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Literature of Small Nations and the Challenges of the Global World: Azerbaijani and Kazakh Perspectives

This research examines the commonalities and distinctions between Azerbaijani and Kazakh literatures, addressing the global challenges faced by the literatures of small nations. Commonalities between these literatures stem from shared folklore, ethnic affinities, and historical-cultural connections, offering unifying elements that reflect their regional identity within a global context. The works of M.S. Ordubadi and M. Auezov, for example, connect deeply to the aspirations and historical narratives of their respective nations, while engaging with broader global themes. Iconic figures like Nizami Ganjavi and Abay Kunanbayev further represent how the lives of the Azerbaijani and Kazakh peoples are portrayed in a manner that transcends national boundaries.

However, differences in style, themes, and literary traditions highlight the unique characteristics of small nations' literatures, showing how they resist homogenization within the global literary landscape. M.S. Ordubadi, a key figure in Azerbaijani literature, is celebrated for his novels and dramas, whereas M. Auezov's influence on Kazakh literature extends to social-political and cultural-philosophical thought. These distinct cultural and philosophical approaches emphasize the challenge of preserving national identity while contributing to global literary dialogue.

This article explores the shared and distinctive elements of both literatures, presenting comparisons between the works of M.S. Ordubadi and M. Auezov, and examining how small nations' literatures navigate global challenges while retaining their unique voices.

Keywords: M.S. Ordubadi, M. Auezov, historical context, cultural identity, Nizami Ganjavi, Abay Kunanbayev, national vs. global.

Introduction

In recent years, the study of the ancient roots of the artistic literature of the Turkic-speaking peoples of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, as well as the detailed and comprehensive research of cultural monuments, has intensified. An example of this can be seen in the interest in works such as "Divan Lugat at-Turk" and the Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions. Scholars from Central Asia are conducting new studies on the first samples of national literature and are analyzing them based on shared monuments. One of such common monuments is the epic "Kitabi-Dede Korkud," most of the events of which, as is known, take place in the Caucasus, mainly in Azerbaijan.

In the millennia-long history of economic, scientific-cultural, and other development of Turkic peoples, each has held its own special place. One of such peoples is the Kazakh people, who represent a nation reflecting ancient Turkic thinking. Like other Turkic peoples, the Kazakhs have made an exceptional contribution to the formation and development of common Turkic aesthetic thought while also worthily benefiting from the traditions of continuity in modern Kazakh literary and artistic thinking (Quliyeva, 2008, p. 283).

The mutual connections between Azerbaijani and Kazakh literature drew inspiration from the folklore of both peoples. The influence, similarity, and closeness of both peoples arose from a single source, namely from ethnic kinship.

Literary Connections Between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan

Writers of the Turkic world, always connected with the fate and history of their people, strove to preserve history in their works by describing the lives of their heroes in the context of history or by turning to great figures of the past and making them the main characters of their works. Examples of such works include the novel "Abai" by Kazakh writer M. Auezov, "Sword and Quill" by Azerbaijani writer M. S. Ordubadi, "Navoiy" by Uzbek writer M. Aybek, and others.

Mamed Said Ordubadi is known as a powerful novelist, playwright, poet, and translator of Azerbaijani literature, a talented publicist who left behind a rich literary heritage. As literary critic Y. Akhundlu noted, M.S. Ordubadi became famous in our literature not only for writing the first samples of the Azerbaijani historical novel, paving the way in this genre, but also for creating a rich and enduring tradition in this field. The unity of artistic imagination with historicism, the fullness of characters, multi-plot lines, and modernity are all based on the traditions on which they rely (Axundlu, 2012, p. 12).

Mukhtar Omarhanovich Auezov is considered one of the brightest figures in the socio-political, cultural-philosophical, and artistic-aesthetic thought of the Kazakh people. Since the mid-19th century, genres such as the poem, novella, and novel have begun to emerge in Kazakh literature. The writer is also known as a public figure, scholar, Honored Scientist, and his work has played a significant role in the development of Kazakh prose and drama.

The creativity and worldview of M. Auezov were influenced by the educator Abai Kunanbaev. His worldview was shaped precisely by the aesthetic views of the educator A. Kunanbaev. M. Auezov deeply absorbed the life and work of the educator, analyzing his work based on the principle of historicism.

Ordubadi's and Auezov's Engagement with History

In the 1920s, M.S. Ordubadi studied and absorbed the classics of our literature, writing articles about prominent masters (M.E. Sabir, M.P. Vagif, Fizuli, Nizami Ganjavi, Mehsati Ganjavi, Khatib Tabrizi, and others). It was during these years that our writers, deciding to celebrate the anniversary of Nizami Ganjavi, began to work in this field. M.S. Ordubadi conducted serious research on Nizami Ganjavi, using rare sources and ancient materials in his article "The Era and Life of Nizami," providing extensive information.

M.S. Ordubadi began working on his last historical novel "Sword and Quill" in 1939, completing it in 1946 and publishing it. According to the writer, when writing a historical novel, it is necessary to show the life of the people, their spirit, and their struggle, creating an artistic image of the people.

The art and creativity of Nizami Ganjavi were a great school for M.S. Ordubadi. In his opinion, when we read the works of N. Ganjavi, we can see the names of birds inhabiting Azerbaijani forests, as well as the character and image of meek and wild animals (Axundlu, 1997, p. 317).

Mukhtar Auezov was also a figure deeply connected with the history and heritage of his people in his creativity. He gained attention with his work "Abai" and turned to the genre of the historical novel after the 1920s-30s. Professor N. Mamedov notes that although M. Auezov's works were always tied to national soil, they were shaped under the influence of universal aesthetic thought. In his works, the artist primarily conducts a deep psychological and social investigation of reality, examines changes in the consciousness of

Kazakhs, delves into the course of society, and strives to identify the causes of contrasts within it (Məmmədov, 2019, p. 12).

In 1942, he published the first version of the work "Albay." In 1947, the second book of the novel "Albay" was published. Later, these works were also published in Russian. In 1952, he published the novel "The Path of Abai."

In this work, M. Auezov, like M.S. Ordubadi in his work "Sword and Quill," highlights the life and creativity of the famous Kazakh writer. The epic novel consists of four books and is included in two novels – "Abai" and "The Path of Abai." The first book, "Abai," reveals the poet's youth and inner world. The other book narrates the development of his poetic talent, which is connected to the life of the Kazakh people. In the third book, Abai chooses the path of struggle, and we see his exceptional role in the lives of ordinary Kazakhs. In the fourth book, Abai appears as a thinker, philosopher, and educator, witnessing the arduous journey undertaken for the prosperity of his people.

M. Auezov was the first researcher to study the life of Abai Kunanbaev in Kazakh literature. His creativity remains relevant to this day. The artistic concept of Abai's personality and the stages of his life are based on rich material. M. Auezov pondered, analyzed, and systematized these materials for over 30 years.

The novel "Abai" also highlights and brings to the forefront the friendship between the Kazakh and Russian peoples. Abai, well-versed in the Russian language and science, is depicted as an educator with an encyclopedic mindset, an educated person connected to world literature and a supporter of Kazakh-Russian relations. The life, creativity, and activities of M. Auezov, like the image of Abai Kunanbaev he created, were closely tied to the life of his native people.

For writers of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, creating images of great personalities required a great deal of effort and responsibility. As noted above, before writing their works, they familiarized themselves with history, collected historical materials from archives, repeatedly read the works of great people, and eventually achieved their goal of writing about them. When addressing historical novels, writers must pay attention to artistry, using historical sources and documents. Professor Y. Akhundlu rightly notes that a writer sometimes has to uncover documents unknown even to historians to accurately reflect historical events. These facts should not be treated equally; they should be approached with a critical and creative attitude. The writer must approach them from a modern scientific perspective, analyze the facts, and evaluate the past according to the literary-historical criteria of the present (Axundlu, 2012, p. 213).

Comparison of Key Works – *Sword and Quill* and *Abai*

M.S. Ordubadi's novel "Sword and Quill" consists of two parts and covers a 50-year period (1175-1225) of Azerbaijani history. Despite the numerous events and characters in the work, the writer managed to systematically connect them and create a single plot line. The events are also arranged in chronological order. As literary critic Sh. Ibrahimgyzy notes, the writer's idea, the author's concept, and the objective idea of the novel mostly coincide, meaning the experienced writer largely achieved his creative goal and artistic intention in this work (İbrahimqızı, 2009, p. 35).

When considering the titles of both works, it becomes clear that the title of M.S. Ordubadi's novel "Sword and Quill" is reflected in the dialogue between the two main characters. It is after this dialogue that the reader understands why the novel is called this and not "Nizami." Ilyas says to his friend Fakhraddin: "...It's a pity that I don't know how to wield a sword and spear. Therefore, I will give you advice. Right now, you have a desire to master the sword and spear, the bow and arrows, so study them well. And I will try to reach heights in the matters of the quill. We need both (Ordubadi, 2005, p. 10).

The title of M. Auezov's work "Abai" was not chosen by chance. Abai Kunanbaev had exceptional merits in 19th-century Kazakh written literature, in its development, and in bringing new content and form to it. His time was one of ignorance and darkness. With his democratic ideas, the poet aimed to engage in education, teaching, and promoting these ideas. He began his struggle alone in the steppe, but his worldview conflicted with the laws of society and governance, causing sharp accusations and attacks against him. The poet, being an elder, called his people to truth, justice, knowledge, enlightenment, and reflected all these thoughts in his poems. Sh. Jalili noted that Abai lived not only as a poet but also as an ideologist, thinking about the future of his people, striving for the integrity of faith, will, and ideals... The literary connections between Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan begin with the influence of Nizami Ganjavi on the work of Abai Kunanbaev (Cəlili, 2009, p. 89).

In both novels, the lives of the Azerbaijani and Kazakh peoples are reflected through the examples of Nizami Ganjavi and Abai Kunanbaev.

In the first section of M.S. Ordubadi's novel "Sword and Quill" titled "Kharabat," the death of the ruler of the Azerbaijani Atabegs state, Shams ad-Din Eldegiz, and the ascent to the throne of his son, Atabeg Muhammad Jahan Pahlavan, are shown. Ahmed Aksungur's lands of Tabriz and Maragha were confiscated, and a celebration is held in the country for this occasion. The ruler of Ganja, Emir Inan, also joins the festivities celebrating the ruler's victory and organizes a festival in Ganja.

On the first pages of M. Auezov's novel "Abai" ("From Madrasah to Home," first book), a scene describes Abai's return from the madrasah to the aul. Abai could not take his eyes off these steppes. His silent gaze drowned in these free and wide plains. These steppes did not frighten Abai at all; if he could, he would embrace this land, press it to his chest, and whisper: "How much I missed you! Perhaps to others you seem frightening, but not to me! My dear, beloved steppe!..." (Auezov, 1954, p. 16).

As we can see, the beginning of each work is presented differently. M.S. Ordubadi, turning to history, illuminates the fate of the people of Ganja, where in the images of two young men, Ilyas and Fakhraddin, the struggle against power and tyranny is shown. The relationships between Emir Inanch and the khatib of Ganja with the famous poetess and singer of that time, Mehseti Ganjavi, reveal the injustice and cruelty of power. Nizami Ganjavi was far from the palaces, but when invited, he was not afraid to openly express his opinion about the fate of his people to the rulers.

M. Auezov in the work "Abai" describes Abai's return to the aul from the madrasah in his childhood, his love for his native land, and his joy and enthusiasm upon returning from the city. The reader feels and sees how Abai admires the steppes, expressing his feelings with words and eyes. However, in subsequent events and conflicts, Abai regrets his return, seeing the injustice and cruelty of his father, and becomes a son opposing him.

Nizami Ganjavi, being far from the palace, is closely connected with his like-minded friend Fakhraddin, who is his comrade-in-arms. M.S. Ordubadi's historical novel generally speaks of the union of the sword and the quill, of reason and strength. Nizami uses the unity of intellect and weaponry for the benefit of his people. Fakhraddin is brave and courageous but does not always see the tricks of the enemies, and then the wisdom and insight of Nizami come to his aid, highlighting the union of the sword and the quill throughout the work.

Abai, having returned from Semipalatinsk to the aul, meets his mother and grandmother but soon regrets his return. Seeing his father's cruelty, he does not even understand his speech, perceiving it as a threat to someone. Abai tries to escape from the meeting of elders to his mother but cannot, as his father orders him to sit nearby. Abai's struggle lies in his loneliness and the small circle of young people around him. Bringing about changes in the steppes was a challenging task for him. The deeper he delved into public life, the clearer and more acutely he felt its ugliness. His protests against oppression only intensified hostility with the ruling circles, and even his father and brother considered him an enemy.

Reading both works, we see Nizami Ganjavi and Abai Kunanbaev at the center of events and witness their wise decisions in difficult situations. Thus, we get to know their inner world, worldview, judgments, and aesthetic positions. In the severe trials of their time, the poets of both nations stood as unyielding pillars. Despite the hardships in Ganja and the steppes of Kazakhstan, the poets always shared the sorrows of their people, going through these difficult paths with them. Breathing in the sorrows of the people, feeling their desires was the main task of both poets.

Legacy of Ordubadi and Auezov

M.S. Ordubadi, as a writer, was an intellectual serving his people, similar to Nizami Ganjavi. Sh. Huseynova rightly notes that M.S. Ordubadi, with all his worldview, talent, and quill, served the people. Therefore, he lived with the inner experiences and interests of the Azerbaijani people and, within the framework of the socio-political conditions and social environment, expressed his thoughts and concerns (Hüseynova, 2015, p. 49).

Succumbing to his father's insistence, Abai Kunanbaev interrupted his studies and returned to the Tобыкты tribe. Delving into social life, he increasingly saw its ugliness. When Abai protested against oppression, not only the ruling circles but also his father and brother began to see him as an enemy. In Abai's view, a poet should reflect the life and customs of the people, not flatter the rich, officials, and bais, and strive to educate the younger generation in a healthy spirit (Xəlilov, 1994, p. 318).

Both poets sought to open the eyes of the people with their words and creativity, to explain the truth to them. In their poems, they spoke out against sycophantic poets who sold themselves for money.

From the first pages, the heroes of both works are depicted as people standing against injustice. However, as mentioned earlier, Nizami Ganjavi, upon receiving an invitation to the court, used this opportunity to speak out against injustices for the sake of his people. Abai, on the other hand, analyzed the events he saw and heard and fought against them alone. Also, acting with the authority of the people's court against the feudal lords, he drew attention with his solitary struggle. He always felt the pains of his people and called them to purity, justice, and truth. Like Nizami Ganjavi, Abai Kunanbaev, with his wise poems, thought about the future of his people, sought integrity of beliefs, will, and principles in people, emphasizing that without them a person is insignificant.

Abai Kunanbaev loved the works of Nizami Ganjavi and learned much from him. Literary scholar Sh. Jalili notes that Abai's work has several features confirming that Kazakh-Azerbaijani literary connections begin with the influence of Nizami Ganjavi on Abai Kunanbaev's creativity (Cəlili 2009: 89). Abai, as a wise man, called his people to truth, justice, knowledge, science, and enlightenment. Unlike Nizami Ganjavi, he continued his father's work, made decisions, and served his people. He was a Kazakh poet who knew the Russian language and befriended Russian revolutionary democrats. The works of Azerbaijani poets and Russian writers had a significant influence on his worldview.

Literary connections will always be relevant and significant, constantly developing. Looking at the Azerbaijani-Kazakh literary ties, one can see that they have great potential for further development in our time. We are witnesses to the fact that Turkic peoples possess a shared culture and literary connections.

We see that in the most famous works of M.S. Ordubadi and Mukhtar Auezov, the creations of Nizami Ganjavi and Abai Kunanbaev are closely intertwined. The influence of one nation on another, their similarity, and closeness stem from ethnic kinship.

Famous writers of the Turkic world have always been connected with the fate and history of their people and depicted the lives of their heroes in the context of history. Turning to the classics of the past, they portrayed their main characters connected with history. The works of M. Auezov's "Abai" and M.S. Ordubadi's "Sword and Quill" are examples of this.

Conclusions

The challenges faced by the literatures of small nations, such as those of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, reflect their efforts to preserve and adapt their unique cultural and historical legacies in a globalized world. As seen through the examples of Azerbaijani and Kazakh literature, writers like M.S. Ordubadi and M. Auezov played pivotal roles in both reflecting their national histories and contributing to broader Turkic cultural identity. Despite their nation's relatively smaller size on the global stage, their works have shaped the aesthetic and historical consciousness of their people.

The interplay of history, literature, and ethnic kinship binds these literatures together, as seen in the mutual influence of folklore and shared historical events. Both Ordubadi and Auezov, in their respective novels *Sword and Quill* and *Abai*, explored the lives of historical figures such as Nizami Ganjavi and Abai Kunanbaev, demonstrating the power of art and intellect in the face of social oppression. These works reflect the broader challenge of balancing local traditions with global relevance, portraying a continuous struggle to maintain cultural identity while engaging with universal themes.

In conclusion, the literatures of small nations, while deeply rooted in their unique historical and cultural contexts, also seek to contribute to the global literary conversation. By preserving the legacy of their national heroes and addressing universal human experiences, these writers ensure that the voices of smaller nations continue to resonate in an interconnected world.

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