointed out that Armenians’ servile conviction must give way to a new self-awareness. No other novels will enthrall patriotic Armenians as much as Raffi’s novels. The influence of Raffi’s works is evident in part by the popularity of Armenian historic names. The proliferation of Armenian names indicates that the people have chosen a new direction. Before conversion to Christianity, Armenians did not use such names as Paul, Peter, Moses, and Hovhannes; however, since the acceptance of Christianity until the mid-1800s, they almost exclusively used Hebrew and non-Armenian names. The efforts that started in the second half of the nineteenth century to create a new mentality revived the use of our ancient historic names. In real life, the Armenian people began to hear and became familiar with names of fictional characters they encountered only in novels;

thus, yesterday's novels became today's life.

Freedom is the one wish Raffi had for his people. His clear ideas inspired new hopes for a rebirth. No other writer before him had the influence he had on the people. Intellectuals like Abovian, Nazarian, Nalbandian, Shahaziz, and Gamar Katipa revived the idea of freedom; but only Raffi was able to put their works to action.<sup>464</sup>

**Zabel Boyajian** (1872–1957) was a philologist and author who edited *Armenian Legends and Poems*.

Anna Raffi and her two sons went to London in the late 1890s. Besides the task of publishing her husband's works, Anna Raffi's greatest wish was to write her husband's biography. She worked incessantly to accomplish it, working mostly at night, because she had other responsibilities in the daytime. She often said, "To have a spoon in one hand and a pen in the other is not possible." The family was hospitable, and students and immigrants always visited them. The family home functioned as a center at a time when there was no other place for Armenians to gather.

Aram continued his education at University College and specialized in literature. Arshak went to St. Petersburg to study medicine. Later, both brothers became Russian language instructors at King's College. Most of their students were British officers who went to Russia as diplomats, but they kept close relations with their teachers. The two brothers established the first Armenian club in London named the Armenian Workers and Students Association. The Armenians gathered once a week to hear lectures, sing Armenian songs, and give presentations.

In 1912 Aram traveled to the Caucasus with the two British Buxton brothers [Noel and Harold] to study the Eastern Question.<sup>465</sup> The result of their study was the book *Travel and Politics in Armenia*. Noel Buxton wrote the part on political issues; Harold Buxton, the Armenian Church; and Aram Raffi, Armenian history.

Upon his return, Aram and his brother worked on expanding the Armenian club and renamed it the Armenian United Society. Almost all the Armenians joined the society and elected Colonel Gregory, an Armenian from India, as chairman. The society rented an office and published the monthly *Ararat* in English. Large functions and lectures took place in rented halls, and many British people attended to become familiar with Armenian culture. The attendance of British people at the society's events was the first time that they became familiar with the Armenians. A popular saying in Britain was, "We do not like the Armenians, but we do not even know why." For political



reasons, a certain prejudice existed in Britain against the Armenians during the last fifty years.

At the onset of World War I, the Armenians in Britain were excited because of the promises the British government made to the Armenians, who established the Armenian Information Bureau, in the middle of London, to disseminate information on the Armenian Question. Aram Raffi became the director and worked tirelessly. He published English language booklets and wrote articles in the local papers. He sent letters to politicians and met with them. Aram contributed a long article on Armenian folk songs and literature of the Middle Ages in *Armenian Legends and Poems*. The hard work deteriorated his health, and he contracted tuberculosis. After a month's rest, he went back to work, but fell ill again and died. He had intended to become a writer like his father and amassed a large amount of material for his purpose; unfortunately, life's necessities prevented him from achieving his wish. Eight months later, Anna Raffi passed away.

Arshak Raffi remained a professor of Russian at King's College, where his students and the faculty liked and respected him; they would say, "Mr. Raffi could teach Russian to even a horse." Arshak's modest home outside of London had a garden full of roses, a tribute to his father.<sup>466</sup>

**Simon Vratsian** (1882–1969) was a central figure in the ARF and a parliament member of the Republic of Armenia; later he became minister of labor, then of agriculture. He edited several newspapers, among them *Hairenik* in 1911 in the United States and *Horizon* in 1917 in Tiflis. He was the last prime minister, for only a few days, at the end of 1920 during the days of bidirectional attacks on the republic by Turkey and the Communist Red Army. After the fall of the republic, he traveled as a field worker for the ARF and eventually settled in Lebanon in 1952 and became the director of the Hamazkayin Jemaran.

In his works, Raffi showed that besides political liberation, the Armenians needed liberation from internal afflictions of intellectual stagnation, harms brought about by the clergy and tax collectors, national disunity and religious intolerance, psyche of ignorance and servility, and the venality and unaccountability prevalent among national establishments. Raffi produced a working plan of what Khrimian and Varzhapetian [patriarch of Constantinople] were preaching—a liberation movement. His fictional characters soon appeared as living figures. The time for preaching had passed; the time had come for action to implement the provisions of Article 61 [of the Berlin Treaty]. Raffi's declared conviction was "armed patriotism and

armed struggle to liberate the fatherland.”<sup>467</sup>

**Hagop Oshagan** (Kiufejian, 1883–1948) was born in Bursa, Turkey. He was a teacher, an author, a playwright, a literary critic, and a cultural and political activist. His numerous stories were published in *Hairenik*, *Husaper*, and other periodicals. Among his works are *Mnatsortats* and *Stepanos Siunetsi*.

The literary revolution, over a period of fifteen to twenty years, brought about by Raffi, is seen in the development of the literary language from the primitive, rough, and disorganized, although quaintly lively, inspiring, and spirited language of Abovian’s *Verk Hayastani*, to that of *Jalaleddin*’s rich, organized, gentle, and attractive language.

Raffi’s writings create emotional turmoil; but more important, they have value and definite proof of Armenian literature’s development. The works of generations of authors after Raffi could not surpass the language he developed. Writers like Nar-Dos, Shirvanzade, in the name of realism, have described Raffi’s language as simple to the point of being intolerably poor. Derenik Demirjian is not exempt from the same reproach for viewing Raffi’s writings from a European point of view. Furthermore, Shirvanzade, Vahan Papazian, and others have criticized Raffi for his inability to psychologically develop and analyze his characters. Such criticism can very easily be used against Raffi’s critics. Speaking of Raffi’s style, those who have stated “Raffi is not an artistic writer” do not understand the meaning of “writing style”; Raffi understood and was aware of his style and used it effectively. His lengthy style is admirable. With his voluminous novels, he remains the greatest author who had the ability to develop and progressively strengthen his novels instead of weakening them at their conclusions. Shirvanzade’s works are as numerous as Raffi’s; whereas, Shirvanzade’s novels show signs of exhaustion as they near the ends (no wonder he has avoided writing long novels), Raffi’s works end as he desired and as he controlled the events. Raffi wrote by obeying his sentiments, events in his surrounding, and most of all, his driving spirit for his mission. Little, if any, sign exists in Raffi’s style that he had learned from books. From where does the elegant but simple style of *Samvel* originate? Search and you will not find. Raffi embarked on a simple and equally difficult task without realizing the greatness of his contribution. Raffi’s heroes were already realities; his role was to summon and give them physical characteristics. For this reason, Raffi’s romantic figures turned into people of action in such a short time. The weakness of characters in Raffi’s historical novels is unrelated to the author. Talent and genius are not enough to penetrate the ramparts of the centuries. Only a long and tedious study will perhaps enable an author to learn and

comprehend the nature of past lives and conditions. Raffi's lengthy works are the greatest of the entire Armenian literature. As our song states, "there are souls that continue to fume from under the ground, and there are strengths that can grow from the soil." Raffi rightfully belongs to one of these.<sup>468</sup>

### G. Vanandetsi

Vanandetsi published *Raffi vepere* (Raffi's Novels) in the early years of the Communist Soviet Union. In the name of international brotherhood, and because of the multitude of nationalities within the Union, the government had suppressed the idea of nationalism. Vanandetsi used Raffi's nationalistic novels and articles to disparage his writings and attack the Armenian bourgeoisie (the enemy of the proletariat as defined by Marxist theory).

Vanandetsi accused *Mshak* as one of the contributors to and representatives of the bourgeoisie press for setting the tone of nationalism. Vanandetsi stated that nationalism was the central theme of Raffi's novels, and to support his claim, he pointed to Raffi's statement, "The success of the Armenian merchants is due to their higher educational level and traditional trading experience, which make them better merchants than their neighbors." He claimed that the threat of losing their trading superiority became the major fear of the bourgeoisie intellectuals. Vanandetsi condemned *Mshak* for neglecting to report on the unjust exploitation of the peasants, created by capitalism; he even included the Armenian Church as a rich landowner that oppressed the peasantry. He accused Raffi of nationalism by pointing to Raffi's criticism of Armenian students in Europe, "who forget their country and nation without reflecting on the condition of their brothers in Turkey . . . The idea of nationalism is our life's purpose; it provides and improves our moral and material lives."

Finally, Vanandetsi discussed even Darwinism, falsely accusing Raffi and *Mshak* as the leaders of the bourgeoisie intellectuals, who preached Armenian national superiority and domination over neighboring people. Thus, Vanandetsi tried to downgrade Armenian nationalism and capitalism and instead tried to elevate the status of the proletariat, wrongly condemning Raffi of being anti-proletariat, when in fact Raffi had the greatest sympathy and respect for that working class.<sup>469</sup>

### Aram Yeramian

Raffi developed some of his characters based on contemporary people. In *Jalaleddin*, Dali-Baba's revolutionary thoughts are those of Stepanos Nazarian and Grigor Artsruni; Kitab-Dalisi expounds his ideology as that of the fiery

critic and poet Mikayel Nalbandian. Who was the doctor in the novel *Khente*? He was a noble servant agonizing over the wretchedness of the three thousand families who had found refuge in Vagharshapat, where contagious diseases reaped thousands of lives. During those days, there appeared an enthusiastic young doctor, who selflessly dedicated himself to the welfare of the refugees. He was Doctor Bagrat Navasardian, a graduate of the National Medical School in St. Petersburg and a native of Vagharshapat. In 1880 he had established the first private hospital in Tiflis and treated the poor without charge. In 1881 he had founded the Armenian Benevolent Society in the Caucasus and a branch of the Moscow Archaeological Society. He died in the Caucasus in early twentieth century.

Based on this outstanding public personality, Raffi depicted the character of the doctor in *Khente*, by describing the doctor's community services. In that section of the novel, in addition to realistically describing the people's suffering and the compassionate doctor's agony, Raffi presented the sad picture of the Ejmiatsin clergy, exposing their unbecoming and inappropriate behavior along with their shortcomings, which Raffi had witnessed during his visits to Vagharshapat.<sup>470</sup>

**Nikoghayos Adonts** (1871–1942) was a linguist, historian, editor, and publisher. In the early 1900s, he was the editor of *Herald of Cultures and Arts*.

*Davit Bek* is not one of Raffi's best historical novels, but it is the most important because of the contemptuous voice of the speaker. The subject is from the recent past, therefore more effective. The characters are true to life; they speak and discuss current issues like us; they languish in pain like us; and they toil like us. The language of the novel is simple and ordinary; the style is clear and devoid of literary embellishments; the emphasis is effective and sincere; the ideas are high and noble. The ideals of bravery, patriotism, and liberty—virtues elevated to a height of being worthy of worship—are alluring virtues that impress and excite young hearts with sublime emotions. These are the reasons why *Davit Bek* remains a popular novel, not relegated to the dustbin of history. *Davit Bek* looks backwards, but speaks for the present and the future. It has remained true to the historical sources, but this is only the structure. The actual historical characters described are far from the reality of their true characteristics. Raffi did not intend to recreate that period of history with artistic imagery and exemplary characters. The past interested Raffi not for the past, but as a teaching tool for political awareness, where he is the teacher and the speaker. He resurrected ancient heroes from their graves and instilled in them his spirit, his ideas, and his language, instructing

them on tactical methods. *Davit Bek* is a testament to Raffi's personal outlook, public and political ideas, dispositions, and especially his observations for struggle against oppression and means of shaking off the yoke of servility.<sup>471</sup>

**Hamastegh** (Hambartzum Gelenian, 1895–1966) came to the United States in 1913. He wrote many articles in the *Hairenik Daily* and *Hairenik Amsagir* about the village life of his childhood days in Kharpert. He authored several books, among them *Giughe* (The Village).

In mid-1800s Armenian young men, after receiving their education from European universities, returned to play an important role in their communities. They were liberal-minded men, who became journalists and editors and introduced new cultural ideas. The common people and the nation, however, were missing from their works. The two main Armenian cultural centers in the 1800s were Constantinople and Tiflis. In the former, the cultural revival was far away from the regions of large Armenian populations; even the patriarch was unfamiliar with the true condition of the people. In Tiflis, the Armenians followed the path of Russianization. Thus, in both places, a national literature was being developed without truly understanding the people; except for Mkrtich Khrimian and later Raffi, who knew and understood the common people and the peasants because both rose from the midst of the common people.

Raffi developed the character of the neglected Armenian in his novels. He had self-confidence and boundless faith in his people, for in *Salpi* he wrote: "Armenians have a bright future." In his introduction to *Salpi*, Raffi stated that his main purpose for writing the novel was to reveal the moribund condition of Persian Armenians. For that reason, he wrote it as a romance novel in order to make it more palatable to the illiterate public. Raffi and similar writers gave form to Armenian literature and political causes. After this movement, the idea of a nation developed among the European-educated Armenians. In the late 1800s the novel and literature were achieving a new form, to which Raffi contributed greatly. Raffi was instrumental in solving one of the contemporary passionate issues—the literary language. With his talent, he perfected and gave the Eastern Armenian vernacular colorful and artistic form.

Raffi was perhaps the first writer who had the temerity to write with a realistic style about the downtrodden people. He was relentless in supporting the oppressed. Raffi's main inspiration was his surroundings, the Armenian people, and especially Armenian history. He insisted on being familiar with

the people—to know the editor, the field worker, the teacher, and the literary writer. Like a harsh prophet, he demanded all. Raffi did not philosophize, but he developed his characters based on contemporary events, and those characters partially fulfilled their roles in the struggle for freedom. Raffi concentrated his convictions in *Kaytser*, where he was the artist, the learned historian, the economist, the sociologist, the statesman, and the educator. No writer after Raffi was able to describe Armenia with its nature and traditions, in other words, its spiritual and physical qualities. Raffi's task was difficult when he began his mission to enlighten and educate the Armenian masses. He appeared at a time when the representative of Armenian aspirations was Ter Todik, the personification of the stagnated intellectual of the Middle Ages, whose sacrifice was to imitate the saints—abstain, fast, stare into the sky, accept servility as if given by nature or the heavens—and draw all truths from the Bible. Raffi became great because he created a period during which he motivated and galvanized a generation and gave the Armenian people personality and character.<sup>472</sup>

**Arshag Chobanian** (1872–1954) was born in Constantinople. He was author, editor, publisher, and cultural and political activist. He moved to Paris in 1895 and later published *Anahit*, a cultural and philological periodical.

Raffi became one of the few great personalities of our old and new literature. Raffi was the greatest writer who developed and expanded the Armenian novel, and whose writings remain timely. He was not the first novelist. Khachatur Abovian wrote the first novel, Mesrop Taghiadian wrote three novels in grabar, and Perj Proshian imitated Abovian in a novel published prior to Raffi's first novel. Raffi's importance was in his development, enrichment, and expansion of the nascent modern Armenian novel. Raffi was a systematic, restrained, and true novelist. He wrote in the Araratian dialect—simple, clear, flexible, and vigorous ashkharhabar—which became the literary language of the Eastern Armenians. He had a talent for examining and analyzing national issues, expressing opinions, and proposing solutions. Raffi became the powerful promoter of the Armenian Question through his novels. He expressed his thoughts in a long list of novels that brightened the Armenian intellectual world like a splendidly shining constellation. He influenced the character and the future of the Armenians; thus, he is rightfully called the “Nation's Novelist.”<sup>473</sup>

**Sarkis Atamian** (1923–2005, Providence, RI) was a historian and a history

professor at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. He was the author of *The Armenian Community*, *Douglas Avenue*, and other books.

Raffi was the greatest Armenian literary figure and the greatest force behind Armenia's emancipation and liberation from servitude and domination. He was the greatest literary giant in all Armenian history. It was difficult to overestimate Raffi's importance, both as a writer and as a political theorist, even though he had no profound background in political philosophy. In Raffi, the revolutionary thought is complete, and it culminates with the idea that the Armenian will either die or attain liberty. There is no other alternative.

Raffi's literary writings did more than any other man's to throw into sharp relief the anguish of an enslaved people, their suppression, and their cultural retardation. He was the apostle of freedom by revolution and of death instead of enslavement. He shook a dying people into consciousness, and it remained for his followers to decide on a course of action. No other single person, perhaps, was as responsible for the subsequent revolution as he was. His style, his rhetoric, and prophetic insight have made him immortal.<sup>474</sup>

**Vahé Oshagan** (1922–2000) was an author, a poet, and a political and cultural activist in Lebanon and the United States.

Raffi was the most prolific and talented novelist of the nineteenth century. He authored a score of historical and ethnographic novels, stories, and sketches of city life. His main purpose was to depict the sorry plight of the Armenian rural population in the Ottoman Empire. He aimed to inspire his compatriots with the pride of their past and historical heritage and to awaken in them a revolutionary spirit. Raffi's novels, written with fiery imagination, intense emotion, and fine observation for detail, constituted the centerpiece of romantic fiction in Eastern Armenian literature. He is rightly considered the ideological father of the Armenian revolutionary movements that began in the middle of the 1880s . . .

Raffi's work was the most successful application of the ideas of enlightenment and political awakening.<sup>475</sup>

**Hrach Zardarian** was born in 1892 in Kharpert and studied dentistry in France. He authored several novels and published his stories in various periodicals.

Raffi's characters are not people, but symbolic ideals. Raffi subjected

himself only to the nation's goddess; that is the force behind his creations. Where correct grammatical construction is absent, in its place is the incomparably more precious quality of the fiery national spirit. Raffi will remain eternal because he is the personification of the nation's collective aspirations. He is the father of the Armenian historical, political, economic, and social novels, which represent a watershed in the history of Armenian literature. With his unusual talent, he had an enchanting influence on the youth of Eastern and Western Armenias. No one is greater than the person whose mission is to become a champion of national revival. Raffi's works are like an enchanting, yet frightening, spirit that descends over its wandering and moribund people, holding their hands, raises them and shows them a bright future in the distance.<sup>476</sup>

### **Daniel Varuzhan**

Raffi studied historical personalities and described those heroes who were to come, and had to come, to inspire the Armenian people for the necessary and redeeming revolution. He was one of those who prepared the ground for the Armenian resistance movement. Raffi preached and planned the revolution. Every *fedayi* had read Raffi's *Khente* and *Kaytser*. Serop Aghbiur, Govork Chavus, Antranik, and Sebastatsi Murad were Raffi's heroes incarnate.<sup>477</sup>

### **Hovhannes Tumanian**

Immortal soul, filled with the Armenians' tribulations of numerous centuries and their desire for a bright future, with the power of your magical genius, you elicited from the darkness of the past and the uncertain future enticing pictures and heroic personalities. With them, you inflamed and encouraged the oppressed, inspired the weak with daring, prevented martyrdom by the hands of the powerful, agitated the souls, and directed the Armenian people unto the path of freedom.<sup>478</sup>

**Y. S. Nikrasova** was a contemporary Russian writer, who was an eyewitness to Raffi's funeral.

Raffi was a true artist, whose pen created realistic characters. The readers forget that these characters were the author's creations, thus, they identify with the heroes; they fear and stir when the heroes are in danger, and rejoice when fortune smiles on them.<sup>479</sup>

**Alexander Fadeev**, a renowned Russian writer, in an article published in



*Pravda* in 1939, had criticized all those leftist writers who considered Raffi a nationalist and demanded to repress his works. Fadeev had emphasized the timeless value of Raffi's talent in Armenian literature.<sup>480</sup>

**Nikola Tikhanov** was a distinguished Russian writer, who wrote that Raffi's prose represented the bearer of the banner calling to fight against oppressive tyranny.<sup>481</sup>

**Mikayel Varandian** (Hovhannesian, 1870–1934) was born in Gharabagh. He was a linguist and historian, who documented and authored the history of the Armenian liberation movements. He was the editor of *Droshak*—the political organ of the ARF—and the Republic of Armenia's ambassador to Italy during 1918–1920.

Raffi was the unequaled creative force during twenty centuries of Armenian history. He was an artist and a thinker. He had unequaled language, formidable style, and peerless pen that inspired and caused the readers to weep. He produced the treasures of his mind and imagination with mature, rash, and prolific ferocity.

Raffi came into the arena under the banner of romanticism. In his youth when he used to wander weeping and lamenting among the fatherland's ruins and amid memories of ancient centuries, the prophet of Armenian romanticism wrote his melancholy and heart-rending *Dzayn tur ov tsovak*. Raffi abandoned stupefying religious fetishism and resigned from depending on compassionate gods, who never smiled on his hapless Armenian people. He fanatically preached the gospel of self-defense and self-help; he appealed to the ordinary people—the suffering and hard working Armenian masses—and shouted at the Turkish Sultan, who had slashed Armenia and the Armenians. His predecessors wrote fragmented revolutionary overtures. Raffi began to preach with his systematic and organized novels, written in a simple and clear style. The novels repeated the same messages of Alishan and Khrimian—Fatherland, Revolution, Freedom—but he repeated them with enchanting dialect and splendid and picturesque descriptions. Raffi's messages opened an unsurpassed flood of impassioned self-sacrifice, heroism, and patriotism. His trumpeting sound thrust Armenian romanticism into the battlefield. Raffi said, “No, Armenia is not a cemetery, the Armenian nation is not dead yet! Yes, dead and hopelessly dissimilated are the Armenian clergy and businessmen, who no longer are needed; but the Armenian builder and the Armenian worker still live . . . and they will claim their place under the sun.”<sup>482</sup>

The sad news of Raffi's death reached us in Shushi. All the students mourned by wearing black. How could we believe that the author of *Khente* and *Kaytser* was no more? He had dominated our hearts and minds; he was the absolute commander of the youth's thoughts and longings. Almost all of us, current and future volunteers to liberate the fatherland, were Raffi's followers.

In the 1880s Raffi produced his novels at a rapid pace, and they sold and spread at unusual rates. The youth waited with unabated breath and enthusiasm for each volume and devoured its pages. So many of these students who vowed to follow Raffi's advice left their homes and loved ones, schools and careers, and went to sacrifice their lives for the fatherland.

Great men are the products of their environments; in their turn, they strive for new trends and become driving forces by their prophetic language. Such was Raffi. None of his contemporaries could measure up to Raffi as a novelist, a preacher, or a publicist. Nazarian, Nalbandian, Shahaziz, Tserents, Patkanian, Proshian, Artsruni—poets, novelists, and publicists—were ordinary talents despite their abilities. Raffi was a genius, an eagle, who soared over them all. He was above them all with his revolutionary sermons, plethora of articles, and editorials in *Mshak*. During fifteen centuries of Armenian culture, Raffi has stood alone and unequalled. He is a titan born of the Armenian people. Raffi was a rare phenomenon. He was a simple and scrupulous merchant without higher education; but he succeeded in a short time to reach great prominence by the strength of his talent alone. He dealt with a variety of subjects and gave us great literature. He was a marvelous man—a novelist, journalist, historian, and judge of characters. In every subject, he was elegant, enthusiastic, and enthralling. His style was lyrical; his prose, poetic. Of course, his language and style contain many inconsistencies, but we must not forget how much he rushed to meet deadlines. All those imperfections are lost in a complete and splendid symphony to create delightful music. Despite all the irregularities, Raffi's language—picturesque, melodic, and dramatic—remained clear and pure.

It is a rare revelation among nations that a simple and modest merchant, without formal education, solely by the power of his talent, succeeds in a short time to reach such heights, to achieve such varied abilities, and to produce such great literature with essence and versatility, as was this miraculous man. His works were beautiful, encouraging, and enchanting. The reality that in the 1870s and 1880s he created the elegant language of *Jalaleddin*, *Khente*, *Kaytser*, and *Samvel* is the mark of a genius. The new and coarse Eastern vernacular suddenly became beautiful, rich, harmonious, and flexible; meanwhile, it was a simple and an accessible literary language. This was one

of Raffi's great talents. No one before him has given such poignant characterization of Armenians and enchanting descriptions of Armenia's majestic mountains and deep valleys, extensive fields and rushing rivers. No one has revealed the various episodes of Armenian history—bright or dark, heroic or sorrowful—with such tender and yet shocking colors. Raffi was master of words, prince of style, the only one of his time, and categorically peerless and uncontested.

Raffi was scraggy, taciturn, humble, and inconspicuous, with the appearance of a clergyman; but internally he was a consuming fire and a flaming fountain that erupted from the depths of the people's spirit with bold and rousing thunder. He was unusually patient, calm, and bashful person. He did not get angry, even in the face of insults. He never raised his voice against people who irritated him in public or in the press, but he struck back calmly and went on peacefully.

In *Kaytser*, Aslan told his comrades, "The clergy reject the physical world, and their fatherland is the heaven," to explain why the idea of a fatherland was strange to them. Thus, Raffi pointed out the general state of the Church, but Raffi loved the Church and liked to idealize it and the clergy of earlier centuries, who, in the words of Aslan, "knew how to improve the lives of the people. They were the people's patriarchs dedicated with all their hearts to the improvement of their people's lives. Meanwhile, clericalism was the strong protector of our religion, church, education, fatherland, and nation. Now one can not find anyone who is more indifferent and insensitive toward the welfare of the people than our celibate priests." Raffi also criticized the wealthy Armenians—the bourgeoisie—revealing hints of socialism. He knew the exceptions like the Lazarian, Sanasarian, and Muradian and Rafayelian philanthropic families. Again in the words of Aslan: "The merchant does not have a nation or a fatherland. His interests are where his profits are." Here, Raffi refers to the Armenian amiras, bankers, and usurers in Turkey.

Preoccupied with his country's woes, Raffi remained open to new ideas of democracy, socialism, and freedom of thought and conscience; he wrote about the new trends with enthusiasm. This precocious, erudite, and gifted writer was a serious, deep, and philosophic thinker. None of his contemporaries could write about liberation trends with such comprehension and express them so succinctly to his readers. As a serious and a modest man, he was aware of his difficult mission; as an intellectual leader, he was ready to forge the destiny of his oppressed people. Raffi conscientiously observed and studied the miserable and sad economic conditions of the Armenians during his travels in Western Armenia. He knew the risks, the responsibilities, and the impediments of his mission; he knew that revolution would eventually

resolve hunger and hopeless poverty. He wanted to present accurately the extremely difficult and unbearable condition of the Armenians in Turkey under Turkish and Kurdish oppression.

Despite being a romantic writer, Raffi was a revolutionary. He was at once realistic, rational, and heedful. He stressed the point of becoming familiar with the Armenian lands: "The knowledge of one's nation is a necessary precondition for patriotism. The knowledge of the nation must be one of the main subjects that every Armenian child must learn. He who does not know his fatherland is unable to truly love his country." In Aslan's words, Raffi explained to the readers that to love one's country was to give first place to its historical past, traditions, and customs. The awareness of one's nation creates a desire for freedom. He predicted that the Armenian problem was going to explode; there was no other way. The Armenians had to prepare themselves and avoid a confusing and a chaotic explosion.

If someday Raffi is forgotten as a political analyst and a pioneer of revolutionary thought, he will remain forever alive as a poet and a literary giant.<sup>483</sup>



## Annotations

- <sup>1</sup> Hakob was the first person in the family lineage to use the Melik-Hakobian family name. Earlier and occasionally for a short time, he had used Melik-Mirzaian.
- <sup>2</sup> *Melik*, used in conjunction with proper names, indicates a position of leadership. *Meliks* were the autonomous Armenian rulers (feudal lords) of mountainous Karabagh (Gharabagh, Artsakh) whose rule extended from the fifteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century. The word's origin is the Arabic word for king.
- <sup>3</sup> Soghomon Melik-Hakobian, *Yerker*, 341–342.
- <sup>4</sup> *Mahdesi* is anyone who visited Jerusalem on a pilgrimage.
- <sup>5</sup> Arsen Kitur, *Patmutiun Hnchakian Kusaktsutian*, 209.
- <sup>6</sup> Veratsin, “Raffii entanikin shurje,” *Hairenik Amsagir*, 145.
- <sup>7</sup> Aghbak region was the area of eastern Van province, adjacent to Persia’s northwestern border.
- <sup>8</sup> Melik-Hakobian, *Yerker*, 360.
- <sup>9</sup> Aftandilian, *Patkerner Raffii kyankits*, 5.
- <sup>10</sup> Avak Khan Aftandilian (1844–1917) was born in Tavriz into a merchant family that was friends with Melik Mirzabek’s family. In 1860 he went to Salmast to study with the Mkhitarist Father Kghemes (Clemens) Sibilian (see below). After Raffi’s departure from Tavriz Aramian School, Aftandilian taught at the school and became one of its trustees. *Khan* is a title given to various officials and dignitaries in Persia; in the case of leaders, it implied a lord or a prince.
- <sup>11</sup> Aftandilian, 16.
- <sup>12</sup> Aftandilian, 12.
- <sup>13</sup> Vratsian, “Tsnndian hariuramyaki artiv,” *Vem*, 59–78.
- <sup>14</sup> Berberian, “Yerb e tsnvats Raffin,” *Hairenik Amsagir*, 114–119.
- <sup>15</sup> Dr. Anania Sultan-Shah was Ruben Berberian’s maternal uncle. He was a close friend of Mikayel Nalbandian and a supporter of the liberal movement and its champions.
- <sup>16</sup> Soghomon was Hakob’s brother’s (Tigran) son.
- <sup>17</sup> Melik-Hakobian, 340–341.
- <sup>18</sup> Petrosyan, *Raffi*, 3n1.
- <sup>19</sup> Ajemian, “Raffii tsnnndian tvakane,” *Masis Calendar*.
- <sup>20</sup> This age is based on Raffi’s description in *Kaytser* where Farhad says that he was ten-years old when he began attending Ter Todik’s school.

- <sup>21</sup> Grigor Narekatsi (Grigor of Narek): A tenth century clergyman, poet.
- <sup>22</sup> Ter Todik is the fictional character of a village teacher in *Kaytser*. It became a term to represent the ignorant priest teachers.
- <sup>23</sup> Raffi, *Kaytser* 1:49–50.
- <sup>24</sup> V. Aharonian, *Raffi kyanke*, 37; “Raffii kyanke,” *Hairenik Amsagir*, 80.
- <sup>25</sup> Realism Schools were based on the German *Realschulen*, trade and technical schools that focused on practical training. Students learned commercial and manual skills, math, the sciences, and modern languages.
- <sup>26</sup> Samvelyan, *Raffi*, 29–31.
- <sup>27</sup> *Fritolin* was discovered after Raffi’s death and published for the first time in 1892. Topchyan, *Raffi* 1: 469, 558–559.
- <sup>28</sup> Second and third stanzas of *Sara* were written during the years 1868–1871.
- <sup>29</sup> Garegin Yenkibarian (1863–1920) was a teacher, lawyer, literary and community figure. He became a close friend of Raffi’s in the early 1880s.
- <sup>30</sup> Yenkibarian, “Mi hishoghutiun Raffii masin,” 212–213, 327–328.
- <sup>31</sup> Raffi, *Punj* 1:124.
- <sup>32</sup> Raffi, *Punj* 1:250.
- <sup>33</sup> Raffi, *Parskakan patkerner*, 345–349; Bayazat, *Raffi* 8:318–319; Topchyan, *Raffi* 9:14–17.
- <sup>34</sup> L’Abbé Eugène Griselle, *L’Arménie martyre*, [Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1916], 45–46, cited in Hambartsumian, 148.
- <sup>35</sup> Raffi, *Punj* 2:133; *Parskakan Patkerner*, 373–395; Topchyan, *Raffi* 9:31–46; Ruben Otyan, *Raffi*, 9.
- <sup>36</sup> Minas Tololyan, *Dar me grakanutiune*, 1:35–45.
- <sup>37</sup> Raffi, *Salpi*, 19.
- <sup>38</sup> Vahe Oshagan, “Cultural and Literary Awakening,” 58.
- <sup>39</sup> Louise Nalbandian, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 38–40.
- <sup>40</sup> Tololyan, 1:66–67; Darakjian, “Taghiadiantsi areghtsuatse,” 4:507–509.
- <sup>41</sup> Tololyan, 1:41–45; V. Oshagan, “Modern Armenian Literature,” 2:157.
- <sup>42</sup> [Armeno-Turkish: aka Kiptchak—Turkish written with Armenian letters.]
- <sup>43</sup> V. Oshagan, “Kiptchak Letters,” 58.
- <sup>44</sup> Sarkis Shmavonian, “Nalbandian,” 39–44.
- <sup>45</sup> Nor Nakhijevan was established near Rostov-on-Don in 1778 when Tsarina Catherine the Great forcibly deported the Crimean Armenians and Greeks to southern Russia.
- <sup>46</sup> Bessarabia: The Russian province along the northern shores of the Black Sea; Kishinev: a town in western Ukraine, close to the Danube River.
- <sup>47</sup> Shmavonian, 45.
- <sup>48</sup> Stepan Voskan (1825–1901) was the first literary critic and all-around intellectual of Western Armenia; he was nurtured in and identified with European, particularly French, culture. Educated in Paris, he became the champion of liberalism. He took part in the French revolution of 1848 and was imprisoned. He was one of the most hostile critics among the intelligentsia of his time. He severely criticized

- Russian policies against the Armenians and did not spare the Mkhitarists, the Apostolic Church, the Protestants, and the clerical authority of the Church.
- <sup>49</sup> Tololyan, 1:249.
- <sup>50</sup> Megrian, "Mikayel Nalbandyan."
- <sup>51</sup> Sarkis Atamian, *Armenian Community*, 73–76.
- <sup>52</sup> Shmavonian, p. 53.
- <sup>53</sup> Bardakjian, *Reference Guide*, 138–139.
- <sup>54</sup> Shmavonian, 47–49
- <sup>55</sup> Tololyan, 245n.
- <sup>56</sup> Atamian, 73.
- <sup>57</sup> Shmavonian, 41–42.
- <sup>58</sup> Berberian, "Gamar Katipa" 10:2:93.
- <sup>59</sup> Tololyan, 1:88–89.
- <sup>60</sup> Shmavonian, 43, 45
- <sup>61</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 10.
- <sup>62</sup> Berberian "Gamar Katipa," 3:2:94.
- <sup>63</sup> Berberian "Gamar Katipa," 10:5:81–82.
- <sup>64</sup> V. Oshagan, "Cultural and Literary Awakening," 61.
- <sup>65</sup> Raffi, *Kaytser* 1:51.
- <sup>66</sup> Melik-Hakobian, 335–336.
- <sup>67</sup> Aharonian, *Raffii kyanke*, 42. See also introduction to *Salpi*, 34.
- <sup>68</sup> Samvelyan, *Raffi*, 52.
- <sup>69</sup> The letters were later published by Anna Raffi in the book titled *Parskakan patkerner*.
- <sup>70</sup> Raffi, *Parskakan patkerner*, 453–456; Bayazat, 8:393–395; Topchyan, 9:84–86.
- <sup>71</sup> Topchyan, 8:14.
- <sup>72</sup> Aftandilian, 16.
- <sup>73</sup> Khorenatsi, Parpetsi, and Yeghishe were historians; Davit Anghaght was a philosopher.
- <sup>74</sup> A British traveler who visited Akhtamar Monastery in the 1880s saw the monks using oiled manuscript sheets in place of glass as windowpanes; cited in M. Spender, *A Life of Arshile Gorky*, 6.
- <sup>75</sup> Raffi, *Kaytser* 2:195.
- <sup>76</sup> Raffi, *Kaytser* 2:195.
- <sup>77</sup> Topchyan, 1:51.
- <sup>78</sup> Tololyan, 1:151–159; Bardakjian, 375.
- <sup>79</sup> Raffi, *Kaytser* 2:448.
- <sup>80</sup> Navasard: Ancient Armenia's New Year festivities in August, when the goddess Anahit was worshiped in songs, dances, and abundance of flowers and leafy blossoms.
- <sup>81</sup> [*Translators*: refers to those who in the fifth century after the discovery of the Armenian alphabet translated prayer books and the Bible from Greek, Assyrian, and Syriac to Armenian.]

- <sup>82</sup> Bayazat, 8:307–309; Topchyan, 1:64–66.
- <sup>83</sup> Samvelyan, *Raffi*, 76–77.
- <sup>84</sup> Bayazat, 8:307; Topchyan, 10:32–33, pages 485–494 explain the discrepancy between the date of Hakob's travel in Western Armenia and that mentioned along with Hakob's article in *Hiusisapayl*.
- <sup>85</sup> Hakob's travels described above are detailed in *Kaytser*, volume two.
- <sup>86</sup> Bebek Theological Seminary, a combination of liberal arts and theological institution, was established in 1840 in Bebek, a suburb of Constantinople, by Cyrus Hamlin of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. In 1864 the Theological Seminary was transferred to Marsovan. The liberal arts section was named Robert College after the philanthropist Christopher Robert. The College was converted to a high school in 1971 by the order of the Turkish government.
- <sup>87</sup> Otyan, 12.
- <sup>88</sup> Year not indicated, but it must be 1857 or early 1858 based on the next letter Raffi wrote on April 20, 1858.
- <sup>89</sup> Varduhi Kalantar-Nalbandian, "Yerku namakner," 79–86; Committee, *Raffi*, 27. The letters were in the possession of Varduhi Kalantar-Nalbandian, who was Hovhannes Kalantar's niece.
- <sup>90</sup> A note by Hovhannes Avetisian written at the bottom of the second letter indicated that the first letter was signed as "I wait for our meeting, your former close friend, Hakob Mirzaian."
- <sup>91</sup> Nor Jugha or Julfa was the Armenian quarters near Isfahan.
- <sup>92</sup> Kalantar-Nalbandian, 83.
- <sup>93</sup> Raffi, *Salpi*, 34–35.
- <sup>94</sup> Bayazat, 10:502–564, 645; Topchyan, 12:154–157, 413–414; Petrosyan, 10.
- <sup>95</sup> Hovhannes Katanian (1824–1894), teacher, painter, sculptor. He worked in St. Petersburg. In the mid-1850s, he became the superintendent of Nersisian Academy. In 1858 he was dismissed (for distributing copies of *Hiusisapayl* to students), because Prelate Sargis Jalalian was in sharp conflict with Nersisian Academy director Petros Shamshian and Katanian for their liberal and progressive ideas. During his student days, Hakob sided with the Shamshian-Katanian supporters and participated in the struggle against the prelate. From 1859 to 1861, Katanian taught painting at the state gymnasium in Stavropol. In 1862 he became the director of Nersisian Academy.
- <sup>96</sup> Yenkibarian, 212–213, 327–328.
- <sup>97</sup> Samvelyan, *Raffi*, 90.
- <sup>98</sup> Bayazat, 8:280–309; Topchyan, 10:7–35.
- <sup>99</sup> Topchyan, 10:485–494.
- <sup>100</sup> [Parnassus: a mountain of central Greece. Raffi meant it as a source of wisdom.]
- <sup>101</sup> Petrosyan, 86.
- <sup>102</sup> Aftandilian, 44–46.
- <sup>103</sup> Aftandilian, 56.



- <sup>104</sup> Aftandilian, 58–59.
- <sup>105</sup> Raffi, *Salpi*, 24–36.
- <sup>106</sup> Aftandilian, 56.
- <sup>107</sup> In 1896–1897 Anna Raffi, took the coins to Saint Petersburg, then to London, to sell. Skillful pickpockets stole the concealed coins without her awareness. Anna Raffi appealed to the police, with no avail. Veratsin, 145.
- <sup>108</sup> Aftandilian, 47–49.
- <sup>109</sup> Aftandilian, 50–51.
- <sup>110</sup> Agha, a title of great respect given to tribal leaders and wealthy prominent people in Persia.
- <sup>111</sup> Aftandilian, 22.
- <sup>112</sup> Aftandilian, 28.
- <sup>113</sup> Bayazat, 8:103. In 1886 the poem *Aha tsagets karmir arev* in the chapter “Labor and soil” was published as a song along with musical notes in *Aghbiur*. Years later, it attained widespread popularity as *Hasso’s Song*.
- <sup>114</sup> Aftandilian, 31.
- <sup>115</sup> Aftandilian, 40.
- <sup>116</sup> Bayazat, 9:23–29; Topchyan, 10:72–77.
- <sup>117</sup> Topchyan, 1:78.
- <sup>118</sup> Melik-Hakobian, 357.
- <sup>119</sup> Samvelyan, *Raffi*, 119.
- <sup>120</sup> Samvelyan, *Raffi*, 124–125.
- <sup>121</sup> Aftandilian, 81.
- <sup>122</sup> Aftandilian, 72–73. Note: Aftandilian states that in 1863 the prelate of Atrpatakan was Abel Mkhitarian. This was either a typographical error or a memory lapse. According to communication received from Father Krikor Chiftjian of the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, Mkhitarian was the prelate of Atrpatakan during 1860–1861.
- <sup>123</sup> *Salpi* and *Kaytser* were not yet available at the time of Hakob’s meeting with the prelate. Fourteen years later, when Aftandilian wrote his book about Raffi, he inadvertently included the two titles, most probably meaning other works. See footnote in Samvelyan, *Raffi*, 115.
- <sup>124</sup> Yeznik and Yeghishe were clergy historians, who wrote in the fifth century. Yeznik wrote *Refutation of the Sects*, and Yeghishe wrote the story of the Vardanants War of 451.
- <sup>125</sup> Aftandilian, 74–79.
- <sup>126</sup> Aftandilian, 73.
- <sup>127</sup> *Lusaghbiur* was a monthly, later a weekly, published in Paris, 1952–1956, 1959, and 1970–1971.
- <sup>128</sup> Samvelyan, *Raffi zhamanakakitsneri husherum*, 338.
- <sup>129</sup> Aftandilian, 82–84.
- <sup>130</sup> Aftandilian, 84–86; Bayazat, 10:505–508.
- <sup>131</sup> Raffi, *Salpi*, 5.

- <sup>132</sup> Makar Chmshkian, 227–223. Makar Chmshkian (1852–1920) was a journalist, typesetter, cultural activist, and publisher.
- <sup>133</sup> Aftandilian, 86–88. Bayazat, 10:509.
- <sup>134</sup> Aftandilian, 90–91.
- <sup>135</sup> [Persian monetary unit.]
- <sup>136</sup> Aftandilian, 88–89; Bayazat 10:510.
- <sup>137</sup> [Raffi moved from the Hakhnazarian's home in late 1871 or early 1872 to Artsruni's inn. He stayed there until sometime in 1874, when he moved out and rented an apartment at Knyaz Tarkhanov's house. Raffi was living at the Svechnikov's house in 1884. See Arpiarian's account later.]
- <sup>138</sup> A. Hakhnazarian, 187–189, 319–320.
- <sup>139</sup> *Haykakan Ashkharh* was published in Tiflis from the 1860s until 1871.
- <sup>140</sup> Aharonian, *Raffii kyanke*, 106–107.
- <sup>141</sup> Quoted in V. Aharonian, *Raffii kyanke*, 108.
- <sup>142</sup> Leo, *Grigor Artsruni* 3:10–13.
- <sup>143</sup> Leo, *Grigor Artsruni* 3:13–16; Bayazat, 9:447–450; Topchyan, 11:263–265.
- <sup>144</sup> Aharonian, *Raffii kyanke*, 117.
- <sup>145</sup> Leo, *Grigor Artsruni* 3:64.
- <sup>146</sup> Leo, *Grigor Artsruni* 3:64n.
- <sup>147</sup> Veratsin, 144.
- <sup>148</sup> V. Aharonian, *Raffii kyanke*, 134–135.
- <sup>149</sup> Melik-Hakobian, 364.
- <sup>150</sup> Raffi, *Parskakan patkerner*, XII.
- <sup>151</sup> Raffi, *Salpi*, 36.
- <sup>152</sup> Raffi, *Punj* 1:VIII.
- <sup>153</sup> Samvelyan, *Raffi*, 158.
- <sup>154</sup> *Ararat* was published by the Catholicosate of Ejmiatsin from 1868 to 1919; not to be confused with Gabriyel kahana Patkanian's *Ararat*.
- <sup>155</sup> Khrimian did resign later in the same year.
- <sup>156</sup> Topchyan, 1:189
- <sup>157</sup> Dvortsova or Dvortsovaya Street was renamed Rustaveli during the Soviet period. Bakur Karapetian, *Haryur tarva yerkkhosutiun*, 3.
- <sup>158</sup> Gharadagh: The region just south of Artsakh on the Persian side of Araks River, the Armenian old province of Paytakaran.
- <sup>159</sup> Bayazat, 10:513–514.
- <sup>160</sup> Bayazat, 9:51.
- <sup>161</sup> Melik-Hakobian, 352.
- <sup>162</sup> Shirvanzade (Aleksandr Movsesian, 1858–1935) was born in the region of Shirvan in the Caucasus. He was an author, editor, publisher, and novelist.
- <sup>163</sup> M. Mkryan, *Shirvanzade* 8:470.
- <sup>164</sup> Raffi, *Punj* 2:VIII.
- <sup>165</sup> Petrosyan, 26.
- <sup>166</sup> Raffi, *Salpi*, 16–17, in a notice written by Mrs. Anna Raffi.

- <sup>167</sup> Aharonian, *Raffi kyanke*, 121–122.
- <sup>168</sup> Arthur Leist was a German writer who lived in Tiflis. He translated Georgian and Armenian literary works.
- <sup>169</sup> *Armenische Bibliothek* was published in Leipzig by Leo Rubenli and Arthur Leist. It published Armenian literary works translated into German. The entire third volume was dedicated to some of Raffi's works—*Khaz push*, *Bibi sharabani*, *Harem*, and *Jalaleddin*. The German translation of *Bibi Sharabani* had been published separately in 1881 in the *Berliner Privilegierte Zeitung* commonly called *Vossische Zeitung*.
- <sup>170</sup> Noted in Samvelyan, *Raffi*, 176.
- <sup>171</sup> H. Ter Grigorian, “Ktorner ugheghums kutakvats pasharits,” 190–202; published in *Mshak* in 1913 on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Raffi's death.
- <sup>172</sup> Topchyan, 9:669.
- <sup>173</sup> Topchyan, 12:198.
- <sup>174</sup> Bayazat, 9:84–89; Topchyan, 10:217.
- <sup>175</sup> Topchyan, 10:283.
- <sup>176</sup> Raffi was the first writer in the modern Armenian literary world to make a living from his writings.
- <sup>177</sup> Bayazat, 10:519, 649.
- <sup>178</sup> Bayazat, 10:520–521, 650.
- <sup>179</sup> Topchyan, 12:174–175.
- <sup>180</sup> Bayazat, 10:651.
- <sup>181</sup> Topchyan, 12:176–177.
- <sup>182</sup> Aftandilian, 94.
- <sup>183</sup> Aftandilian, 95.
- <sup>184</sup> Raffi, *Salpi*, 534.
- <sup>185</sup> Aftandilian, 96.
- <sup>186</sup> Bayazat, 10:528–536; Topchyan, 12:181–189.
- <sup>187</sup> *Pordz* (1876–1881) was published in Tiflis as a quarterly until 1879; then a monthly. It was a liberal paper, but it published articles of liberal and conservative writers.
- <sup>188</sup> Raffi, *Parskakan patkerner*, XIII–XIV.
- <sup>189</sup> Topchyan, 10:354–382, 531–532.
- <sup>190</sup> Aftandilian, 98–101.
- <sup>191</sup> Hambardzum Arakelian (1855–1918) was a teacher at the Aramian School in Tavriz and one of Raffi's friends. After Artsruni's death, he became the editor and publisher of *Mshak* from 1913–1918.
- <sup>192</sup> Bayazat, 10:525–527, 651–652.
- <sup>193</sup> Raffi left alone. His family went to Payajuk; later they came to join him in Agulis.
- <sup>194</sup> Iskuhi Hakovbians, “Tavrizi Hay gaghuti,” 90–100.
- <sup>195</sup> Menavor, “Raffi: Tune yev depker,” page number unavailable.
- <sup>196</sup> Bayazat, 10:522.
- <sup>197</sup> Gevorg Harutiunyan, *Raffi yev patanekutiune*, 54.

- <sup>198</sup> Aftandilian, 105–106
- <sup>199</sup> S. Harutiunian, “Raffu steghsagortsutiune,” 1:49.
- <sup>200</sup> Aftandilian, 107–110.
- <sup>201</sup> Aftandilian, 107–111.
- <sup>202</sup> Topchyan, 10:343–352; Bayazat, 9:201–210.
- <sup>203</sup> Topchyan, 10:415–456; Bayazat, 9:220–262.
- <sup>204</sup> Aftandilian, 113.
- <sup>205</sup> Aftandilian, 117–119.
- <sup>206</sup> Aftandilian, 136.
- <sup>207</sup> Aftandilian, 96–97.
- <sup>208</sup> Topchyan, 10:456–464.
- <sup>209</sup> Topchyan, 10:467–468.
- <sup>210</sup> Melik-Abrahamian, “Raffin Julfayum,” 263–264, 343.
- <sup>211</sup> Melik-Zohrabian, “Mankakan hishoghutiunner,” 255–257, 340.
- <sup>212</sup> Melik-Hakobian, 357–358.
- <sup>213</sup> Raffi, *Salpi*, 499–500.
- <sup>214</sup> Topchyan, 10:468–475.
- <sup>215</sup> Goroiants, “Husher Raffii masin,” 158.
- <sup>216</sup> Otyan, 15. See Hovhannisian’s letter in Mrs. Anna Raffi’s introduction to *Parsakan patkerner*, XIII; also, the article and Hovhannisian’s letter in Bayazat, 9:155, 517, respectively.
- <sup>217</sup> Aftandilian, 116.
- <sup>218</sup> Aftandilian, 125.
- <sup>219</sup> Mkrtich Portugalian (1848–1921) was an educator and a journalist, who published the *Armenia* journal in Marseilles. He was the founder of the Armenakan political party, the earliest one advocating Armenia’s liberation.
- <sup>220</sup> Ghazaros Aghayan (1840–1911) was a writer, poet, particularly of children’s poems. Early in his career, he worked as a typesetter and type caster, and he was the editor of several publications.
- <sup>221</sup> Verin Agulis, a town near the Araks River in southern Nakhijevan, which was Russian territory at that time.
- <sup>222</sup> Alashkert: A town north of Lake Van.
- <sup>223</sup> Topchyan, 9:173–229.
- <sup>224</sup> Topchyan, 9:198.
- <sup>225</sup> Topchyan, 9:216–218.
- <sup>226</sup> Topchyan, 10:475–479.
- <sup>227</sup> Samvelyan, *Raffin zhamanakakitsneri husherum*, 263, 343.
- <sup>228</sup> Aftandilian, 125–128; Bayazat, 10:536.
- <sup>229</sup> Hovannisian, *Armenia*, 12.
- <sup>230</sup> Bayazat, 9:265–272; Topchyan, 11:7–14.
- <sup>231</sup> Bayazat, 9:301.
- <sup>232</sup> Bayazat, 9:295–296.
- <sup>233</sup> *Iron Ladle* was a reference to how other nations ladled soup (their freedom) with

iron ladles, the Armenians had come with only paper ladles (petitions), and they were unable to take their portion of soup.

<sup>234</sup> Raffi, *Tachkahayk*, 30.

<sup>235</sup> Topchyan, 11:47.

<sup>236</sup> Leo, *Rusahayots grakanutiune*, 174.

<sup>237</sup> Bayazat, 9:273–278.

<sup>238</sup> Topchyan, 9:217.

<sup>239</sup> Topchyan, 4:445.

<sup>240</sup> Topchyan, 11:57–96.

<sup>241</sup> Goghtn was the Armenian province in the southern part of Nakhijevan, where Agulis was situated.

<sup>242</sup> Petrosyan, 40.

<sup>243</sup> Leo, *Rusahayots grakanutiune*, 174. Raffi wrote editorials, commentaries, essays, and articles also.

<sup>244</sup> Aftandilian, 129; Topchyan, 12:194–195; Bayazat, 10:540–541.

<sup>245</sup> A. Yeramian, “bzhishki iskakan tipe,” 117.

<sup>246</sup> Ananun, *Rusahayeri hasarakakan zargatsume* 2:204–205.

<sup>247</sup> Louise Nalbandian, 67–89; Vratsian, “Dashnaktsutian tsnunde,” 72–76.

<sup>248</sup> Vratsian, “Tavakaliani namaknere,” 103.

<sup>249</sup> Yezidi Kurds practiced a religion that had elements of Armenian religious rituals, such as the fasting on Saints Sargis and Gevorg holy days. They also considered St. Gregory the Illuminator and David as God’s favorites.

<sup>250</sup> *Droshak*: The official organ of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, published in Switzerland then.

<sup>251</sup> Aharonian, *Raffii kyanke*, 173–175.

<sup>252</sup> Samvelyan, *Raffi*, 292–294.

<sup>253</sup> Raffi, *Tachkahayk*, 108–127.

<sup>254</sup> Simon Zavarian was one of the three founding members, along with Kristapor Mikayelian and Stepan Zorian, of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation.

<sup>255</sup> Shirvanzade, “Antsyal demker,” 68.

<sup>256</sup> Kristapor Mikayelian, “Bekorner im husherits,” 60.

<sup>257</sup> Vratsian, *Hushapatum*, 98–99.

<sup>258</sup> R. Sevan, “Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaktsutian,” 78.

<sup>259</sup> Tigran Tigranian, *Anglian yev Hayere*, 113–122. One hundred years later, the letters were discovered by Tigranian in the British government archives.

<sup>260</sup> Vratsian, 77–78.

<sup>261</sup> V. Valadian, “Sargis Kukuniani arshavanke,” 3.

<sup>262</sup> Petrosyan, 38.

<sup>263</sup> Topchyan, 11:305–306.

<sup>264</sup> Raffi, *Kaytser* 1:288.

<sup>265</sup> Bayazat, 5:504.

<sup>266</sup> Quoted by Lang, *Armenia: Cradle of Civilization*, 39.

<sup>267</sup> Lang, *Armenia*, 44.

- <sup>268</sup> Raffi, *Kaytser* 2:484–486.
- <sup>269</sup> Topchyan, 4:448.
- <sup>270</sup> Berberian, “Gamar Katipa,” 129.
- <sup>271</sup> Berberian, “Gamar Katipa,” 104.
- <sup>272</sup> The main character in Raffi’s novel *Khente* is Vardan, who is depicted as a khent—a fool. The novel ends with Vardan’s dream as he lay over the grave of his beloved Lala.
- <sup>273</sup> Topchyan, 4:449–450.
- <sup>274</sup> Bayazat, 10:27–28; Topchyan, 4:449.
- <sup>275</sup> Gabriyel Mirzoian (1857–1902) was a teacher, journalist, literary and community activist. He was a close friend of Raffi at *Mshak*.
- <sup>276</sup> Leo, *Rusahayots Grakanutiune*, 174–180; Topchyan, 4:450.
- <sup>277</sup> Melkon Panian was a merchant from Agulis who lived in Moscow. He had many intellectuals as friends such as Nalbandian, Nazariants, Shahaziz, and Patkanian. He assisted them financially.
- <sup>278</sup> Bayazat, 10:559; Topchyan, 12:214.
- <sup>279</sup> Berberian, “Gamar Katipa,” 136.
- <sup>280</sup> Tserents (Dr. Hovsep Shishmanian) author of *Teodoros Rshtuni* and other novels.
- <sup>281</sup> *Arevelian Mamul* (Eastern Press) was a renowned monthly published by M. Mamurian in Smyrna.
- <sup>282</sup> Bayazat, 9:518–519.
- <sup>283</sup> Bayazat, 9:197.
- <sup>284</sup> Shirvanzade, “Raffi,” 61.
- <sup>285</sup> Haremzade: Harem (harem), Zade (son), i.e., a child of a harem.
- <sup>286</sup> Petrosyan, 45–46.
- <sup>287</sup> Petros Adamian (1849–1891), born in Constantinople, a renowned actor who was invited to Tiflis in 1879 by Gevorg Chmshkian to present plays at the newly established Armenian theater, where he performed for several years. He toured Russia and returned to Tiflis in 1886, then to Constantinople in 1888.
- <sup>288</sup> Samvelyan, *Raffin zhamanakakitsneri husherum*, 207.
- <sup>289</sup> Aharonian, *Raffii kyanke*, 192–193.
- <sup>290</sup> Bayazat, 10:28–34. Topchyan, 11:326–332.
- <sup>291</sup> Bayazat, 9:493–501.
- <sup>292</sup> Bayazat, 10:25–26.
- <sup>293</sup> Topchyan, 10:14.
- <sup>294</sup> Andon Hasuni (1809–1884): Archbishop of Constantinople (1846–1866); Patriarch of the Kilikian Catholic See (1867–1880); Prince of the Church (1881–1884). He founded the Order of the Armenian Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in 1847.
- <sup>295</sup> Varandian, *Haykakan Sharzhman Nakhapatmutiun* 2:263–267.
- <sup>296</sup> Bayazat, 9:81–84.
- <sup>297</sup> Mkryan, *Shirvanzade*, 8:488–489.
- <sup>298</sup> Ormanian, *Church of Armenia*, 186–188

- 299 Petrosyan, 47.
- 300 Berberian, "Gamar Katipa," 130.
- 301 Raffi, *Gharabaghi astghagete*, 312; *Khamsayi melikutiunnere*, 311.
- 302 Bayazat, 10:547–549; Topchyan, 12:202–204.
- 303 Raffi, *Davit Bek*, 156.
- 304 Bayazat, 10:40–45, 625–626; Topchyan, 11:357–362, 499.
- 305 Raffi, *Gharabaghi astghagete*, 317–319.
- 306 Petrosyan, 51.
- 307 Raffi, *Khamsayi melikutiunnere*, 313; Bayazat, 10:587.
- 308 Raffi, *Gharabaghi astghagete*, 313–314.
- 309 Raffi, *Khamsayi melikutiunnere*, 285.
- 310 Karapetian, *Haryur tarva yerkkhosutiun*.
- 311 Topchyan, 12:206–207.
- 312 Raffi, *Gharabaghi astghagete*, 359.
- 313 Aharonian, *Raffii kyanke*, 204.
- 314 Raffi, *Gharabaghi astghagete*, 365.
- 315 In 1886 Raffi was working for *Ardzagank*; he had left *Mshak* in 1884.
- 316 Aharonian, *Raffii kyanke*, 205–208.
- 317 [Leo, *Vep te patmutiun* (Novel or Story?), cited in Barkhutariants's *Aghuanits yerkir*, 8n2]; Topchyan, 9:698.
- 318 P. A. Chobanian, "Barkhutariantsi kyankn," 8.
- 319 P. A. Chobanian, 7.
- 320 Bayazat, 10:151–158.
- 321 Bayazat, 10:57–66, 628–629; Topchyan, 11:385–386, 501–502.
- 322 Shirvanzade, "Raffi," 59.
- 323 Raffi, *Kaytser* 1:273.
- 324 Mkryan, *Shirvanzade*, 8:464.
- 325 Sahakyan, *Raffu gaghaparakhosutiune*, 54.
- 326 Samvelyan, *Raffi*, 315.
- 327 Bayazat, 10:664.
- 328 *Psak* was the first Armenian newspaper in Yerevan published from March 15, 1880 to April 7, 1884.
- 329 Petrosyan, 57n3.
- 330 Vanandetsi, *Raffu Vepere*, 106.
- 331 Bayazat, 8:570–571.
- 332 Bayazat, 8:571–573.
- 333 [The election of the catholicos and the Armenian Question.]
- 334 Topchyan, 12:228–230.
- 335 Bayazat, 10:574–576.
- 336 Bayazat, 10:576–577.
- 337 Bayazat, 10:577–578.
- 338 Bayazat, 10:579–580.
- 339 Bayazat, 10:66–137, 629–639; Topchyan, 11:387–455, 502–506.

- <sup>340</sup> Shirvanzade, "Raffi," 55–56.
- <sup>341</sup> Aharonian, *Raffi kyanke*, 194.
- <sup>342</sup> *Nor Bargirk Haykazian Lezui* (Modern Dictionary of the Armenian Language): published in two volumes, in grabar, the first in 1836, and the second in 1837, by the Mkhitarists of Venice.
- <sup>343</sup> Mkryan, *Shirvanzade* 8:462.
- <sup>344</sup> Shirvanzade, "Raffi," 58.
- <sup>345</sup> Mkryan, *Shirvanzade*, 8:479.
- <sup>346</sup> Petrosyan, 63.
- <sup>347</sup> Petrosyan, 64.
- <sup>348</sup> Mkryan, *Shirvanzade*, 8:466.
- <sup>349</sup> Shirvanzade, "Raffi," 59.
- <sup>350</sup> Mkryan, *Shirvanzade*, 8:485.
- <sup>351</sup> Nerses Abelian was a teacher at the Kevorkian School in Ejmiatsin.
- <sup>352</sup> Bayazat, 10:582–583.
- <sup>353</sup> Petrosyan, 64.
- <sup>354</sup> Mkryan, *Shirvanzade*, 8:467.
- <sup>355</sup> Mkryan, *Shirvanzade*, 8:468.
- <sup>356</sup> Kalantar-Nalbandian, 86.
- <sup>357</sup> Leopold von Sachar-Masoch was a writer born in Lvov, Galicia, (now in Ukraine). The word *masochism* is derived from his name.
- <sup>358</sup> Petrosyan, 66.
- <sup>359</sup> Petrosyan, 67.
- <sup>360</sup> Stepanos Zelinski (1847–1904) was an agriculturist, teacher, writer, and journalist. He taught in Yerevan, and then moved to Tiflis in the 1880s and became one of Raffi's closest friends. He wrote in *Mshak* and *Ardzagank*. In 1882 he climbed Mount Ararat.
- <sup>361</sup> Shirvanzade, "Raffi," 59–61.
- <sup>362</sup> Shirvanzade, "Raffi" 57.
- <sup>363</sup> Mkryan, *Shirvanzade*, 8:467.
- <sup>364</sup> Mkryan, *Shirvanzade*, 8:480–481.
- <sup>365</sup> Shirvanzade, "Raffi," 58.
- <sup>366</sup> Shirvanzade, "Raffi," 58.
- <sup>367</sup> Shirvanzade, "Raffi," 58–59
- <sup>368</sup> Aftandilian, 136.
- <sup>369</sup> Veratsin, 143.
- <sup>370</sup> Shirvanzade, "Antsyal demker," 69–75.
- <sup>371</sup> Leo, *Grigor Artsruni* 3:328–329; Bayazat, 10:605–606.
- <sup>372</sup> Leo, *Grigor Artsruni* 3:329–330.
- <sup>373</sup> Vratsian, "Raffin yev Artsrunin," 64–65.
- <sup>374</sup> The full text of the letters from which Vratsian excerpted are found in Bayazat, 10:584–605; Topchyan, 12:240–263.
- <sup>375</sup> Vratsian, "Raffin yev Artsrunin," 73–74.



- 376 Topchyan, 12:247–248
- 377 Topchyan, 12:249.
- 378 Topchyan, 12:250–251.
- 379 Patriarch Nerses Varzhapetian was elected catholicos in May 1884, but before reaching Ejmiatsin he died in October 1884.
- 380 Topchyan, 12:251–252.
- 381 Avetik Araskhianants was from Agulis and European-educated economist. He taught at the Nersisian and Gayanyan schools. He was at *Mshak* during 1875–1887 and was the editor of *Murch* monthly, 1889–1890. He taught at the Kevorkian Academy in Ejmiatsin, 1901–1911. He became the director of the Armenian school in Akhalkalak, where he died. He was buried in Tiflis.
- 382 Topchyan, 12:261–263.
- 383 Nerses Abelian (1855–1939): journalist, teacher, literary and community activist. He wrote a series of important articles on economics in *Mshak*.
- 384 Samvelyan, *Raffi*, 331.
- 385 Raffi, *Khamsayi melikutiunnere*, 403–404.
- 386 Raffi, *Khamsayi melikutiunnere*, 182.
- 387 Raffi, *Khamsayi melikutiunnere*, 202.
- 388 Raffi, *Khamsayi melikutiunnere*, 342.
- 389 Raffi, *Khamsayi melikutiunnere*, 138.
- 390 Mkryan, *Shirvanzade*, 8:471.
- 391 Mkryan, *Shirvanzade*, 8:476.
- 392 Raffi, *Samvel*, 5–9.
- 393 Mkryan, *Shirvanzade*, 8:471–473.
- 394 Samvelyan, *Raffi*, 337.
- 395 Shirvanzade, “Raffi,” 60.
- 396 S. Sarinyan, “Raffu steghtsagortsutiune,” introduction to Topchyan, 1:24.
- 397 Topchyan, 12:267–269.
- 398 Samvelyan, *Raffi*, 345.
- 399 Mkryan, *Shirvanzade*, 8:479–480.
- 400 Veratsin, 144.
- 401 Shirvanzade, “Raffi,” 60.
- 402 Mkryan, *Shirvanzade*, 8:497.
- 403 Hakobyan, *Raffu paykare*, 3.
- 404 Hakobyan, 5; Raffi, *Kaytser* 2:10.
- 405 Hakobyan, 8.
- 406 Raffi, *Salpi*, 419.
- 407 Hakobyan, 27–28.
- 408 Hakobyan, 28; Topchyan, 12:260.
- 409 Bayazat, 10:147–150
- 410 Mkryan, *Shirvanzade*, 8:492.
- 411 Novo Orlovskaya Street was renamed Svaneli during the Soviet period. Raffi’s address had become Svaneli 6, Karapetian, 4.

- <sup>412</sup> Shirvanzade, "Raffi," 62.
- <sup>413</sup> Makar Chmshkian, "Arajin tsanotutiunes," 227–234, 335–336.
- <sup>414</sup> Gevorg Bashinjaghian (1857–1925) was a painter. He was the first painter to open an art studio in Tiflis, in 1883.
- <sup>415</sup> Samvelyan, *Raffi*, 351–352.
- <sup>416</sup> Shirvanzade, "Raffi," 62.
- <sup>417</sup> Aharonian, *Raffii kyanke*, 235. According to Vardges Aharonian, Shirvanzade was incorrect about Proshiants' age. Proshiants was not older than Raffi, he actually was a year younger being born in 1838. (Aharonian based Proshiants' age on Raffi's birth date of 1837). Proshiants died in 1907.
- <sup>418</sup> In 1888, Armenian Easter was on April 24, according to the Julian calendar used by the Armenian Church until 1923. Easter, according to the Gregorian calendar, was on April 1.
- <sup>419</sup> Parsamian, "Raffi," 18–19; Haykazuni, *Raffii ezgali mahe*, 26.
- <sup>420</sup> Shirvanzade, "Raffi," 62.
- <sup>421</sup> Berberian, "Gamar Katipayi kartsike," 94–100.
- <sup>422</sup> Shirvanzade, "Antsyal demker," 76.
- <sup>423</sup> Haykazuni, *Raffii ezgali mahe*, 26–28.
- <sup>424</sup> Petrosyan, 92.
- <sup>425</sup> Shirvanzade, "Raffi," 63.
- <sup>426</sup> Cited in Petrosyan, 90–91.
- <sup>427</sup> Cited in Petrosyan, 91.
- <sup>428</sup> Aharonian, *Raffii kyanke*, 241.
- <sup>429</sup> Haykazuni, *Raffii ezgali mahe*, 26–28.
- <sup>430</sup> Kajaznuni: The first Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia.
- <sup>431</sup> The translation of the poem was done by Simeon Hakhumian.
- <sup>432</sup> Yevgeni Stalinski was the Russian editor of the *Kavkaz* newspaper.
- <sup>433</sup> Parsamian, 7–24.
- <sup>434</sup> Parsamian, 7–24.
- <sup>435</sup> The poem concludes Raffi's *Aghtamara vanke* article. Several of the stanzas have been put to music and the resulting song is titled *Dzayn tur ov tsovak*—the song's first line.
- <sup>436</sup> Tekeyan, "Raffi," 57.
- <sup>437</sup> A. Aharonian, "Raffi: ksanyevhing amyakin," 7–17; "Raffi: 35-Amyaki artiv," 47–64.
- <sup>438</sup> Aftandilian, 131–138.
- <sup>439</sup> Aghayan, 69–74, 307–308.
- <sup>440</sup> Mkryan, *Shirvanzade*, 8:461.
- <sup>441</sup> Shirvanzade, "Raffi," 63.
- <sup>442</sup> [At the beginning of April, at the Kamoian Church parish meeting, the representatives elected Raffi as auditor to examine treasurer Hakimian's books. Abgar Hovhannisian had considered Raffi's election illegal. Shirvanzade had regretted his inability to warn Raffi to decline taking the responsibility.]

- <sup>443</sup> [In November 1860, Mkrtich Khrimian along with Garegin Sruandztian, Hrachia Sevikian, and Haji Mikayel traveled to the Caucasus to raise funds for the Varag Seminary and *Artsvi Vaspurakan* monthly. In the middle of 1861, Khrimian unexpectedly left with Sevikian, while Sruandztian and Haji Mikayel continued with their mission.]
- <sup>444</sup> Atanasian, 216–220, 330–333.
- <sup>445</sup> Grigor Artsruni, 169–176, 314–316.
- <sup>446</sup> Gevorg Chmshkian, 205–206, 323–324.
- <sup>447</sup> [Raffi lived at the inn from the beginning of 1872 until early in 1874. He moved into an apartment near the Sion (Zion) Church, at Knyaz Tarkhanov's house. He lived there until his departure for Tavrız in September 1875. When he permanently settled in Tiflis after returning from Agulis in 1879, he lived at the Svechnikov's house. See Arpiarian's account of visiting Raffi in 1884.]
- <sup>448</sup> Ter Grigorian, 190–202, 320–322.
- <sup>449</sup> Goroiants, 158–159.
- <sup>450</sup> Arpiarian, "Raffi yev hay vipasanutiune," 177–181, 317–318.
- <sup>451</sup> Arpiarian, "Raffii herapatkere," 48–49.
- <sup>452</sup> Kalantar, 182–186, 318–319.
- <sup>453</sup> Vardanian, 203–204, 322–323.
- <sup>454</sup> Zakarian, 221–225, 334–335.
- <sup>455</sup> Stepanian, 210–211, 326–327.
- <sup>456</sup> A. M——ian, 234–244, 336–337.
- <sup>457</sup> [Time has shown that Leist was wrong. Even now, Raffi's books are popular. Obviously, as a European, he lacked Armenians' emotional connection with the issues raised by Raffi, some of which are still contemporary.]
- <sup>458</sup> Leist, 293–294, 346–347.
- <sup>459</sup> Sarukhan, 111–116.
- <sup>460</sup> Nazarian, 207–209, 324–326. [Raffi's children sold newspapers on the streets to earn a small income.]
- <sup>461</sup> A. Abeghian, 88–93.
- <sup>462</sup> Berberian, "Raffii hanchare," 58–73.
- <sup>463</sup> Berberian, "Gamar Katipayi kartsike," 94–100.
- <sup>464</sup> S. Gabamajian, *Raffi*, 10–30.
- <sup>465</sup> [Eastern Question was the title of a booklet published in Russian by Grigor Artsruni. It was translated into English.]
- <sup>466</sup> Boyajian, 106–110.
- <sup>467</sup> Vratsian, *Hushapatum*, 68–81; "Raffi," *Vem*, 59–78.
- <sup>468</sup> Hagop Oshagan, 75–87.
- <sup>469</sup> Vanandetsi, *Raffi vepere*.
- <sup>470</sup> Yeramian, 117–121. [Yeramian interviewed 81-year-old Dr. Navasardian in Tiflis in 1933.]
- <sup>471</sup> Adonts, 122–148.
- <sup>472</sup> Hamastegh, 49–59.



- <sup>473</sup> Chobanian, 50–56.  
<sup>474</sup> Atamian, 78–79.  
<sup>475</sup> V. Oshagan, “Modern Armenian Literature,” 2:164.  
<sup>476</sup> Zardarian, 149–155.  
<sup>477</sup> Sahakian, *Raffi gaghaparakhosutiune*, 58  
<sup>478</sup> Sahakian, 59. [On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Raffi’s death.]  
<sup>479</sup> Sahakian, 59.  
<sup>480</sup> Sahakian, 60.  
<sup>481</sup> Sahakian, 60.  
<sup>482</sup> [Varandian, “Armenian Revolutionary Federation,” 65–79.]  
<sup>483</sup> Varandian, “Raffi: Mahvan karasnamyaki ativ,” 67–80.



# Appendix

## Raffi's Novels and Their First Publication Dates

*Punj*: Two volumes, self published in 1874.

*Jalaleddin*: First published serially in *Mshak* starting in May 1878; in book form in 1884 in Tiflis.

*Khente*: First published serially in *Mshak* starting in February, 1880; in book form in 1881 in Shushi.

*Davit Bek*: Parts one and two were published serially in *Mshak* starting in December 1880. Part three was published serially in *Mshak* starting in December 1881. Part one and part two were published separately in book form in 1881 and 1882, respectively. All three parts were published in book form in one volume in 1882.

*Voski akaghaghe*: Published serially in *Mshak* in 1879; in book form in 1882.

*Khachagoghi hishatakarane*: Published serially in *Mshak* starting in 1882 and ending in 1883. Parts one and two were published in book form in 1882; parts three and four in 1884.

*Khamsayi melikutiunnere*: Published serially in *Mshak* in May 1882; in book form in 1882.

*Gharabaghi astghagete*: A translation from the Russian, it was published in 1882.

*Kaytser* volume one: Published in book form in 1883.

*Psak*: Consisted of a collection of Raffi's works, it was published in 1884 by a group of students in Tiflis on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Raffi's literary contributions.

*Kayeni ktake*: A translation from the Russian. It was published in 1884.

*Paruyr Haykazn*: Published in *Aghbiur* in 1884.

*Gaghtnik Gharabaghi*: Published serially in *Ardzagank* in 1886; also in 1906 by the Vienna Mkhitarists.

*Kaytser* volume two: Published in book form in 1887.

*Gharib mshetsin*: Written in 1879, but published serially in *Ardzagank* in 1886.

*Samvel*: First published serially in *Ardzagank* in 1886-1887; in book form in 1888.

*Zahrumar*: Published posthumously by Anna Raffi in 1895 in Tiflis.

*Hay kine yev Hay yeritasardutiune*: Published posthumously by Anna Raffi in 1889 in Tiflis.

*Minn ayspes, miusn aynpes*: Published posthumously by Anna Raffi in 1890 in Tiflis.

*Salpi*: Published posthumously by Anna Raffi in 1911 in Vienna.

*Hayotz patmutiun*: Written during Raffi's teaching years in Tavriz from September 1875 to May 1877, and at the girls' and boys' schools in Verin Agulis from September 1877 to 1879. He wrote it for his history classes because Armenian history textbooks were not available at the schools. This work was not published by him or by Anna Raffi, who had intended to publish it, but she did not attain her wish. The manuscript remained with the Vienna Mkhitarists until they made it available in 1982 to the editors (Tophchian, et al.) of *Raffi: Collected Works*. Thus, finally *Hayots patmutiun* appeared in its entirety in printed form in volume nine of the series.

In 1896, "Yerku amis Aghvanits yev Siuniats ashkharhnerum" was published in *Luma* in Tiflis.

### Foreign Translations and Their First Publication Dates

#### Russian

*Voski akaghaghe*: Published in 1892 in Tiflis, translated by N. Kara-Murza.

*Khente*: Published in Tiflis in 1892 in Tiflis, translated by N. Kara-Murza.

*Jalaleddin*: Published in Moscow in 1912, translated by N. Bahatryan.

*Samvel*: Published in Moscow in 1946, translated by A. Ter Karapetov and I. Yerevantsian.

*Bibi-Sharabani*: Published in Tiflis in 1889, translated by I. Vermisheva.

*Kaytser*: Several chapters from both volumes were translated by Yuri Vasilovski and Minas Berberian and published in 1892 in their first volume of collected works.

*Kaytser*: In 1912, S. Sargsyan translated several chapters and published in a collection of Armenian literature, in Tiflis.

In 1916, S. Arutiunova's translated chapters appeared in a book edited by Maxim Gorki.

In 1917 when Gorki was planning to publish his collection of international literature, among his several Armenian collaborators was Vahan Terian, who translated the first volume of *Kaytser* to include it in Gorki's second volume.

**Georgian**

*Vepikner*: Translated by M. Chmshkryan, published in Tiflis.

*Parskakan patkerner*: Translated by M. Chmshkryan, published in Tiflis.

*Vepikner yev patkerner*: Translated by D. Ter Davtyan, published in Tiflis.

*Patkerner*: Translated by D. Ter Davtyan, published in Tiflis.

*Khente*: Published in Tiflis in 1903 in *Moabe* monthly.

**German**

*Bilder aus Persien und Turkisch-Armenien*, contained “Bibi sharabani,” “Khaz-Push,” “Harem,” “Jalaleddin,” was published by Leo Rubenli (Abgar Hovhannisian) in volume three of *Armenische Bibliothek*, in Leipzig in 1887.

*Sove, Bibi Sharabani, Khaz-Push*: Published in Vienna in 1912, translated by Paskal Ohanyants.

**French**

*Parskakan Patkerner* (Contes persans): Published in 1902 in Paris, contained “Bibi Scharabani” and “Les khaz-pouches,” translated by Abgar Hovhannisian (Hoannisian).

*Jalaleddin*: Published serially in *Revue des revues* in 1896-1897.

*Samvel*: Published in two volumes by Altian and Kibarian in Paris in 1924.

**Polish**

*Parskakan patkerner*: Date and place not available.

**English**

*Parskakan patkerner* under the title “The Araxes” was published in *Ararat* in London, translated by Zabel Boyajian.

*Jalaleddin*: Published serially in *Armenia* from July 1906 to January 1907 in Boston, translated by Khorene M. Antdreasian.

*Kaytser* (Fire-Sparks): Published in *Ara* (Journal of Literature and Armenian Politics and History) in 1893 (vol. 2, nos. 1-12) and in 1894 (vol. 3, nos. 1-7), in Calcutta, translated by H. Basil.

*Samvel*: Published in *The Armenian Review*, from Spring 1948 to Winter 1951, in Boston, translated by James Tashjian.

*The Fool* (Khente): Published in Boston in 1950, translated by J. S. Wingate.

*The Golden Rooster* (Voski akaghaghe): Published serially in *The Armenian* in Calcutta in 1908-1909, translated by J. Pyrantz.



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**Spanish**

*Les memorias del Hurtacruz*: Published in Buenos Aires in 1949, translated by B. Agemian.





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“A nation will find it hard to forget such a man because that kind of a man carries in his heart the nation’s sorrow and joy. . . Your efforts and works left a true memory in every Armenian’s heart.”

— Ilia Javjevadze, Georgian poet and publisher (1888)

“Raffi is the real founder of the Eastern Armenian modern language. Raffi set the foundations of Armenian literary prose . . . He was the true pioneering theorist of the Armenian revolutionary movement.”

— Shirvanzade, novelist (1924)

“Raffi was a poet-novelist and a visionary prophet, who felt what was elusive to thousands and saw what was invisible to mortal eyes.

— Avetis Aharonian, author, diplomat (1937)

“Raffi produced a working plan of what Khrimian and Varzhapetian were preaching—a liberation movement.”

— Simon Vratsian, author, publisher, prime minister (1937)

“The works of generations of authors after Raffi could not surpass the language he developed. Raffi’s lengthy works are the greatest of the entire Armenian literature.”

— Hagop Oshagan, author and publisher (1937)

“During fifteen centuries of Armenian culture, Raffi has stood alone and unequaled . . . Internally he was a consuming fire and a flaming fountain that erupted from the depths of the people’s spirit with bold and rousing thunder . . . He is a titan born of the Armenian people.”

— Mikayel Vardanian, historian and diplomat (1938)

“He shook a dying people into consciousness, and it remained for his followers to decide on a course of action . . . His style, his rhetoric, and prophetic insight have made him immortal.”

— Sarkis Atamian, historian and author (1955)

“Raffi’s work was the most successful application of the ideas of enlightenment and political awakening.”

— Vahé Oshagan, author and academician (1997)

