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Abdullah Qadiri and "Bygone Days"

Abstract

Days gone by, Qodiriy's novel, written during the 1902s. At that period Uzbek identity was being formed as an ethnicity that would later underpin the formation of an independent Muslim republic of Uzbek people. His novel could be viewed as the representation of history of the Uzbek people. The article provides an overview of Qodiriy's life and his novel. Major themes of the novel are elucidated to provide a bridge between the author's period and Uzbekistan today. Most notably, Mr. Reese explores the chapters A Young Man Suitable for the Khan's Daughter and Hajji Shakes the Hem of His Robe; in which he renounces Worldly Affairs to gain an oversight of Qodirriy's reform agenda as well as the conflicts surrounding ethnic identity, through an overview of Azizbek's character. The final portion of the article provides commentary on the link between national identity and the novel.

Key words: novel, period, national mentality, oriental thinking, artistic skills.

Abdulla Qodiriy va "O'tgan kunlar"

Abstrakt

Oʻtgan kunlar, Qodiriyning 1902-yillarda yozilgan romani. Bu davrda oʻzbek xalqi oʻziga xos etnos sifatida shakllandi, keyinchalik u oʻzbek xalqining mustaqil musulmon respublikasini shakllantirishiga zamin yaratdi. Qodiriy romanini oʻzbek xalqi tarixining bosib oʻtgan yoʻli, qiyofasi sifatida qabul qilish mumkin. Maqolada Qodiriy hayoti va uning romani haqida umumiy ma'lumot berilgan. Muallif yashagan davr va zamonaviy Oʻzbekiston oʻrtasidagi farqlarni koʻrsatish maqsadida romanning diqqatga sazovor oʻrinlari tahlilga tortilgan. Xususan, "Xonning qiziga yaroqli yigit" va "Hoji etak silkkan" boblari koʻrib chiqilgan; unda Qodiriyning yangicha islohotlar dasturi, shuningdek, etnik xoslik atrofidagi mojarolarni yoritish uchun Azizbekning fe'l-atvoriga umumiy nuqtayi nazardan qarahlariga e'tibor qaratilgan. Maqolaning yakuniy qismida milliy oʻziga xoslik va roman oʻrtasidagi bogʻliqlik sharhlangan.

Kalit soʻzlar: roman, davr, milliy mentalitet, sharqona tafakkur, badiiy mahorat.

Introduction

Abdulla Oodiriy was born on April 11, 1894 and died in Tashkent in October of 1938 as a victim of Joseph Stalin's Great Terror. Qodiriy represented one of the troika of great Central Asian reformers along with Abdulrauf Fitrat and Cholpan – who played major roles in the efflorescence of cultural activity after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. During this period, Central Asia witnessed a deluge of intellectual pursuits that produced a standardized Uzbek prose, a canon of Uzbek literature to include novels, poems, short stories and plays that brought attention to the need for Central Asian society to modernize in order to gain self-rule a phenomenon, at times as a pejorative, referred to as the Jadid movement [Khalid, 2015]. The Jadids beginning in the mid to late nineteenth century sued for reform of common customs and practices along modern lines in order to achieve a society on the same level of development as the Ottoman and Russian Empires, and later modern Turkey and Soviet Russia. With the fall of autocratic rule, the Jadids initially saw the Bolshevik revolution as an opportunity to advance their agenda.

Qodiriy is arguably the most beloved among those who perished in 1938. His two main novels, O'tkan Kunlar and Mehrobdan Choyon, or The Scorpion from the Mihrab, standardized Uzbek prose and provided the benchmark for aspiring Uzbek authors. His plays, such as "The Pederast", depicted the moral degradation of Central Asian society, in this case through the trials and tribulations of a Bacha, or dancing boy, and the effects this predatory practice has on the life of a young man. Jadid plays were especially important as they represented an oral tradition recognizable to a largely illiterate society. A salient point to all of Qodiriy's work is that he drew upon the struggles of the common man, or woman, in Central Asia rendering them into a language evocative, humorous, and often dripping with sarcasm.

Abdulla Qodiriy was very much his own man. He came from a family of simple means and through his own force of intellect managed to achieve both a Madrassah and modern education, most notably through the Russian model. Comfortable in Turkic, Persian, Arabic, and Russian, Qodiriy began his career as a scribe for a Tashkent merchant but found his way to the Briusov Institute to study journalism in Moscow by 1924 [Allworth 1990].

After the publication of O'tkan Kunlar in 1926 as a full novel Qodiriy found himself in jail perhaps for using his characteristic wit against the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist

Party of Uzbekistan in the journal Mushtum (The Fist), where he served as Editor [Oodiry 2005]. Post arrest Abdulla Oodiriy refrained from working in the press, but engaged in work as a translator. He is well known for having translated Gogol's Marriage and Anton Chekhov's the Cherry Orchard. Throughout the 1930s he continued to write and eventually became a delegate to the Uzbekistan Writer's Union. In keeping with his practice of drawing upon the tableau of life presented by the common man, Oodiriy traveled to the collective farms of the UzSSR in order to write Obid Ketman, 1932-1934 in serial form. His work was eventually vilified as nationalistic and antagonistic to Soviet rule and he was arrested in 1937. Between October 4th and 5th 1938 Abdulla Qodiriy died alongside many of his fellow compatriots in a mass execution of Uzbek intellectuals mostly under the accusation of nationalism [Khalid 2015]. Such is the emotional dissonance of Abdulla Qodiriy's work and life he was the first of those murdered in 1938 to be rehabilitated in 1956 [Allworth] 1964]. Almost every Uzbek of that generation can remember the time they were first allowed to own a copy of O'tkan Kunlar.

Since 2016, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev acknowledged Abdullah Qodiriy's contributions in forming Uzbek literature by establishing the Qodiriy household as a museum as well as establishing a school in his name. President Mirziyoyev himself has often referred to O'tkan Kunlar in his speeches when justifying his reforms.

The following paper will explore salient aspects of Abdullah Qodiri'ys novel O'tkan Kunlar that speak to picture Qodiriy's vision of reform. We will consider the novel's place as the origin story of the Uzbek people as we know them, with the hero Otabek bringing that vision to modern readerships. We will juxtapose both Otabek and his father, Yusufbek Hajji, to the character of Azizbek – the rebellious Hakim of Tashkent – to illustrate how corruption and factionalism within the Khanate of Kokand led to its demise. Finally, a few words will be said on the place of translation of Uzbek literature that remains the ideal vehicle in which to deliver to the world the Republic of Uzbekistan's vision of its own future.

Origin Story of the Uzbek People (As we know them today)

As the English language title for O'tkan Kunlar – Bygone Days – suggests, temporality was a central concern in Abdullah Qodiriy's masterful novel of 19th century Central Asia in decline. One could say that by creating an allegory of the past, to depict his present, the author provides a stark warning for future generations – thus we could consider his novel the origin story of the Uzbek people as we know them today.

First and foremost, Abdullah Oodiriy's worldview was that of a forward-thinking Muslim reformer. He wished to modernize what he saw as a corrupt and decaying Central Asian form of governance ill suited for the demands of the modern world. The nostalgia expressed in O'tkan Kunlar did not mean he completely mourned the loss of the old world. He wished to alter to his own agenda a cultural landscape dear to him while still maintaining his essential identity. The author sought to use the past as a device to illustrate and to weigh the overwhelming sense of dislocation felt from the events of his day. Qodiriy's 19th century Central Asia was not depicted as an Eden by the author. He held no illusions of an ideal, grandiose past. Indeed, the author's most biting criticisms in the novel pointed toward the moral turpitude within his own contemporary society and sought to draw upon the 15th century of the Timurids as his model for inspiration. The enemies on the horizon, e.g. the Russians, were seen as sort of a force of nature destined to meet the hero of the novel with his demise at Ayliyo Ata. Otabek son of Yusufbek Hajji, Yet. perhaps, for all of Qodiriy's criticisms towards 19th century Central Asia, throughout his masterpiece the reader discerns the bitterness the author felt toward his failed venture.

What we have then in O'tkan Kunlar was an indictment of the political, economic, and cultural shifts that wracked early 20th century Turkistan through an allegory of the past. Qodiriy through the tropes of Memory and Loss forewarned his readers not just of the death of the ecumenical world that formed the Turco-Perso-Indo-Arab culture typical to the Central Asia of his youth. He foretold what the dissolution of his hopes and dreams for reform held for their own lives—we will have our world dictated to us, we will forever pine with the hope of self-rule.

Perhaps one of the fantastic elements of O'tkan Kunlar is that the author speaks directly to the reader throughout the text. He lays out his program from the first pages and keeps his audience informed throughout.

From the Author

Since it seems we have set foot in a new era, fine, we should follow the spirit of this new age and its innovative forms of expression and, just as with those who wrote dastans, we should renew our creative impulse through the novel and the short story – and in that vein, I am also driven by a sense of obligation to familiarize our people with the Tahirs and Zuhras, the four dervishes, the Farhods and Shirins, and the Bahram Gurs of our time.

As such, I have had a strong desire to experiment with our era's means of capturing the creative impulse, namely the novel, and in so

doing, I have fulfilled my goal by producing O'tkan Kunlar. One could say that people can only further advance their skills through slow, methodical development and through meeting their shortcomings face to face at the outset of their endeavor. My wish has been to put this aphorism to test and not shrink in fear from my many failures and setbacks, which are often attached to one so overly enthusiastic.

They say that history will teach us the mistakes of the past. With that in mind I have drawn upon the darkest and filthiest days of our history, not so long ago, mind you, that being the epoch of the khans.

When one considers the historical injury caused by Joseph Stalin's Great Terror, an attempt to rewrite the collective memories of a vast swathe of the globe, one can appreciate the Uzbek people stridently revivifying their lost heroes post-Independence in 1991. The story of Amir Timur and his Timurids is not just a story of their achievements and contributions towards the development of humanity. If taken within context of the turmoil of the last century, whenever an Uzbek lays flowers at Amir Timur's tomb Gur Amir to recall distant greatness, they are also remembering the sacrifices made by the Jadids to preserve their memory in the face of brutal repression.

A Young Man Suitable for the Khan's Daughter

In Chapter Two, Volume One, of O'tkan Kunlar, titled A Young Man Suitable for the Khan's Daughter, Qodiriy as a Jadid writing in the pivotal years of the 1920s, illustrates his novel's intent regarding political issues in both 19th and 20th century Central Asia [Khalid 1964]. Our hero Otabek, during his visit to Margilan, attends one of the great institutions of civil society from Turkey to Western China, namely the Gap. Qodiriy himself belonged to the Gap Gurungi. Gurungi translates from Chaghatay as "discussion." Gap, from the verb Gapermok is its modern Uzbek equivalent. The Chaghatay Gurungi's ideological bent was the development of a modern Uzbek language based upon Chaghatay but stripped of its Persian and Arabic loan words. Adeeb Khalid uses the term "Chagatayism" to describe the Jadid use of Chaghatay during the period of national delimitation in 1924 to appropriate all of Turkistan's sedentary peoples as Uzbek [Khalid 1964].

So Otabek attends a Gap and through him we gain a blueprint of what constitutes Qodiriy's view of modern forms of governance. We will see later in the novel Qodiriy's criticisms on Russian rule. In chapter two, however, Otabek explains to those attending that after spending time in Shamai, present day Semei or Semipalatinsk in northern Kazakhstan/ southern Russia as a trader, he feels that the

Kokand Khanate was merely playing at governance. In order to gain, to use a Soviet term, parity with Imperialist Russia he would have to take aspects of that system and incorporate them into the court of the Kokand Khanate – something Otabek concedes to be a pipe dream. Here a longer passage illustrating Qodiriy's views through his hero Otabek is appropriate:

"Before going to Shamai, I thought that all government systems were like ours", stated Otabek, "but my travels there changed this opinion. My experiences deeply affected my beliefs about life, transforming me. When I saw the Russian government's policies, I realized that our leadership's approach and tenets are frivolous, as if we are playing at governance. I cannot imagine what will happen to our situation if our government continues with this current anarchy... When I was in Shamai, I thought that if I had wings, I would fly to my motherland, I would descend directly upon the khan's palace and implement each and every one of Russia's governmental policies. The khan would take heed of my proclamations, writing decrees benefiting all levels of society, ruling by enlightened Russian ideas. In one month I would see my people on the same level as the Russians. But when I returned to my homeland, my dreams and aspirations showed themselves to be mere fantasy. No one would listen to me. Even when there were people who were willing to listen, they would retort, 'Will the khans listen to your dreams, and will the beks even carry them out?' With this simple question they shattered my dreams. At first I could not fathom that they actually believed their own words, but later I found that they spoke the truth. Indeed, who will listen to the prayers of the dead baring their soul to the living? Will those already buried in a cemetery listen to calls for help? Who will listen?" [Qodiriy 2019].

We must keep in mind that Abdullah Qodiriy spent a year in Russia studying journalism at the Briusov Institute from 1924-1925 and went on to translate Gogol's "Marriage" and Anton Chekhov's "The Cherry Orchard" from Russian into Uzbek. So, western methods of governance, modern teaching methodology, curriculum development, and social reform had a profound impact on the Jadids while they traveled abroad, a notable example would be the Bukharan Jadid Abdul Rauf Fitrat's who spent time in Europe and Istanbul [Allworth 2002].

Yet despite Qodiriy's admiration for Russian governance as seen through the character Otabek, the Jadids did not wish to sacrifice their own Muslim identities to western culture hence O'tkan Kunlar's place in post-colonial literature. In the same dialogue the elders mention Umar Khan, one of the great leaders of Kokand during the Khanate's ascendancy and expansion [Qodiriy 2019]. So while we

see an acknowledgement of great moments in Central Asian history, yet Qodiriy evokes a collective memory of when Central Asia had capable rulers ready and able to defend their Khanate's interests on their own terms.

Throughout the rest of the chapter Otabek illustrates to the reader the idea of social reform, namely modernizing the institution of marriage. The issue of polygamous marriages, arranged marriages, taking a spouse out of love and especially the domestic discord sown by the institution of the Kundosh, or multiple wives in a man's home, continue as a major story line for the rest of the narration and eventually lead to the novel's tragic ending.

As Adeeb Khalid demonstrated in Making Uzbekistan, the ladid movement, in which Qodiriy played a role, saw the Revolution of 1917 as an opportunity to create an Uzbek nation state along modern lines [Khalid 1964]. Those reformists engaged in a cultural entrepreneurship that meant the solidification of what it meant to be what Edward Allworth called a 'Modern Uzbek'—just as other national movements around the world sought the same lofty goals [Khalid 1964]. As Khalid shows, the objectives of the Jadids were eventually subsumed by the more cynical agendas of the Bolsheviks. We must caution against generalizations, but the new leadership of the Soviet Republics had no intention of allowing self-rule among Central Asians [Khalid 1964]. Their intent was to placate local notables until they solidified power, especially during the Civil War period. The creation, then, of the Soviet Socialist Central Asian Republics, once a hope to assert the Jadids' vision of a national identity, represented the most cataclysmic event of their lifetime. Instead of self-rule, a world was created along homogenized colonial lines.

As a reform minded individual, he hoped to preserve the basic elements and character of his society while grafting it to new forms of expression and governance. The 1924 Delimitation of Borders that brought the SSR to Central Asia put an end to that agenda as the cacophony of peoples became nationalized through a largely political process – one that Adeeb Khalid argues Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks had a hand in forming [Khalid 1964]. One could say by looking back at his 'Bygone Days' Qodiriy mourned his present predicament and the foreboding the future holds for his worldview and the potential it promised.

Azizbek: Symbol of Corruption and Factionalism

Beginning in Chapter Two of O'tkan Kunlar, A Young Man Suitable for the Khan's Daughter, we first hear mention of one of the primary villains depicted throughout Volume One of the novel, Azizbek Parvonchi. Placed by Musulmanqul, young Khudayar Khan's regent, into the position as Hakim of Tashkent, Azizbek's character represents the socio-cultural tensions that run throughout the novel, namely the issues of endemic corruption and factional rivalries weakening the Kokand Khanate.

Azizbek was in fact a historical character. He was appointed as Hakim of Tashkent in 1846 enjoying Qipchak support through Musulmangul's faction in Khudavar Khan's court [Vohidov, Khalikova 2009, 42]. Historical records indicate, one of the primary sources of civil discontent throughout the Khanate but especially in Tashkent was over-taxation of the local population [Geiss 2003, 44-45]. One could easily chalk this off to simple greed but much deeper motivations for over-taxation were at play in nineteenth century Turkistan. As Paul Georg Geiss clearly states, when, in the case of Azizbek, a Hakim of a municipality was appointed they often strategically placed their own relatives into positions of authority. Increase in taxes often accounted for not only their personal wealth, that could shift according to the vicissitudes of court life, but to continue funding the network of tribal and familial associations placed into power. In fact, a ruler's power was often contingent on their ability to provide wealth for those within their group. Hence security for a ruler was what we call "the self-licking ice cream cone": he taxes because he must appease the constituency, both patron and tribal group, that put him into power while attempting to bolster his rule. As long as he provides taxes and troops to the Khan, the Khan is happy. As long as his tribal group continues to prosper, they support his rule with troops and other forms of support.

In the case of Azizbek, as depicted by Qodiriy, we have an especially egregious example of overreach in regard to taxation. Azizbek was appointed Hakim over a population already bereft of funds through over-taxation. Perhaps through hubris, or simply survival for being assigned to rule a population disposed toward unrest, he led a rebellion against Khudayar Khan in 1847 ostensibly, ironically, to protest against Qipchaq influence in Khudyar Khan's court and the onerous taxes placed against Tashkent's population.

As mentioned above Khudayar Khan's court was riven with internecine disputes. Sedentary groups opposed the rise of the nomadic factions that placed Khudayar Khan on the throne; nomadic tribal groups fought against other tribal groupings in order to wrest power from a weak ruler. Again, Geiss makes a salient point: The Kokand Khanate was established far later than the Emirate of Bukhara. The Ming tribesmen who controlled the throne notably spurned any real or imagined claim to Chinggisid lineage – aspiring rulers almost always married someone of Chinggisid blood in order

to obtain Chinggis Khan's Turkic-Mongol bone fides – therefore eschewing an important marker of credibility among Central Asian populations [Geiss 2003, 44–45]. So, because of the marked presence of tribal groups in the Ferghana Valley and their active presence in court politics and a new paradigm for rule, those who held power within the borders of the Kokand Khanate did not hold the traditional awe and respect for those on the throne in Kokand.

Accordingly, Khudayar Khan came to power through the support of Musulmanqul and his Qipchaq tribal factions. In the chapter Bloody Clouds over Tashkent then we see Khudayar Khan with his military leader Nur Muhammad Qushbegi, also a Qipchaq, attempt to wrest power from Azizbek and regain control of Tashkent, only to be pushed back through superior tactics and firepower in Chapter 15, Tashkent under Siege. Subsequently, in Chapters 16, Azizbek, 18, Announcement, and 21, Revolution, we witness events turn against the victorious Azizbek as he hypocritically announces an onerous increase in taxes in order to refill his coffers after an extended conflict [Qodiriy 2019].

Qodiriy does take the liberty of an historical novelist by not informing the reader that the hero, Nur Muhammad Qushbegi, that eventually regains Tashkent through the help of Otabek's father, Yusufbek Hajji, represented one of Musulmanqul's Qipchaq rivals and at one point was guilty of over-taxation of the region under his control, namely Qurama [Timur, Beisembiev 2003]. One is left to wonder if Qodiriy engages in selective memory in order to move along the narrative.

This string of events leads to the most tragic moments in O'tkan Kunlar. With the conquest of Tashkent by Khudayar Khan's forces, we see the installment of Nur Muhammad Qushbegi, again an ethnic Qipchag as the new Hakim of Tashkent. What follows then is a purge or ethnic cleansing of Qipchag elements from the Khanate of Kokand by sedentary elites as seen in the Volume 3, Chapter 3 Massacre of the Oipchags. We know from multiple historical sources that in fact this historical event did occur within the Khanate and meant the loss of thousands of lives [Rise 2017]. Thus, if O'tkan Kunlar is the first full-length Uzbek novel then perhaps we can consider it the first depiction of ethnic cleansing within Uzbek literature. Perhaps we can also consider it a literary basis for Human Rights within Uzbek letters as well, through Yusufbek Hajji renouncing the internecine fighting that wracks the Khanate. In Volume 3, Chapter 9, Hajji Shakes the Hem of His Robe; In Which He Renounces Worldly Affairs, we see Otabek's father, Yusufbek Hajji make an appeal to decency within the Khanate:

"I resign myself to the despair of not knowing whether our

nation will ever achieve a degree of civility... From infancy, as far as I can remember, my gaining of accolades, further power, or greater titles have shown no meaning—my sole concern in engaging in such work has been toward benefiting the lives of Muslims. All told, all my efforts have shown me to be a naive child manipulated by sycophants chasing the titles qushbegi and mingboshi... That same individual we know as the Shah-an-Shah has lent his ear to the contemptible counsel of these dissolute schemers and disregards the counsel of his own community. Meanwhile, I was one of those people who saved him from the disaster of Musulmanqul. So, there we have it. The council of those who engage in obfuscation is well received. The learned and wise are deceived as if they were small, naive children..."

Vast amounts of academic energy have been expended in outlining the process of 'creating' the national identities of the Former Soviet Central Asian Republics – the taxonomy of Us and Them. Missing from many of those worthy efforts has been a deep textual analysis of literary works from their source languages. Political, economic, administrative documents may give the reader the modus operandi of a moment in history, but literature divines from the author's soul his raison d'etre. That spark of creation that moved the author now provides its readers with the blueprint of their beliefs and, hence, their culture. Perhaps ideas that were once immediate and 'known' over time fade into the edges of collective memory, residual emotions felt, yet intangible, abstract.

The Republic of Uzbekistan's efforts at reform have permeated almost every aspect of society in the Former Soviet, Central Asian Republic – and in many ways have mirrored the hopes and dreams of Abdullah Qodiriy and his Jadids. Increasingly transparent judicial systems, accountability toward previously untouchable elites, the end of the infamous 'Cotton Campaign', the rise of social media bloggers, among many others watershed moments have since 2016 surprised both policy makers and local nationals who prior to 2016 dismissed Uzbekistan as a lost cause.

The preeminent translator of Spanish language authors Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Cervantes in her seminal book Why Translation Matters stakes a rhetorical claim that might seem obvious but holds greater salience today than when she wrote the book a decade ago. In short, to Grossman translation brings an increasingly interconnected, smaller world characterized by conflict together. Literary translation especially allows us to simply "...represents a concrete literary presence with the crucial capacity to ease and make more meaningful our relationship to those with whom we may not have connected before" [Grossman 1998].

In the case of Uzbekistan, Grossman's plea on behalf the

continuance of literary translation as a means to bridge cultures is a national imperative. Uzbekistan suffers from the crisis of context – a enviable problem considering the embarrassment of riches their history holds. When you are the origin story of so many civilizational moments, the world tends to lay claim to your narrative. A concern held by Central Asian reformers throughout the last century and today. When you are everything to everybody, the creation of a credible national narrative becomes a perilous enterprise of negating your own efforts.

Conclusion

If we follow Grossman, translation remains the primary vehicle in which to confront the struggle to arrive at not only a viable national narrative, but to bring form to the reforms attempted by those hoping to develop their homeland. Through the Uzbeks telling their story through rendering it into other languages, they are also able to engage in an internal dialogue that shapes identity – this is who we are, let me show it to you through literature. These narratives form belief systems that are vital to the current reforms pursued by Uzbekistan today. They must resonate with both the local population of Uzbekistan, but also foreign observers, cynical over the past couple of decades of perceived propaganda.

If one takes a moment to consider: the shaping of national narrative – or Imagined Communities – does not reduce the meaning of those narratives to the citizens engaged in codifying them. The West has become cynical of their own national stories. Instead of treating those who, from newly established Republics, are just now able to shape the contours of their lives with cynicism, perhaps we should hold some envy at the broad array of possibilities laid before them.

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